MIRROR

Aid to the Church in Need

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Together in the earthly Jerusalem – the Pope, the rabbi and the imam.

"We realise all the more that we may not regard divisions in the Church as something natural, inevitable in any form of human association. Our divisions wound Christ's body, they impair the witness which we are called to give to Him before the world."

Pope Francis,
at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2014

Dear Friends,

"Ut omnes unum sint!" This prayer of Jesus to the Father "that all may be one" is, perhaps, the most beautiful and important resolution we can make at the beginning of this New Year. Seeing the increasing divisions within our families, within our society, our political and cultural life, and not least between religions, we yearn more than ever for unity and peace. But despite globalisation we are in an age of increasing division between nations and religions. War and terror are opening up vast gulfs of hatred that appear unbridgeable. Is it even possible here to imagine all the inhabitants of the earth coming together in unity? Humanly speaking it is impossible – but God has the power to bring it about! Unity is a gift that comes down "from above" and the most beautiful fruit of the Love that comes from God alone.



Ecumenism begins with our desire for reconciliation!

For Christians love forges unity, love is the first and greatest commandment. Yet although we all together profess the Cross and redemption through Jesus Christ, there are many theological convictions that separate us. The division within Christianity is a deep wound that stands in contradiction to the truth that this Christianity must proclaim to the world. How can we lead others to peace if we are disunited among ourselves? Christian Ecumenism does not mean that the various Christian confessions merely acknowledge and tolerate one another. True ecumenism must have as its goal full, visible unity; otherwise it is a betrayal of the Cross of Christ. The prayer uttered by Jesus to the Father – "Ut omnes unum sint!" – is not a hope that is meant to find its fulfilment only in the "Heavenly Jerusalem". Rather, Jesus' prayer for unity is an urgent call to be fulfilled in the here and now. And it was for unity of believers in all nations that Jesus gave His Life on the Cross.

True ecumenism begins with our turning in humility towards the Cross and with our willingness to seek reconciliation. In this our ecumenical dialogue has, in the deepest sense, already reached its goal. It was in this spirit that Saint John Paul II wrote: "The witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants. Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us."

Dear friends, may the intentions of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18th - 25th January) stay with us throughout the year, so that our love for God and for one another may grow day by day. Let us consecrate this ecumenical striving to Mary, who gave us the gift of God as the Mother of Unity. For just as the family cannot truly be a family without a mother, so it is impossible without Mary for the nations and religions to live together in peace

My grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin M. Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant

Mightier than the mightiest storm

Never before was there such a vast gathering of Christians in this world. On 15th January 1995 between four and five million people came together with Pope John Paul II for the celebration of Holy Mass in Manila. Some 20 years later his successor, Francis has returned to the Philippines, and once again the people thronging in great numbers to Holy Mass.



Still waiting for your help – Father Cosme Almedilla, standing in front of the ruins of his church.



Many of these pilgrims have not come from their homes. They have no homes. Around 14 months ago Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful in recorded history, swept through this island paradise. And just a month before that an earthquake had ravaged the countryside. The people were still clearing away the earth and rubble when Typhoon Haiyan struck. With winds of over 200 km/h, the typhoon tore through the islands, sweeping roofs and entire huts away. More than 7,000 people lost their lives, while millions are still living amid the ruins today. Pope Francis has come with a message of consolation and hope. For this time the earthquake and typhoon did more than just destroy huts and houses. The sheer force of Haiyan also destroyed the basis of people's livelihood, the fishing boats and the fields with their harvests. This was also true of over half the people of the parish of *Saint Isidore the Farmer*, in the diocese of Borongan, which lay in the direct path of the typhoon. They depended on fishing and agriculture, writes Father Leroy Geli. "For the first time ever, the storm raged so fiercely that even all our hope was buried beneath the rubble", he writes. The normally cheerful Filipinos were reduced to despair and are only slowly beginning to recover. Their faith helped them – and the solidarity of their brothers and sisters in the faith has helped rekindle hope in their hearts.



Someone to cling to in the storms of this life – little Angelina from the parish of Saint Isidore.

