



## Dear Friends,

We walk together as “Pilgrims of Hope” through this jubilee year of 2025, which concludes on January 6 with the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. Let us focus on this final furlong and enter with faith into this Christmas season to celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God, with hearts full of hope. For although the Incarnation took place in the “fullness of time”, it seeks to be constantly realised in our own lives and, in this jubilee year, bring forth special fruits of redemption.

Everywhere we look there is a deep yearning for resolution and redemption. Events bombard our senses, crises afflicting the world, there are alarming threats to world peace, and the political and social upheavals are simply too much for many people. All these things tear at our hearts.

Our hearts go out to our project partners who bring their dire needs to our attention. So many of their stories touch us deeply. Our hearts ache for them and yearn for the coming of the one who can defeat every evil and bring us all health and healing (cf 1 Pt 2:24).

God has become man – to save *us*! The Infinite, Almighty, Ineffable One, who is far beyond our understanding, manifests Himself to us as that Love to which all hearts aspire – He is coming to us! He desires to enter our world today to heal our wounds. He wants to lead us into all truth (cf Jn 16:13), and reveal to us His Father’s eternal plan of salvation, that our lives may be lived well and lead us to perfection.



***“Instead of might and glory, it is humility and closeness that God has chosen as the way to our hearts.”***

For all who can welcome it, this is truly an all-transforming, beautiful and joyous message! One that enters our lives by faith – and hope – not by sight. But it has proved true and believable, millions of times over throughout history.

But how could we believe and hope, if God had not come to share in our weakness and limitations? God “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of

a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:6-7).

Christmas overturns all our well-worn assumptions. Instead of might and glory from above, it is humility and closeness from below that God has chosen as the way to our hearts. A child in the manger, reaching out his arms towards us.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). And He Himself assures us: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). It is these promises of God which enable us to go forward into the future, filled with hope and joyful faith, and thus towards perfection.

In this spirit I wish each and every one of you a merry, and richly blessed, Christmas.

*F. Anton Lässer CP*

Father Anton Lässer CP  
Ecclesiastical Assistant



## Giving a lifetime of **HAPPINESS**



*“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mt 19:6).*

In the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta, in the west of **Pakistan**, 135 young Catholic couples are preparing to get married. To ensure that their married happiness is based on a solid foundation, the Church is helping them to prepare for this sacrament.

What is the meaning of Christian marriage? Why is a Christian not permitted to have more than one wife, as is the practice in the majority Muslim society all around them? Why is it not possible for a Christian to simply dissolve a marriage? How can married couples communicate with each other and discuss their feelings and potential conflicts? How can parents help their

children to live happy lives? And how can Christ become the centre of family life?

These are just some of the questions that are raised on the marriage preparation course. The couples meet together for ten one-day sessions to have their questions answered and receive guidance to help them have successful marriages. They pray together, discuss issues together, and every couple can find advice and help for their own particular challenges.

**For just €75 you can help a young couple to prepare for a good marriage and lay the foundations for a lifetime of happiness together.**



## A gift for **RELIGIOUS SISTERS** – who are a gift to others

“Sleep, little Jesus, sleep. Close your little eyes. Your mummy is watching over you and rocking you to sleep”. Once again this endearing Christmas Carol will be sung by many people in **Ukraine** – even in this fourth year of the war – while the noise of the air raid sirens and the crashing of bombs still rings out around them. For many people it is thanks to the sisters that they can still celebrate Christmas at all.

Despair, discouragement, bitterness, and often even hatred are spreading, and countless people are deeply traumatised. Yet all over Ukraine these religious sisters are standing side by side with the people, comforting and encouraging them, even

though they also experience the fear and hardship of war.

