

The church of Jesus Christ – the ecclesiology of the NAC

Concerning the term "church"

The term "church" is used to describe a Christian place of worship, a local parish, or a Christian denomination. In the theological sense, however, the term refers to the church of Jesus Christ. ([Catechism of the New Apostolic Church \[CNC\] 6.1](#))

The church of Jesus Christ has been established on earth by the Lord Himself. Those human beings who belong to the church of Jesus Christ have been called forth by God for eternal fellowship with Him. ([CNC 6; 6.1](#))

The church in history

The purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is, on one hand, to make salvation and eternal fellowship with God accessible to human beings and, on the other hand, to bring worship and praise to God. ([CNC 6.2](#))

Already in the Old Testament there are many references to the church of Christ. The letter to the Hebrews also interprets the old covenant—with its law, sacrificial service, circumcision, and priesthood—as a "shadow", that is, a foreshadowing, of the new covenant. Thus the old covenant already intimated that which has become reality in the church of Jesus Christ in the new covenant. ([CNC 6.2.1](#))

Everything that church is, and everything on which church is based, has its source in the person and deed of Jesus Christ. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the essential prerequisite for the existence of church. ([CNC 6.2.2](#))

In history the church of Christ was first revealed on Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The early Christians continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. These characteristics are decisive for the church of Christ. ([CNC 6.2.2](#))

Images for the church of Jesus Christ

The New Testament contains a great number of images and examples in which the nature of the church is revealed. ([CNC 6.2.3](#))

The image of the church as the body of Christ is often applied to those who, through baptism, faith, and profession, belong to Jesus Christ. It demonstrates that the church is similar to an organism in which all are dependent on one another. The growth of the body is geared toward Christ, who as the head is Lord, standard, and goal. ([CNC 6.2.3.1](#))

Just as God chose the people of Israel out of many nations, He has also chosen a people in the new covenant, namely His church. ([CNC 6.2.3.2](#)) In the image of the city of God, the church is shown as the place where God dwells in the midst of all those who are His own. ([CNC 6.2.3.3](#)) The image of the kingdom of God refers to the rule of God in His church. ([CNC 6.2.3.4](#)) The image of the flock shows the church as a community which follows Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. ([CNC 6.2.3.5](#)) Other images for the church include the house of God, the temple of God, the woman clothed with the sun and the male child, as well as the bride. ([CNC 6.2.3.6](#))

The church – visible and invisible

Everything that church is and ever will be is rooted in Jesus' word, work, and nature. In its nature the church reflects the dual nature of Jesus Christ. His divine nature is concealed while His human nature is visible. The church likewise has an invisible and a visible side which belong together inextricably. ([CNC 6.3](#))

The invisible side of the church is perceptible in the salvific effect of the sacraments and in the word of God. ([CNC 6.3](#))

Like the Man Jesus, the visible side of the church shares in the general history of humanity. By contrast to Him, however, the people at work within the church are subject to sin. It is for this reason that the same errors, aberrations, and lapses inherent in human beings are also to be found in the church. ([CNC 6.3](#))

Church is one of the basic contents of Christian faith. Without church it is impossible to be Christian. ([CNC 6.4](#))



Distinguishing features of the church (notae ecclesiae)

The Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople states that the church of Christ is the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church. (CNC 6.4.1)

The church is **one**. Profession of the one church derives from belief in the one God. The church attests to the oneness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (CNC 6.4.1.1)

The church is **holy**. This has its foundation in the sanctifying actions of God. The holiness of the church has its foundation in God alone, and not in the people who belong to it. Their sinfulness does not invalidate the holiness of the church. (CNC 6.4.1.2)

The church is **universal** (*catholic*). This means that it is all-encompassing and universal. It is both of this world and of the next, both present and future. (CNC 6.4.1.3)

The church is **apostolic**. In its apostolic doctrine—the message of Christ's death, resurrection, and return—is proclaimed. Likewise the Apostolic ministry instituted by Jesus Christ has been historically manifested in the church until His return. (CNC 6.4.1.4)

Church of Jesus Christ – The mystery and manifestation of the church in history

The historicity of the church is rooted in the historicity of Jesus Christ. He lived as true Man among mankind. (CNC 6.4.2)

Just as human beings were able to perceive Jesus Christ with their senses, so too they can perceive His church. It is manifest in historical reality, specifically within the fellowship of human beings who have been baptised, who believe in Christ, and who profess Him. (CNC 6.4.2)

In its nature the church is perfect, however, it still demonstrates imperfections in its historical manifestation. (CNC 6.4.2)

