

Dear Friends,

In the last issue of the Mirror I had the pleasure of speaking to you about the great joy we experienced on *Aid to the Church in Need's* Jubilee pilgrimage in Rome and the happy providence that it fell at the same time as the election of Pope Leo XIV. At that time, I could not have imagined that just a few days later I would have the opportunity to personally meet the Holy Father at the Jubilee of Families – at which ACN had been able to offer 10,000 Child's Bibles, in various different languages, to those present.

It was with a calm and unhurried manner that Pope Leo XIV, during the papal audience on Wednesday 28th May, walked along the line of individuals who had been allowed to meet him personally during the so-called “Baciamento” (ring kissing). The Holy Father was fully engaged, completely interested in what I had to say, as though I alone was with him at that moment. He listened attentively as I told him about the work of ACN and presented him with the latest issue of our Child's Bible, asking him if he would agree to authorise a foreword for this gift for children around the world.

I was also able to introduce our latest catechetical publication to him, the new “YOUCAT Love Forever”. This special marriage guidance handbook for engaged and married couples was developed over several years as part of an international and intercultural project and has now been approved by the Church. It is the fruit of a great deal of hard work and loving commitment. In straight-forward, contemporary language it presents the faith and teachings of the Church at a time of great uncertainty and grave challenges, offering a solid and much-needed foundation for a successful partnership between man and wife in marriage and family – and not for young couples only.



With a smile, and indicating the many questions and concerns which those in the rows before and after me were also raising, the Holy Father asked me to bear with him patiently. Yet just nine days later, what we

what his predecessor, Pope Francis, frequently asked of the faithful: **“Pray for me!”**

Let us not neglect to offer Pope Leo the constant support of our prayers, so that – guided by the Holy Spirit and under the protection of the Virgin Mary – he may be able to lead us as a good shepherd in these difficult times and point out the way forward for the Christian people with certainty.

With my warmest greetings and blessings and an assurance of my prayers,



“Let us pray for Pope Leo that he may be able to lead us as a good shepherd in these challenging times.”

had scarcely dared to hope came as a joyful surprise, when we received the official foreword authorised by Pope Leo XIV to the latest edition of our Child's Bible.

Following this personal encounter in Saint Peter's Square and after reading his various homilies and addresses so far, I am moved to ask you, on his behalf,



Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Where **CHRIST** Himself is the Doctor



Young mums in Mexico – praying, growing and celebrating together with the Franciscan Sisters.

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick”, Our Lord says in the Gospel. And we hear wonderful testimonies from Latin America of God’s healing grace in souls.

In **Mexico**, in the diocese of Aguascalientes, the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Refuge are providing a loving home to 25 young mothers and their babies.

“Occasionally, we even have 10-year-old girls coming to us, already eight months pregnant”, says Mother Noemi, the Superior, with emotion. They come from troubled backgrounds, having been physically and psychologically maltreated and sexually abused. “It is hard for these girls to trust, to open up and to get used to an ordered way of life. Many of them can’t even read or write”, she adds.



Learning to smile – a young mother with her child.

“When they arrive here, they often feel utterly worthless”, adds her younger assistant, Sister Lupita. “But I see how they develop and how the grace of God is at work within them. And when they leave us, sometime later, they have begun to blossom and to believe that they are loved by God.”

The feeling of being loved and valued is something quite new for these girls. And it also helps them to learn to love their babies. Many of them find a life of faith and want to receive the Sacraments. For example, Marisela, now 17, had a child at the age of 14. She explains, “So much has changed for me. I now believe in love and forgiveness, and that God loves me.”

The Sisters are there for the girls, all day and every day. But what they don’t have is a chapel where these young women can be close to Jesus at any time of the night or day, and where Mass can also be celebrated.

We have promised the Sisters €50,000 so that this “hospital for wounded souls” can be built, where Christ Himself is the Doctor.

Similarly we have heard wonderful stories of conversions of former criminals in **Ecuador**, one of the Latin American countries most affected by violence.

In the port city of Guayaquil, which has almost 3 million souls, the crime rate is particularly high. It is mainly young people between the ages of 15 and 27 who are recruited by criminal groups.