The source of their strength is Jesus Christ himself. And He is the reason for their joy this Christmas, a joy they are passing on



*Joy – even in the midst of war – at the birth of the Prince of Peace.*



*Little carollers: their voices ring out above the din of war.*

to others. “We sisters are sharing our Christmas meals with all the needy who come knocking on our convent doors. And we sing carols for Jesus, who came into this world so that we might have hope and not feel alone. *He* is what matters most at Christmas time”, says Sister Maria from Kramatorsk.

All over Ukraine, religious sisters from many different congregations offer their faithful service for no other reward than love. Yet at the same time they too have to pay their bills and face the soaring costs of food, energy and medical care.

**With a gift of €84 you will be supporting one of these sisters’ life and apostolate for a month. At the same time you will be helping her to be a gift to others.**



# Help these young men follow their **VOCATION!**

**All of 67 young men currently training for the priesthood in the Diocese of Lwena in Angola are quite different to each other. But the one thing they have in common is that they have responded to the call of God.**

As a youngster, Fernando (33) was never keen to go to church with his mother. All he was interested in was football. Whereas Matol Piedade (28) regularly went to Holy Mass with his parents and loved everything in the church. He used to play at saying Mass with his brothers and sisters and would borrow his mother's shawl to be his "priestly vestment". Cristo (22) already had some profound questions as a youngster: "What is the meaning of the host? Why can't young children receive Holy Communion?" His grandmother explained that you have to be properly prepared before receiving Communion, because it is the Body of Christ. When he kept on asking how the host becomes the Body of Christ, she sent him to the



*They all want to be priests!*

catechist. "I asked him the same questions, and he explained to me that it was through the Consecration that it became the Body of Christ and that only priests had the power to do this. So I told him I wanted to become a priest, but he replied: 'My son, this is not something that just happens overnight, but it is a vocation and a calling from God.'" And over the years, this desire grew stronger within him.

So now, the most heartfelt Christmas wish of Fernando, Cristo, Matol Piedade and all the 64 other seminarians in Lwena is to be able to follow their path to the priesthood.

**For €350 you can help one of these seminarians pursue their heartfelt vocation at the seminary for another twelve months. The Christmas joy you bring them will be great indeed!**



# A gift for the future of the **FAITH** in Lebanon

**In Lebanon, instruction in the Catholic Faith is not on the curriculum outside of Catholic schools. In the state schools catechists often have to step in to provide this, otherwise the Christian children would have to attend religious instruction in another faith. Outside of the family, these catechists are the only people who provide this instruction in the Faith.**

But the role of the catechist goes much further than this, as Father Samer explains: "They are not just teachers, but also parents, friends, psychologists and social

workers." Thérèse has fond memories of these lessons when she was a child. "I grew up during the war", she explains. "And I remember what my catechist taught me very well. During one of the shellings, I took a statue of the Virgin Mary with me and gathered together with the children of my own age. Then I prayed together with them." Today she is a catechist herself.



*Joy in the Faith – not fear of the future!*

But now it is becoming harder and harder for the dioceses to pay the salaries of these catechists. And so, as Father Dany Ephrem explains, "Your help is the driving force that supports the Church in Lebanon. Every donation, every prayer is like a precious stone, that builds up the Faith in this troubled land."

Would you be willing to help build the future of the Faith in Lebanon?

**For just €27 you can cover a week's salary for a part-time catechist, and for €40 that of a full-time catechist.**



# Will you **HELP** with a surprise gift at Christmas?

Simple shepherds were the first catechists of the Christian era. They proclaimed what they had learned from the angels about the birth of the Redeemer. “And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them” (Lk 2:18).

Although no longer instructed by angels, ordinary men and women around the world still continue to play a vital role in proclaiming the Gospel today. Where parishes are so vast that priests can only rarely visit the many individual villages, it is the catechists who pray with the faithful, prepare the children, young people and adults for the reception of the sacraments, offer comfort and support and act as role models and helpers for the Christian families.