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the church of Christ began to unfold. In it Apostles and other ministers were active, the gospel was preached, and the sacraments were dispensed. (CNC 6.4.2.1)

After the death of the early Apostles this ministry was no longer occupied. Even during this time, the Holy Spirit was at work, albeit not in His original fullness. Believers continued to spread the gospel and the Christian system of values, however, the expectation of Christ's return faded into the background. (CNC 6.4.2.2)

The church of Jesus Christ and the sacraments (see also document "Sacraments in the New Apostolic Church")

Wherever baptism is properly performed, believing human beings can be incorporated into the body of Christ. Holy Baptism with water is entrusted to the church as a whole. (CNC 6.4.4)

Comprehensive administration of the sacraments occurs through the Apostolic ministry. The Apostles also dispense the three sacraments to the departed – whoever enjoys it lies exclusively in God's omnipotence. (CNC 6.4.4)

Holy Communion is celebrated in proper fashion together with the Apostles as a table fellowship in which the sacrifice of Christ, as well as the body and blood of the Lord, are present. (CNC 6.4.4)

Holy Sealing can only be dispensed by Apostles. (CNC 6.4.4)

The church of Jesus Christ and the future (see also document Text „Life after death and eschatology“)

The church has a present and a future dimension. (CNC 6.4.5)

At the return of Christ the church will be revealed in all its salvation and all its deficiencies: part of the church will be caught up to God, and another will remain on the earth and will have to prove itself in a period of antichristian afflictions. (CNC 6.4.5)

The future manifestation of the church also becomes clear in the promise that the firstlings elected to the royal priesthood will be involved in imparting salvation in the kingdom of peace. They will be messengers of Christ for all human beings who have ever lived. (CNC 6.4.5)



The church of Jesus Christ and the churches as institutions

In its historical manifestation the church of Christ will not completely live up to its oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity. (CNC 6.5)

The church of Christ is most clearly revealed where the Apostle ministry, the dispensation of the sacraments to the living and the dead, as well as the proper proclamation of the word are present. It is there that the Lord's work of redemption to prepare the bride of Christ for the marriage in heaven is established. (CNC 6.5)

Binding elements between the individual Christian churches include baptism, the profession of Jesus Christ, and belief in Him. Through the baptised who live in accordance with their faith, the church can be perceived as a fellowship of faith, hope, and love. Thus the church of Christ is also visible in the churches in which oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolicity are present in varying forms and to varying degrees. (CNC 6.5)



The ministry in the New Apostolic Church

Ministry and duties

The term "ministry" describes a function or position that is assigned to a specific area of responsibility as well as an authority that has been bestowed in order to represent, lead, and provide order to a community. ([Catechism of the New Apostolic Church \[CNC\] 7](#))

The spiritual ministry constitutes authority, blessing, and sanctification issued through ordination for service in the church of Christ. ([CNC 7.1](#))

A distinction must be made between the ministry and the many diverse duties that support the proclamation of the gospel and the wellbeing of the believers, which can also be performed without ordination. ([CNC 7.1](#))

It is also important to distinguish between ministry and the call that has gone out to all believers to serve the Lord through following. Just as the Apostles bear witness of the gospel through word and conduct, reborn Christians do the same in fellowship with them, thereby supporting their great commission. ([CNC 7.1](#))

Grundlegung des Amtes im Neuen Testament

Holy Scripture provides abundant references to the content and nature of ministry: in the old covenant there was the ministry of the king, the priest, and the prophet. Everything that was already laid out in the Old Testament ministry is reflected in Jesus Christ: He is King, Priest, and Prophet. ([CNC 7.3.1](#))

The spiritual ministry is based on the sending of Jesus Christ by the Father. ([CNC 7.2](#))

Through the calling and sending of the Apostles, Jesus instituted the ministry for His church. ([CNC 7.2](#))

By His divine authority Jesus elected the twelve Apostles and authorised, blessed, and sanctified them for service to the gospel. The sending of the Apostles makes the fullness of salvation in Jesus Christ accessible to mankind. ([CNC 7.3.2](#))

Jesus Christ ordained twelve Apostles, however the New Testament attests to more than twelve Apostles. ([CNC 7.4.2](#)) It is primarily the book of Acts that records the activity of the Apostles. ([CNC 7.4.3](#)) Among other things, it attests that the gift of the Holy Spirit was dispensed by Apostles. The Apostles proclaimed the gospel and fought against heresies. ([CNC 7.4.4](#))

Jesus issued the authority of the keys to Simon Peter and gave him the commission to lead the church. ([CNC 7.4.3](#))