The Pope has come with a message of mercy and sympathy. The visible signs of this practical charity and solidarity are the new roofs on the churches and the continuing financial aid, one year on, after the attention of the world has moved on, like the storm itself. Their Faith remains; but it needs a roof beneath which people can gather for prayer, for Holy Mass. This is exactly what you have made possible in Saint Isidore with **€30,000**, and also in the parishes of Saint Lawrence and Saint Bonaventure (where Hayian not only tore off the roofs but also destroyed doors, windows and benches) with **€60,000** in each case. They also had to install new wiring and rebuild the walls. And another two dozen parishes now also have their chapels back, thanks to you. Everything they could do – clearing away the rubble, working the timbers, repairing the roofs – they did themselves. What they lacked was the money for the materials. "Love is the measure of faith", said Pope Francis. And in these small churches and chapels your love is present, and mightier than the mightiest storm. But there is still much to be done.

Power hub of mission

"We are willing to go anywhere, however hard and difficult it may be." This is the motto of the Secular Institute of the Incarnate Word. And perhaps not surprisingly, it has missions in Iraq, Syria (Aleppo), Tajikistan and China – to name but a few.

And for the Institute, the Philippines are a sort of power hub of the new evangelisation. From here its missions extend



Come to me, all you who are heavy laden (cf. Mt 11:28): The biggest open-air Mass of all time.



Bringing God's love – and many new vocations. Sisters in front of the congregation's Mother House.

throughout the region, as far as Africa, as well as throughout the Philippines themselves. Five years ago the novitiate of Saint Joseph Freinademetz was established close to Lipa – the provincial capital of Batangas – with two novices. Today there are already ten. "We live by divine providence" says the director of the house, Father Santiago Vidal. And this providence not only brings new vocations, but from time to time many hardships as well. At first a four-seater car was sufficient for their needs, but very soon it had become too small and, given the notoriously bad road conditions, it was in constant need of repair and became too expensive. They sold it. But this hampered their work, including the new evangelisation on the island itself. Just going shopping (12 km) or to the hospital (13 km) now takes anything from half to a full day – time they could better spend working with the young people in the city and in the orphanage. Time is also short for visiting the elderly and sick in their homes, and for leading prayer groups.

The work of mission and evangelisation means meeting people with the Good News. We have promised **€12,000** for a car, to help them meet the faithful. ●

A Mother House for God's Love

The names speak for themselves: House of Hope, Happy Home, Saint Joseph Golden Home. These are the names of the care homes in which the sisters of the Missionary Congregation of Mary look after the elderly and abandoned, the mentally sick and the handicapped.

"We bring them God's love", says the Superior, Sister Felisa Batusin. Along with her 44 professed sisters and 10 novices she also carries out youth outreach and religious instruction in the schools in the diocese of Malaybalay. But their Mother House became uninhabitable. It was made of wood and over the years was eaten by the termites. In 2010, on the 40th anniversary of their foundation, the sisters began building a new Mother House. With the help of generous friends they were able to build the chapel and most of the rooms to hold the lectures, training sessions and retreat days. But by then the coffers were empty. And with the meagre earnings from their own teaching activities, the sisters also supported other communities that would otherwise not have survived. But the Sisters were also affected by the typhoon, which magnified the need around them – and the Mother House would provide a place for quiet recollection where the sisters could regain strength and hope. Only then did they turn to us for help, to finally complete the work on the convent. We wrote back saying: "We bring you God's love." In the face of such selfless sacrifice and joyful devotion how could we have done less than promise the prayers of us all, together with **€30,000** in financial aid? ●

Working on the basis of trust

Alexander Men was a man of dialogue, open to ecumenism. The book-crammed study of this Russian Orthodox priest, who was murdered in 1990, still retains its icon corner which has remained untouched to this day, with its pictures of Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Francis, Saint Anthony and Saint John Paul II. A friend of Father Werenfried, he worked for Christian unity.