The members of the pastoral outreach team, both priests and laity, daily visit the ten prisons within Guayaquil Archdiocese, where more than 10,000 prisoners are incarcerated. This work involves travelling anything up to 75 miles (120 km) and at present all these journeys are made in an old, rundown car, or otherwise by taxi or bus. But bus journeys are particularly dangerous and prison visitors have already been robbed seven times.

We have promised the archdiocese €22,500 for a new vehicle. Will you help us to provide an “ambulance for the salvation of souls”?



Ecuador – Holy Mass inside the prison.



They are the **FUTURE** of the Church!

In the summer of 2014 the Nineveh Plains of **Iraq** were overrun by the terrorists of the so-called “Islamic State” (IS). The vast majority of the population fled or were expelled, and many were murdered. Christianity seemed to have disappeared from this region, where the faith had flourished for 2,000 years. But thankfully, today there are still young Christians living and praying here...

When Pope Francis visited Iraq in March 2021, he celebrated Holy Mass in Erbil and blessed a statue of the Virgin Mary from the nearby town of Karamlesh, lovingly restored after having been decapitated by the terrorists. It was brought back here as a symbol of the rebirth of the Christian presence in the region. For many of these Christians have now returned to their home



“Holidays with God” in Ukraine.

towns and villages, following the defeat of the IS extremists. ACN was a major contributor to the rebuilding of the ruined Christian towns and villages in the Nineveh Plains region, including Karamlesh.

Today Christian families in the region are cautiously hopeful as they look to the future. The fact that many children and young people live in Karamlesh is a source of hope.

The Church is the centre of their lives. Today somewhere between 120 and 130 young people take part in the meetings and events of “Don Bosco Youth” and the “Friends of Don Bosco”, groups which aim to live the spirituality of Saint John “Don” Bosco. “Our aim is to rest in the love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and in the joy of the Gospel”, explains Father Adday Babaca, their parish priest.

Guided by their priest and a small group of religious, they pray together, read the

Scriptures, celebrate Mass, learn about the lives of the saints and from time to time visit ancient monasteries and other holy places. Games and sporting events are also part of the programme.

“Young people are the shining future of the Church and the rock of faith on which a strong and unshakeable Church will be built, unaffected by the wars of this world”, he tells us. Often they also bring their families back to the church. “They see the courage and enthusiasm in the eyes of their children and the hope that has been poured into their hearts, and the healing of their souls that they are experiencing.”

We have promised €5,300 to help fund this precious initiative. And there is hope that it might lead to spiritual and religious vocations.

ACN also supports a number of annual Church-run holiday camps, especially in the **Middle East** and in **Ukraine**, but also in many other countries.

These summer camps give the children and young people an opportunity to deepen their faith, while at the same time enjoying a joyful and relaxing time with others of their own age. And where necessary, children who have been damaged and disturbed by warfare and violence also receive spiritual and psychological support.

Would you be willing to help these children and young people grow together in friendship with Jesus and with one another?



A youth camp in Lebanon.



Some of the Friends of Don Bosco in Karamlesh, Iraq.



Pointing the way to true **HAPPINESS**

Falsehoods about the Catholic faith abound, and many baptised Christians know very little about their own faith. It is frequently said that the Catholic Church, with her moral teachings, restricts human freedom and prevents us from being happy. Good catechetical publications are a great help in combating these erroneous ideas.

For almost 15 years now the youth catechism, YOUCAT has been a great success in explaining the Catholic faith in a form that is understandable and appealing to young people. Today this book has been

translated into 60 different languages and is used all over the world wherever young people want to come closer to God and find answers to their questions.

But marriage and the family face particularly important challenges today, and many young people do not have positive role models of successful relationships, so a new booklet in the series has been published focusing on marriage guidance, entitled "YOUCAT Love Forever". Shortly before his death, Pope Francis wrote a foreword to the booklet in which he urged young people to "Believe in love, believe in God and believe that you can live the adventure of a lifelong love. Love wants to be forever."