Characteristics of the Apostle ministry

"Apostle" (apóstolos) means "ambassador". ([CNC 7.4](#))

Jesus Christ personally only gave His church one ministry, namely the Apostle ministry. The Apostle ministry takes all its authority from Jesus Christ and is unconditionally dependent on Him. ([CNC 7.4](#))

The Apostle ministry is described as the "ministry of the new covenant", the "ministry of the Spirit", the "ministry of righteousness", and the "ministry of reconciliation". Apostles are also called "ambassadors for Christ" and "stewards of the mysteries of God". ([CNC 7.4.1](#))

The orientation of the congregation to the return of Christ is another significant characteristic of the Apostle ministry. ([CNC 7.4.1](#))

The development of the ministries from the Apostle ministry

In order to cope with all the tasks incumbent on them the Apostles needed helpers. Through laying on of hands and prayer they equipped these men for their task. This practice established the foundation for future ordinations. ([CNC 7.5](#))

Beyond that, Bishops or Elders, prophets, Evangelists, pastors and teachers helped along in the early Christian congregations by commission of the Apostles. As the church grew, a ministerial hierarchy developed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. ([CNC 7.5](#))



The reoccupation of the Apostle ministry

The mandate of the Apostles is not limited to the early Christian period. (CNC 7.5.1)

At the end of the first century there were no more Apostles. Up until the renewed occupation of the Apostle ministry in 1832, the activity of the only ministry instituted by Jesus Christ had been interrupted. The interruption in the personal presence of the Apostle ministry is rooted in the will of God. It ultimately remains a mystery to human beings. (CNC 7.5.2)

By the will of God, the Apostle ministry was once again occupied. While there may not be a historical succession between the early Christian Apostle ministry and that of the end time, there is certainly a spiritual succession. (CNC 7.5.3)

With the reoccupation of the Apostle ministry, ministers were again ordained. A differentiated ministerial order came into being. (CNC 7.5.3)

The authority of the Apostle ministry in the church of Jesus Christ

The New Apostolic Church is a church of ministry. (CNC 7.6)

There are three ministerial levels, each with different spiritual powers: the Apostle ministry, priestly ministry, and diaconal ministry. (CNC 7.6)

The authority of the Apostle ministry derives from their calling by Jesus Christ. The Apostles are active by the will of their Sender, Jesus Christ, and are completely dependent on Him. They see it as their duty to serve as examples to the church and lead them in following Christ. (CNC 7.6.3; 7.6.4)

Jesus Christ has issued the power to "bind and loose" to the Apostles. This formulation speaks to the fact that the Apostles, together with the Chief Apostle, comprise the spiritual and organisational leadership of the Church and decide on the ordinances of congregational life. It was in the circle of His Apostles that He instituted Holy Communion, which they were to celebrate in accordance with His example. He also issued authority to them to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name. (CNC 7.6.2)

It is the task of the Chief Apostle to discharge the office of Peter. The Chief Apostle is the highest spiritual authority. He is accorded a leading position in the circle of the Apostles. (CNC 7.6.6)

Ordination

By the ordination authority, blessing, and sanctification issue forth from the Apostle ministry in order to equip ministers for their work in the congregations. Ordination to a spiritual ministry is performed by the Apostle in the name of the triune God through laying on of hands and prayer (CNC 7.7)

In the exercise of his ministry, the minister is accountable to, and dependent on, the Apostle ministry. The sanctification that has come forth through the ordination must be put into practice by the minister. He exercises his ministry within the framework of the authority issued to him. Every minister is a servant of God. He provides pastoral care to the members of the congregation entrusted to him and promotes their faith. (CNC 7.7)

New Apostolic ministers can be married and have family. Currently, women are not ordained in the New Apostolic Church. However, they have important duties in pastoral care and in the classroom, as teachers, youth workers, organists, choir masters and in the orchestra.

Appointments

An appointment is the assignment of a firmly defined task. It is not to be equated with ordination. An appointment can be limited in terms of both duration and location. (CNC 7.10)

The ministries from Bishop to Priest are summarised by the term "priestly ministries". They have received commission and authority from the Apostles to dispense Holy Baptism with water, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and to consecrate and dispense Holy Communion. Further tasks of the priestly ministries include conducting divine services and funerals, performing acts of blessing, proclaiming God's word, and providing pastoral care to the members of the congregation. (CNC 7.9.1)

The word "Deacon" is derived from the Greek language and means "servant". Deacons help along in various ways in the congregation. (CNC 7.9.2)



The Sacraments in the New Apostolic Church

Holy Baptism with water, Holy Sealing, Holy Communion

Essence and meaning

Sacraments are fundamental acts of God's grace. Salvation in the sacraments is founded upon the incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the sending and activity of the Holy Spirit. The proper administration of the sacraments is incumbent upon the Apostles, commissioned by Christ.

