

Statement by **Junia today** on Chief Apostle Schneider's interview of 10.06.2021 regarding the interim status on the subject of the ordination of women

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, leader of the New Apostolic Church international, provides insights into the deliberations of the District Apostles' Meeting on the subject of the ordination of women. The process is structured by four fundamental questions and seven guiding questions, the answers to which are to lead to a decision as to whether or not women can be ordained. The Chief Apostle's interview reveals that it is primarily the district apostles and the Chief Apostle himself who participate in the consultations and ultimately make the decision. Instead of consultations exclusively within the Church leadership, however, what is needed is an open discourse that addresses the issue in an exchange with fellow believers in the Church and, above all, with women. For too long, it has been communicated that the question of women in ministry is to be worked through only on "What does God say?" and "What does the Bible say?" The needs of women are not seen here.

In the interview, it is acknowledged that in terms of God's will, "men and women are made in the image of God" - a start. However, the gender binary, as it is referred to in the interview, is problematic because members of our church do not identify exclusively as male or female, but we have a rich diversity from which we should draw in our church.

In reference to the November 2020 District Apostle Meeting outcome, if we acknowledge that "men's and women's roles are understood differently due to social and political developments within human society," as described in the interview, we should recognize that we have it in our power as a human community to change patriarchal and sexist structures that explicitly discriminate against women and limit their religious freedom. Furthermore, if this conclusion is based on the will of God, shouldn't that be absolutely sufficient and outshine all human arguments against women's ordination? From this reasoning of seeing the will of God as the central criterion, nothing should stand in the way of ordaining women.

Furthermore, it remains open to what extent, besides the Bible itself, other sources and scientific treatises are consulted. For in theology it is now widely agreed that women took on important functions and tasks in the early Christian communities and preached themselves. Junia as a female apostle is only one example. Despite this, or precisely because of this, the biblical sources must be viewed with a critical eye on the times and the social constructs of the time must be taken into account. A transparent presentation of which sources and consultants were consulted would be welcome. In any case, the phase of dealing with biblical exegetical questions (fundamental question 2) can be significantly shortened in view of abundant literature from theologians and scholars.

The fact that the district apostles will take the contents from their meeting in May 2021 to the respective apostle meetings and discuss them there should also be viewed critically. Not only does it promote the male perspective of a Bible reading that reflects exclusionary patriarchal cultures, but this approach casts doubt on an open-ended and consistent process. If only the apostles' circle has the opportunity to express thoughts and give opinions, again only male voices will make a decision on an issue that will have significant

impact on women. Women's voices must be heard! Women must be involved in deliberation and decision making!

Can this really be a "long-term strategic approach"? - Thoughts on the individual steps

1. Is it in accordance with the will of God that women are not ordained?

Wasn't the question of God's will already answered in November 2020? God created people in His image and empowered all people to rule. Only socio-political developments in society have shaped the gender-specific tasks found today.

2. Does the fact that Jesus called only men to the apostleship automatically mean that women cannot be ordained?

Jesus did not only call men to be disciples. The existence of women like Mary Magdalene is not recognized at this point. Also the fact that Jesus was accompanied to the cross mainly by women and that they were the first witnesses of his resurrection is not taken into account here. In addition, Junia, Phoebe and Lydia played key roles in the churches and in the circle of the apostles.

3. Is the ordination of women impossible due to corresponding statements in the apostles' letters of the New Testament?

We answer with a clear "no". Because we are sure that there cannot and will not be a conclusive, objectively correct answer. Too often, too profoundly, too differentiated and too comprehensively, theologians, scholars and researchers have dealt with the topic for decades up to the present day and have reached different results in each case - partly due to their objectives. The resolution paper of the Association of Apostolic Churches in Europe of June 27, 2003, "Gift-Oriented Staff - Women in Ordained Ministry," for example, is informative.

4. Does the church, or rather the District Apostles' Meeting, want to ordain women into ministry or not?

Why are these questions only asked of men? Are we really going to ask only men about what affects 50% of our congregation, that is, the women? You have to question the intent to "want" anything. Change brings challenges and many people are risk averse or simply comfortable in their privilege and therefore see no need or urgency, let alone "want" this change.

5. Is there a need to ordain women in an area, a country, a region?

Need cannot be the key to ordaining women. The Chief Apostle had already made a statement to this effect at the 2014 International Church Congress. Rather, the question should be asked: What opportunities does the ordination of women offer in certain areas? What is the potential? The "need" and rather the goal should be to eliminate discrimination.

6. Do the congregations and society in this regional area accept the idea of women's ordination?

If we acknowledge that the regional and societal context is the key to acceptance, is it not obvious that it is a societal problem and not one of our faith? Can we not name it exactly for what it is, sexism and discrimination? If the Church perceives that equality is not "unconditionally accepted" everywhere, what is the Church willing to do to change this?

7. Women can be ordained in an area, country, or congregation.

Women should have the opportunity to be ordained regardless of the region in which they live. One thing is important to emphasize here: just because women can be ordained does not automatically mean that they will (want to) actually be ordained. The decision is up to the woman herself.

It would be important for the Chief Apostle and the District Apostles to include in their statement that women can and should hold all offices, so that discrimination in our church would end. It would be a path toward a church in which we all had our full right to religious freedom and could live our faith fully.

Recommendations for an inclusive strategic approach

A strategic approach, in Junia's view today, includes the following steps:

- Consultation with affected parishioners: Women
 - When asking questions and making decisions about women in our church, women should have a seat and a voice at the decision-makers' table. Deliberations on this issue should include women from different parts of the world as well as organizations that have expressed concerns about discrimination in our church.
- Just because a decision is made that women can be ordained does not end the discussion. The way they are ordained and what they bring to the table should be discussed, and women should be part of that discussion.
- People of every gender identity and sexual orientation should be involved in these decision-making processes; we are all equally children of God.
- Due diligence - impact assessments.
 - Understanding women's agency
 - Ensuring the protection of women in all roles.
- Evaluation and participation mechanisms.

- The decision to ordain women should be accompanied by an explicit apology that acknowledges the oppression, discrimination, and especially sexism that women have experienced and continue to experience in our congregations.
- Awareness raising, inclusion, continuous dialogue must be part of the ongoing process. To this end, we propose a committee of experts and affected persons who, on the one hand, address problems with the church leadership and, on the other hand, serve as contact persons for those affected. The New Apostolic Church of West Germany has already appointed a committee of this kind in the District Church of West Germany. Ongoing sensitization for ministers and pastors should also be part of the process.

By implementing the above-mentioned points and suggestions of Junia today, the Chief Apostle and the District Apostles worldwide are committing themselves to an open-ended and inclusive discourse on the subject of women in ministry. Through the participation of affected members of the New Apostolic Church worldwide, it can be ensured that the faithful will also be able to support the decisions.

The members of Junia today have set themselves the goal of continuing to work on solutions. They hereby offer the Chief Apostle, the District Apostles, Apostles, and all decision-makers renewed cooperation and open discourse.

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