As you saw on page 1, our Ecclesiastical Assistant, Father Anton Lässer was recently able to give Pope Leo XIV an overview of this booklet. The Holy Father was delighted. In his homily for the Holy Year Jubilee of Families he spoke of marriage as "the measure of true love between a man and a woman: a love that is total, faithful and fruitful". He also pointed to the example of canonised and beatified married couples and emphasised how "today's world needs the marriage covenant in order to know and accept God's love and to defeat, thanks to its unifying and reconciling power, the forces that break down relationships and societies".

But the seed of faith needs to be planted in the youngest of hearts. The ACN Child's Bible, first published 46 years ago, has



Some of the first to receive the new Child's Bible. Outside the Lateran Basilica in Rome.



YOU CAT in the Central African Republic.



Children in Mozambique, delighted with the children's YOU CAT.



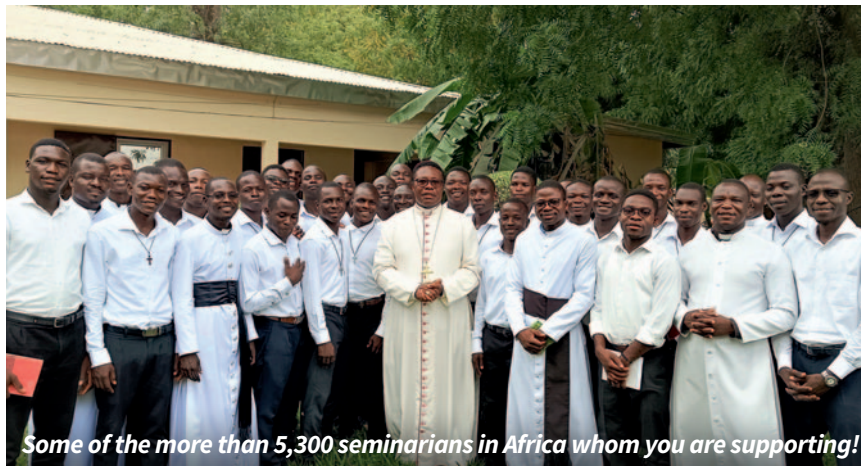
Free copies of the Child's Bible at the Jubilee of Families.

now been translated into 194 different languages and printed and over 51 million copies have been distributed. Recently, the layout has been modernised and suggestions for catechesis have been added, while keeping its highly popular illustrations. The first 10,000 copies of the new edition were distributed by ACN on 31st May in Rome as part of the Jubilee of Families.

Aid to the Church in Need distributes several hundred thousand catechetical books every year around the world, including the Child's Bible. With your donation you can help us so that God can speak to the hearts of still more children and young people. You can also purchase the books yourself and give them as presents to spark young people's interest in the Gospel.



“I only want to get better so I can become a **PRIEST**”



Some of the more than 5,300 seminarians in Africa whom you are supporting!



Young Carmelites at Jean-Thierry's grave in Cameroon.

From a very young age, Jean-Thierry Ebogo (1982-2006) from Bamenda in **Cameroon** had one great wish: to become a priest, so as “to be like Jesus”. But he could not be ordained a priest, as he died at the age of 23. Yet through his example many other young men have found their way to the priesthood. And shortly before his death, he had promised to bring Africa “a rainfall of priestly vocations”.

From the age of just 13, Jean-Thierry wrote poems in which he expressed his deep and tender love for Christ and his desire to give himself entirely to Him. At the age of 21 he entered the convent of the Discalced Carmelite Friars in Nkoabang, near the capital Yaoundé. But shortly after, he was diagnosed with a malignant tumour in his right leg, which had to be amputated. He offered up his intense sufferings for priestly and religious vocations.

In 2005 he was brought to Italy for treatment, but the cancer had already spread. The doctor in the hospital exclaimed,



Jean-Thierry and his mother, shortly before his death.

“Who have you brought me? This is a saint!” For she could not believe that someone suffering so intensely would not utter even a single complaint. His only concern was whether he could still be ordained a priest. “I only want to get better so I can become a priest”, he said.