A sacrament comes into being through the union of a visible element with a spoken word that refers to the reality behind it. A sacrament legitimately comes into being through four interrelated variables: sign, content, dispenser and faith. Faith is the prerequisite for a sacrament to unfold to its full salvific effect.

There are three sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ: Holy Baptism, Holy Sealing, and Holy Communion. (Catechism of the New Apostolic Church [CNC] 8)

The Holy Baptism with water

Effects

Holy Baptism with water is the first and fundamental sacramental act of grace of the triune God upon a human being who believes in Jesus Christ. (CNC 8.1)

Holy Baptism is a sign of the covenant with God. Through Holy Baptism with water the baptised enters into the covenant with God—he becomes a Christian and is thereby incorporated into the church. (CNC 8.1)

It is the first step on the way to the renewal of the inner man. The baptized person participates in the death of Jesus Christ and in his new life. (CNC 8.1)

Holy Baptism with water is necessary for salvation. It is not a figurative or symbolic act, but is indeed an act of God's loving care that fundamentally changes the relationship between a human being and God. (CNC 8.1.3)

Since Holy Baptism with water has been entrusted to the church as a whole, properly performed baptisms in other churches are also valid. (CNC 8.1.10)

Prerequisites

Any human being can receive Holy Baptism with water. The prerequisite is profession of faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. (CNC 8.1.5)

When children are baptised, those who bear responsibility for their religious upbringing must profess their own faith in Jesus Christ and vow to raise the baptised child in accordance with the gospel. (CNC 8.1.5)

This responsibility is assumed by the young new apostolic Christians in the act of blessing of the Confirmation (CNC 12.2.2).

A validly dispensed Holy Baptism with water is not repeated. (CNC 8.1.7)

Form

In the New Testament "baptism" is often understood as a two-part baptism with water and the Holy Spirit. Holy Baptism with water and Holy Baptism with the Spirit are therefore interdependent but assigned to each other. (CNC 8.1.2.2)

The two essential elements of Holy Baptism with water are the water and the word in the Trinitarian formula. The water is consecrated in the name of the triune God. Thereafter the baptising minister uses the consecrated water to make the sign of the cross three times on the forehead of the person being baptised, and baptises in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (CNC 8.1.4)

Jesus Christ submitted to the baptism of John the Baptist in order to demonstrate how righteousness before God can be attained (Matthew 3: 15). (CNC 8.1.2.2)

The great commission issued by the Risen One makes it clear that baptising—in the form of baptism with water and the Spirit—is one of the tasks assigned to the Apostles. The Apostles gave authority to baptize with water also to the priestly ministers. (CNC 8.1.2.2)



The Holy Sealing

Holy Baptism with water and Holy Sealing are two interdependent yet distinct sacraments. The rebirth out of water and the Spirit occurs by receiving both of them. (CNC 8.1.8)

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus occurred after His baptism was complete. The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit is a legitimation of His Messiahship and a reference to the sacrament of Holy Sealing. (CNC 8.3.3)

The sending of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, was fulfilled on Pentecost. According to the testimony of Scripture, Holy Sealing is bound to the Apostle ministry. (CNC 8.3.4)

Effects

The rebirth out of water and the Spirit, which was begun by God in Holy Baptism with water, is completed through Holy Sealing. The new creation that comes about through the rebirth is a reference to the sanctification and renewal that occurs through God, the Holy Spirit. (CNC 8.3.8)

At Holy Sealing a human being is enduringly filled with the Holy Spirit. (CNC 8.3.9)

The effect of the rebirth out of water and the Spirit is childhood in God as well as the calling to be a firstling. If the sealed soul gives the Holy Spirit room to unfold, divine virtues will develop. (CNC 8.3.9)

Perequisites

The prerequisites for receiving Holy Sealing are baptism with water, belief in the triune God, as well as belief in the Apostles sent by Jesus Christ. (CNC 8.3.7)

Form

The sacrament of Holy Sealing is dispensed exclusively by Apostles through the gesture of laying on of hands and a prayer. (CNC 8.3.6)

The Holy Communion

Holy Communion is the sacrament which is dispensed to a human being again and again. It is the central event of the divine service. (CNC 8.2)