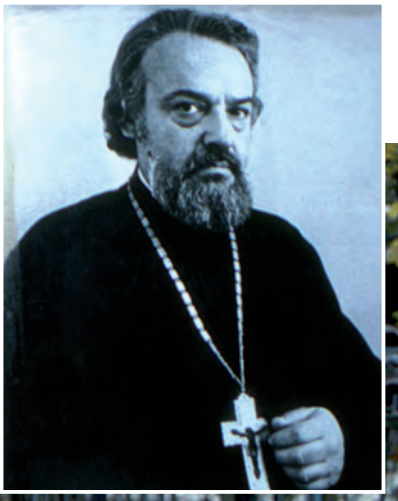
Christian unity, and the prelude to it, namely dialogue between the different denominations, is also the central concern of the Biblical Theological Institute of Saint Andrew the Apostle in Moscow. Its immediate goal is the theological formation and ongoing training of teachers, translators, publishers, writers and journalists, as well as the promotion of dialogue between our Sister Churches. To further this aim it has run a Summer Academy every year since 1999, to which it has invited students and academics who otherwise would not have the opportunity for ecumenical formation. Particularly fruitful have been the conversations between its Orthodox and Greek-Catholic participants. In addition to the lectures in the history of religion, in liturgy, philosophy and Bible exegesis, the 50 participants from **Ukraine**, **Belarus**, **Kyrgyzstan** and **Russia** are able to meet together in work groups, exchanging their experiences and asking challenging questions. Many such questions are put by the Institute itself, such as: How much space do we give the Holy Spirit in our own personal lives? How do we live out the Good News in our daily lives? How do we view the charismatic movements in our Churches?

This kind of exchange represents grassroots ecumenism. It establishes a basis of trust without which the rapprochement between the Christian churches cannot succeed. We are supporting this work with **€8,000**. The director of the Institute, Alexey Bodrov – who sees Alexander Men as a spiritual father of the Institute and wishes to continue his work of reconciliation – maintains good contacts with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and with the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow. He has enlisted two Jesuit priests in Rome to translate a dictionary of theology for laypersons and theologians, in order to stimulate discussion and ongoing formation within Russia in an ecumenical spirit. You are likewise supporting this project with **€8,000**. There are also various other books, for example on Pope Francis, which serve this end and show how one can live from one's faith and in a spirit of reconciliation. Alexander Men neatly encapsulated the minimum necessary consent for such work: "To love what is ours is not to hate what others have." That was 25 years ago. Today we could perhaps formulate it like this: To love what is ours, and seek to know the other better. ●



Nowhere in the world is interreligious dialogue more greatly needed than in the Holy Land. The Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations introduces young Israelis to the sacred places of Christianity and explains the other Faith to them. We are supporting the centre's ongoing work – this year with €55,000.

Any donation you kindly give will go to support these, or similar



"To love what is ours is not to hate what others have": Father Werenfried at the grave of Father Alexander Men.

First, to know one's own faith

The evening after his grandfather's funeral, little Naim asked his grandmother, "Where has grandpa gone?" Grandpa and grandma are Christians, but little Naim is not baptised; his father is a Muslim. But before grandma can reply, he answers his own question: "Look up there at that shining star; that is me. And the star next to it, that is grandpa, who is also shining, and we are both with God and speaking to each other."

This is an expression of a natural religious instinct. God lives in every heart that is open to Him. Many people do not know this, but they do suspect it – especially children, like Naim. Extremist Islam does not ask questions but only seeks to subjugate others. But it does cause peace-loving Muslims to ask questions, both about their own religion and about the God of love. So that Christians can give them an answer, the Archdiocese of Songea in **Tanzania** has organised courses for Christians who can be leaders and spokesman in their towns and villages. In Tanzania, radical Islamists are now seeking to undermine the peaceful coexistence that has hitherto endured between Christians and Muslims. The basis of the course is a book entitled *Waislamu Wauliza, Wakristu Wajibu*, or *Muslims enquire, Christians answer*, written by Father Christian Troll, a Jesuit and orientalist. We are helping with **€3,500** towards the cost of this course and with **€5,000** for another similar initiative in interreligious dialogue through study groups in the Tanzanian diocese of Bunda.