On December 8, 2005, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he was granted special permission to take his final vows in his hospital room. But he did not live to be ordained, dying just a month later on January 5, 2006. His mother's residence permit in Italy had expired before his death, so that she couldn't stay with him until the end. As she bade him farewell on 26 December, both of them knew they would not see each other again in this world. Jean-Thierry said to her: “God's will be done, Mama! Just remember how you entrusted me to HIM the day I was born. When you visit a friend and give him a baby kid as a gift, you don't afterwards ask him what he did with it. He might have reared it, or he might have eaten it. Now I am the little kid you gave to God, and we must not ask God what He has done with the little kid you gave Him on the day I was born.”



Jean-Thierry signing his religious vows in the hospital.

As he died, his last words were “How beautiful is Jesus!” Thousands of people were present at his funeral, and countless people today feel their lives have been touched by him and that he has helped them. Today many people visit his grave, and the cause for his beatification is well advanced.

At the age of 17 Jean-Thierry wrote in one of his poems: “I am certain of happiness. I will live.”

Although this young man from Cameroon never became a priest, the radiance of his example has become a gift to the Church and a wellspring of new vocations.



Ministering more swiftly and safely

The diocese of Pankshin in **Nigeria's** Middle Belt serves a hilly region, where most of the dirt tracks are difficult to negotiate, above all in the rainy season.

On average, every parish in the diocese serves more than 160 different village communities. So the priests have to travel long distances in order to minister to the faithful. And these are dangerous journeys on these solitary roads, especially when travelling alone on a motorbike. This is an area of Nigeria where more and more priests are being attacked and even abducted.



Bishop Michael Gokal Gokum has asked our help to provide five sturdy second-hand cars for five of his parishes. And, thanks to your generous support, we were able to provide the €45,600 needed to purchase them. He has now written to thank us: "The priests have already collected their vehicles and are confident that their evangelising work will be greatly enhanced as a result. I would like to thank you on their behalf. May Mary, Mother and Star of Evangelisation, richly reward all your generous benefactors. Many thanks, and may God bless you all!"

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Life-changing work

I am writing to you to say that I admire everything you do serving the persecuted Church globally. Coordinating lots of international projects to help Christians get the help needed – so important at this time! At my church we had an Aid to the Church in Need speaker come and give a powerful and moving speech on what ACN is doing helping persecuted Christians in Nigeria. You do incredible, life-changing work! May God bless you richly and abundantly for all that you do for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

A benefactor from the UK

Moved by their suffering, and their courage

It is one of my most heartfelt wishes always to be able to support ACN! Whenever I receive your mailings I am deeply moved by

the stories telling of the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world – and at the same time I am also moved by the courage of so many others who are giving their lives to help them. God willing, I will never stop supporting you, if only with little contributions – and I am firmly convinced that God will help me to do so!

A friend and supporter in Brazil

Sharing the little she has

My dear friends, the work you do is so great and urgently needed. The world is divided between those asking for help and those with plenty. I am poor and would love to help more, but I cannot. I have a small pension, and I am sending you a cheque for 30 Euros with this letter to help those in need. I can't give more. Many thanks for your work, may God help you all.

A benefactor in Portugal



Regina Lynch

Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

My column today is a hymn of praise for the youth of our world as young Catholics from all over the world meet in Rome this August to celebrate their faith with Pope Leo XIV as part of the Jubilee of Hope. He has called them "a volcano of life, energy, sentiments and ideas".

Especially during Covid we witnessed how in many of our donor countries the young people stepped up to assist the isolated elderly by doing their shopping or by being a listening ear at a distance, while in our beneficiary countries, they are now active as catechists or youth leaders. And this despite local hardships such as war or anti-Christian persecution or discrimination. Thankfully they are not alone as countless numbers of priests and religious walk with them, encourage them and through faith, help them find hope in the future.

Thanks be to God, there is a whole generation of young people, who are seeking God and helping others to find Him. We meet them when we travel through the continents. But they are also there in the traditional Christian countries of Europe. Of the 10,384 adults baptised at Easter in France this year, 36% were aged 18-25. What an example and source of hope for us and for our Church!

We should encourage the young Christians, whom we know personally, and most importantly, pray for them.

Regina Lynch

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Please use the envelope. Aid to the Church in Need, 35/3, 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.



Editor: Stephen Axisa

Publisher: Aid to the Church in Need, 35/3, Mdina Road, Attard, ATD 9038

Printed in Malta

De licentia competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae

www.acnmalta.org