Holy Communion is also known as the "Eucharist" ("giving thanks"), the "Lord's Supper", and the "breaking of bread". (CNC 8.2.1)

Already the Old Testament contained references to Holy Communion. (CNC 8.2.2)

Both the Passover meal and Holy Communion are meals of remembrance of which bread is an indispensable component. The Passover meal commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. Holy Communion points to liberation in a much more comprehensive sense, namely to the redemption of mankind from the servitude of sin. (CNC 8.2.4)

On the occasion of the Passover feast, Jesus Christ shared in a meal with His Apostles. In the process He instituted Holy Communion. (CNC 8.2.5)

The oldest evidence of the celebration of Holy Communion and the words of institution which Jesus spoke at that time can be found in 1 Corinthians 11. This also recalls the situation in which Holy Communion was instituted. (CNC 8.2.6)

The sacrament is constituted by the elements of bread and wine. (CNC 8.2.7)

Meaning of Holy Communion

Holy Communion is a meal of remembrance: it commemorates the death of Jesus Christ as a unique event that is valid for all time. This commemoration extends beyond the resurrection and ascension of the Lord and also incorporates the current presence of Christ as well as His future kingdom. (CNC 8.2.8)

Holy Communion is a profession of the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ. This profession is required of all who wish to partake of it. (CNC 8.2.9)



Those who regularly partake in Holy Communion in the New Apostolic Church should be aware that they are thereby also professing belief in the Apostles of Jesus active today. ([CNC 8.2.9](#))

In Holy Communion Jesus Christ joins in fellowship, first with His Apostles, and then with the believers. The congregation gathered for divine service also has fellowship among one another in Holy Communion. ([CNC 8.2.10](#))

Holy Communion also has an eschatological character: it is closely associated with the marriage feast in heaven. Until the ultimate reunion of the bride and bridegroom, the congregation experiences its most intimate fellowship with Him in Holy Communion. ([CNC 8.2.11](#))

Essence of the Holy Communion

The bread and wine are not changed in their substance through the consecration or the speaking of the words of institution. Rather the substance of the body and blood of Jesus is joined to them (consubstantiation). ([CNC 8.2.12](#))

In Holy Communion the bread and wine correspond to the human nature of Christ, while the body and blood correspond to His divine nature. ([CNC 8.2.12](#))

Bread and wine are not merely metaphors or symbols for the body and blood of Christ. Rather the body and blood of Christ are truly present (real presence). ([CNC 8.2.12](#))

The once brought, ever valid sacrifice of Jesus Christ is also present in Holy Communion. ([CNC 8.2.13](#))

Holy Communion and Apostolate

The forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion are closely related to one another. Both are founded upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Although the sacrifice of Christ is present in Holy Communion, forgiveness of sins is not effected at the same time in the sacrament. ([CNC 8.2.14](#))

Jesus Christ instituted Holy Communion in the circle of the Apostles and entrusted it to them. ([CNC 8.2.15](#))

Where the Holy Spirit is at work through the ministry established and authorised by Jesus Christ, this sacramental reality comes into being. ([CNC 8.2.15](#))

Effects of the Holy Communion

When consecrating Holy Communion, the authorised minister speaks a liturgically fixed text based on 1 Corinthians 11: 23 et seq. and Matthew 26: 26 et seq.. ([CNC 8.2.16](#))

The body and blood of Jesus Christ is dispensed in the consecrated wafer. ([CNC 8.2.17](#))

The basic prerequisites for partaking worthily of Holy Communion are a longing for salvation, willingness to repent, and faith. ([CNC 8.2.18](#))

In the New Apostolic Church bread and wine are dispensed in the form of a wafer sprinkled with wine. ([CNC 8.2.19](#))

The believer's share in the merit of Christ—which is founded upon Holy Baptism with water—is continually reinforced by partaking in Holy Communion. Holy Communion assures the fellowship of life with the Son of God and establishes the unity of the believers among one another. ([CNC 8.2.20](#))

Holy Communion is an essential means of preparation for the return of Christ. ([CNC 8.2.20](#))

Eligibility for partaking in the Holy Communion as well as communion celebrations of other churches

Those who are baptised, adopted, or sealed in the New Apostolic Church are entitled to regularly partake in Holy Communion. The essential prerequisite is Holy Baptism with water. Properly baptised Christians can be admitted to Holy Communion as guests. ([CNC 8.2.21](#))

The Communion celebrations of other churches also contain important elements of Holy Communion. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are also commemorated with belief and gratitude there. ([CNC 8.2.22](#))