In not a few cases their work can even be dangerous. Father Edgard Ouedraogo, who runs a training centre for catechists in **Burkina Faso** in West Africa – a country suffering terribly from Islamist terrorism – writes to tell us, “The catechists are the pillars of the Church and often risk their lives. They are the ones in greatest danger and sometimes they pay the highest price. In fact, there are more martyrs among the catechists here than among us priests.”

In 2023 the parish of Rollo was overrun by terrorists. The inhabitants fled and are only gradually beginning to return. For the 16 catechists working in the area it is

not just the looming threat of violence but also the long distances that make life difficult. They have to travel long journeys on their old and battered bicycles, over stones, down potholes and through mud. Some of the catechists are sick, and many are already quite elderly – people like André, who is proud of the fact that he is still able to drag heavy stones to build a grotto for Our Lady in one of “his” villages. Nevertheless, riding home in the evening on his bicycle, he is utterly exhausted.

Father Étienne Sawadogo, the parish priest, wants to make the labours of these catechists just a little easier. If each of them had a motorcycle, they would be able to reach the faithful much more quickly and easily. Each motorcycle costs €1,170 and he needs 16 of them, so €18,720 in total.

But this is an astronomical sum for this desperately poor parish. So Father Étienne is counting on your generosity of heart. Will you help this priest, who himself survived the terrorist attack, to provide a surprise for his catechists this Christmas?

Committed lay men and women are not only helping proclaim the Gospel message in Africa, but also in Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, and they are rarely being paid to do so. You can be a “ministering angel” for these catechists by helping with their training, contributing to their support or providing them with Bibles, catechisms and prayer books.

**Your Christmas gifts can bring joy to the remotest villages... “The Redeemer is born! Come, let us adore Him!”**

*This catechist is firm in his faith – but his bike is a bit more wobbly...*



**Catechists announce the Gospel in the smallest villages.**



*“O King, greater than all kings...” sung by the pilgrims in their hundreds.*

## “The **BLESSING** of the Infant Jesus drives out fear”

**For 400 years Christians have brought their needs before the Infant Jesus of Prague — and reported countless wonders in answer to their prayers. The image is known all over the world, not least in Nigeria, where there is so much violence and fear but where so many of the faithful today put their trust in the “Little King”.**

“We need the Infant Jesus to bring peace and security to our land. We pray that He will bring an end to the mass abductions and murders of Christians. I say to you all, don’t be discouraged, for the Christ Child is here to heal our wounds.” So says Carmelite Father WalterMary Obiefuna Ayogu, who himself was cured from a serious illness after praying to the Infant Jesus.



*“We have come to worship Him” (Mt 2:2).*

Every year in December, in Obadoliwiyeyi, a village on the fringes of the Nigerian metropolis of Benin City, a great feast is held in honour of the Infant Jesus of Prague. “The name of the village means ‘The King is there to welcome his people,’” the priest explains. “Before the people here became Christians, they were referring to their own tribal king. But today they worship the true King of Kings”, Father WalterMary adds. So now they sing: “Eze kacha Eze” – “O King, greater than all kings!” Over and over again.

Despite the potential dangers they face, pilgrims continue to travel here from all over the country. One young brother explains: “The right arm of the Christ Child is raised in blessing, and gives us peace and inner calm, dispelling our anxieties and fears.” Many people travel for days on end and many tell of graces granted to them by the Infant Jesus. As Father WalterMary can testify: “The daughter of one lady who came to the feast, had been abducted. All the pilgrims prayed for her freedom, and I



*“Holy Infant Jesus, help me in my need!”*

placed a sheet of paper with her name on it beneath the statue of the Infant Jesus. Shortly afterwards, the mother told me that her daughter had been set free.”

Father WalterMary recommends a simple, short prayer to the faithful, one he himself prays unceasingly: “O holy Infant Jesus, I believe in you, I hope in you, I trust in you and I love you with all my heart!” He devotes all his energies to encouraging as many people as possible to open their hearts to the Little Prince of Peace and to adore the Mystery: that the All-powerful God has become a child. Today the Infant Jesus of Prague is revered in at least 15 dioceses of the country.