In **Lebanon** and **Syria** the Focolare movement is also pursuing the path of interreligious dialogue. Here survival of refugees is the most urgent need. Yet at the same time they need spiritual support as well. By taking part in large prayer meetings for 600 people or so of all ages and backgrounds, these suffering people are able to see that Christian unity is not merely theological rhetoric – and the two-day family meetings for up to 400 people help them to see the strength and support the family can give – and how the Church, as Pope Francis says, goes out to the margins of society in order to care for all people. Only a person firmly rooted in his faith can survive in a non-Christian environment and not think constantly of emigrating to supposedly Christian countries. This approach is complemented by educational congresses for young people aged between 14 and 20. For to be strong in one's own faith means recognising what we share in common, both theologically and in personal prayer. We have promised **€20,000** to support this wide-ranging programme helping Christians to know and love their own faith. ●



Respecting others means getting to know them. In the archdiocese of Songea (Tanzania) Christians can find answers to the questions of the Muslims.

Love is stronger than death



The drawn-out suffering of Christians in Iraq and Syria is something that can only be borne with a strong faith. Your support helps strengthen this faith. The thank-you letter from Father Jakob Mourad of Homs in Syria is testimony to this. "Our witness today", he writes, "reflects the appearance of the Cross, which announces the Resurrection to all mankind. In this sense your aid is a precious contribution to that hope that reminds us all: Love is stronger than death. We pray for you and for all the benefactors who in one way or another are showing their solidarity with the poor and persecuted of this region. Thanks to this striving, we are able to live in unity in the Church of Christ, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail (cf Mt 16:18)".

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Forgetting my own little cares

Thank you for helping me to forget my own little cares by opening my heart to the suffering of so many of my Christian brothers and sisters who are embracing martyrdom in order to remain faithful to God. Your Mirror *newsletter is a great help to me in this way. I am united in prayer with you and all your co-workers. Please pray for me too.*

A benefactress in France

Helping ACN – a family tradition

All their lives my parents supported ACN. It was because of this that I visited your presentation on Religious Freedom Worldwide *in a church in Zürich. The speaker was Doctor Paul Bhatti, the brother of the murdered Pakistani minister Shahbaz Bhatti. His words moved me deeply, and your report is extremely informative. Now I feel called on, in the tradition of my parents, to stand up decisively for your cause. Many thanks!*

A benefactor in Switzerland

Drops in the ocean

I want not only to wish you all, and all you serve, my sincere Christmas blessings, but to thank you so much for all that ACN does. I want to thank you for the words on your lovely Christmas card, for Fr. Martin and Johannes Heereman's inspiring words in your always excellent Mirror. *The needs are so great, the persecution and suffering incomprehensible and yet with God's infinite grace you and we must press on - little by little. Once again the* Mirror *reflects the true Church in real need – and we in Australia have so much. Please accept my donation although only drops in the ocean.*

A benefactor from Australia



Johannes Freiherr Heereman,
Executive President, ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

At the beginning of November we presented our report on* Religious Freedom Worldwide – 2014. *Through our work – which we can only carry out thanks to your generosity – we have discovered the state of religious freedom in every corner of the globe. The truth is horrifying, but it must be brought to light if the free world, and above all the Christian world, is to be able to react. This will be still more necessary in 2015.

How many times we have already wished one another all the best for this New Year. But I am quite sure that in our heart of hearts what we wish still more is that the suffering of our fellow Christians in Iraq, in Syria, in China, in Cuba and in so many other countries of this turbulent world could be lessened or made to cease completely. I can only assure you that you are contributing greatly towards this end, and for this I thank you. Often it is no more than the widow's mite or the offerings of the little ones. And often people show their mercy through great sacrifices. Many do this, and they too deserve our heartfelt thanks, in the name of the Church in need!

Behind every sacrifice there is love. It is this love that brings salvation, since God – as Pope Francis repeatedly emphasises – desires mercy, rather than sacrifice.



Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Please use the envelope. Aid to the Church in Need, 39B Mdina Road, Attard ATD 9038; Tel: 21487818; Fax: 21586257

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Pass this leaflet on to your neighbours, friends or leave it at the Parish Church for others to review.

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