In Nigeria, and all over the world, people are yearning for peace and looking anxiously towards the future. Father WalterMary wants to share his confident trust with everyone and says:

**“May the Infant Jesus help us lovingly to understand that He holds the world in His hand and is very close to it – and that the hostile powers of this world cannot destroy His wonderful work of love! The Child Jesus is the true King. I wish that every family in the whole wide world would hear these words of the Prince of Peace: Peace be to your house!”**



## Thanks for a Christmas that has sown seeds of peace!

Thanks to your help, many thousands of children in the crisis-torn region of **Lebanon** and **Syria** experience the joy of Christmas every year. From Lebanon, Sister Christina Salameh has written to thank you on behalf of all these families:



“Once again last year, your valuable contributions helped give joy, encouragement and fresh hope to so many children and families at Christmas. Far beyond its material value, this was a living expression of love made incarnate, which embodies the true spirit of Christmas. This is how we have tried to sow fresh hope in people’s hearts. Every smile, every look of happy surprise, every laugh was a real sign of this hope. Your generosity brought joy where it seemed to have dried out and rekindled hope where it had begun to waver.

**We firmly believe that these seeds of hope will continue to bear fruit and help transform hearts. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for having been instruments of Divine Providence.”**

## Need, love and thanks – your letters

### God will do the rest

*Thank you for the Mirror; it made a deep impression on me. I find it so beautiful that you are supporting all these young vocations, wherever they are in the world! The Church is being attacked today, and not least by the media. But you are standing firm, even in those countries where the Church seems to have no chance. Jesus Himself established His Church with just twelve Apostles – and just see what it has become, all over the world! We must simply do our best, and God will do the rest!*

**A friend and benefactress in Belgium**

### I receive the best support

*Thank you for your appreciation of the financial support I often send to you for your great work in the Catholic missions. Believe me, I receive the best support, as you give your benefactors wonderful opportunities to help people and communities so far*

*away from us. Thank you to all the priests who have helped me pray for my family members who are in need of conversion back to their faith, with masses and novenas. This is my greatest happiness.*

**A benefactress in Australia**

### Wonderful work, with great love

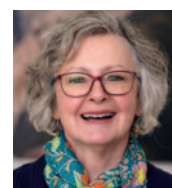
*May God bless you, and bless all you are doing for our brothers and sisters in need and persecution. It is all absolutely essential! What a wonderful example, and what courage! You are doing tremendous work and doing it with great love.*

**A friend and supporter in France**

### In solidarity

*In solidarity with persecuted Christians and displaced families – may this donation help restore dignity, safety, and hope.*

**A supporter in the U.S.A.**



**Regina Lynch**

Executive President,  
ACN (International)

*Dear Friends,*

*In many parts of the world, where ACN supports the Church in its mission, catechists play an integral role in evangelisation. For these full-time or part-time men and women this is a vocation. They prepare the baptised and the catechumens for (often) those few days in the year, when the priest can finally come to their village – just one of perhaps 50 or even 100 communities of the parish.*

*Over the years I have met many catechists. I visited them in the schools, where they were being trained for their future tasks or I have met them at work in the field. I have always been impressed by their dedication to spreading the Gospel, even if it means hardship and sacrifice. A few times, I have visited the places where they paid the ultimate price for being a catechist by giving up their life for their faith.*

*One of those places was the Island of Basilan in the predominantly Muslim Southern Philippines, where the Islamic terror organisation, Abu Sayyaf, has had a history of kidnapping and killing in its aim to have a separate Islamic state. On 14 February 1999 the terrorists ambushed a group of catechists, who were on their way to Isabela, the capital of the island, for a formation course. Six of them were killed: either shot or hacked to death. Today, the burned remains of the jeep in which they were travelling is a reminder of their great sacrifice.*

*Let us pray for all who devote their life to training others in the faith.*

*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.



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