



Dear Friends,

I am constantly amazed by the wisdom and great wealth of experience that our beloved Church possesses about human nature. During my trip to Turkey to commemorate the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, I encountered this wisdom once more, as we meditated on the words of the Nicene Creed. In a different way, we find this same wisdom in the appointment of our new president, His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, by our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV. We are delighted at this news and offer him heartfelt welcome. Please read his message on the back page of the Mirror.

Another example of the Church's understanding of our human nature, which again fills me with joy, is the grace of Lent. The Church grants us this time for spiritual healing. By responding to her call for renunciation, we gain new freedoms – freedom to examine and correct our old habits; freedom to put at the centre of our life what is truest and most vital, namely Our Lord Jesus Christ; freedom to translate our love and compassion for our fellow

men and women into practical action. Lent is the opportunity to set ourselves free so that we can love.

Is it not often the case that the things we call our own tend to possess us more than we possess them? This is exactly what Jesus means when He says “You cannot serve both God and Mammon” (Mt 6:24). Permit me to offer you a practical tip at this



“Lent is the opportunity to set ourselves free so that we can love.”

point: Rather than offering up something rather trivial this Lent, offer up something that you know is not good for you or for your neighbour, because it enslaves you or takes up too much of your time – for example television, your mobile phone, social media or similar habits. And use the time this frees up for a closer encounter with Jesus by reading the Scriptures, praying and engaging in works of charity.

Jesus' command to “Go out into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all

creation” (Mk 16:15) also reflects this understanding of human nature. For Saint Augustine's words ring true for every one of us: “Our hearts are restless till they rest in You”. True peace, loving security and complete human fulfilment are to be found only in Christ's Gospel. And so this missionary command of Jesus serves the true goal and highest good of man – and especially of those called to mission, because it is them who, above all, most directly experience the presence and working of God's love.

In this issue of the Mirror we introduce you to some of these missionaries, who in their life and ministry show how Jesus' call to mission can bring salvation and life.

With my profound gratitude to you for helping us to support these missionaries, I send you my warmest greetings.

Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Making God's love felt – religious sisters in Pemba diocese, Mozambique.

Ministering **ANGELS** in the midst of violence and death

Ever since 2017 the far north of **Mozambique** has been plagued by terrorism, violence, exodus and death. Here, in the diocese of Pemba, 59 religious sisters are devoting themselves to bringing solace in the midst of this unbearable suffering.

Sister Alphoncia Mmole from Tanzania cares for orphaned children. "Many of these children were forced to witness the

murder of their own family members. They came to me suffering deep psychological trauma and poor health. So I have welcomed them lovingly and am striving to give them confidence and hope for the future", she explains.

From time to time there are little miracles. "One of the boys was quite wild and cruel to his fellow pupils. On one occasion I found him pressing a cushion over the

face of another boy and on another occasion, hitting him in the stomach with a flat iron. I asked him if he wanted to see other children wounded or even killed. He looked at me, began to cry and shook his head. Since then he has never been violent towards any of the other children again."

Sister Alphoncia herself had no easy childhood. "I suffered a great deal in my own life", she confesses. "In the past I preferred to hide away and isolate myself. But seeing the suffering of other people has opened my eyes and my heart. The truth is, I am a poor individual, helping other poor people. Every day I stretch out my hands to God and ask, where will our help come from? The prayers and support we receive from ACN give us the strength and courage to continue our mission."

For each of these 59 brave women who by the love of God are striving to heal what has been wounded and damaged by hatred and violence, we are providing basic support (€600) for the coming year. Will you help us, so these religious sisters in the diocese of Pemba can continue to be ministering angels to the weakest members of society?

PEACEMAKERS and good shepherds

In April 2021 the Italian Comboni missionary, Bishop Christian Carlassare personally experienced the all-pervading violence gripping **South Sudan**. Aged 43, he had just been appointed Bishop of Rumbek, when armed men broke into his house and shot at him.



Bishop Carlassare is appealing for peace.



South Sudan: only the Church is bringing hope.

He remained undeterred by the incident. On the contrary, he saw this painful experience as an opportunity to "be at one with the wounds of the people and show that it is indeed possible to rise again". When Pope Francis visited South Sudan in 2023, Bishop Carlassare travelled over 200 miles (400 km) on foot, with a group of young people, to its capital Juba. There are many other priests in South Sudan promoting an end to the

violence and the peaceful coexistence of all the people. What little they have they share gladly with those still poorer than themselves.

Your Mass Stipends provide indispensable support for those ministering in Sudan. Will these good shepherds once again be able to celebrate Mass for your intentions this year?



You too can be **MISSIONARIES!**

Needless to say, most of us don't have the opportunity to travel to faraway lands and proclaim the Gospel. Nevertheless, we can be missionaries through our prayer and practical support.

Father Jean-Jacques Saint-Louis is a Montfort missionary in **Haiti**. He writes, "There is a powerful spiritual bond between ACN and ourselves, since we are all working for the same goal, we are working to bring hope to the poor. This bond is something that cannot be put into words, but we feel it nonetheless."

ACN is indirectly responsible for the fact that he will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of his ordination this year – as the charity supported the Montfort Missionaries in his parish when he was a boy. He recalls how "These priests were totally devoted to the task of building up the Kingdom of God. Already by my First Holy Communion I strongly felt the call of God, and ever since then I have kept this flame alive in my heart. And indeed as a child I was able to drink water from a well dug by one of the Montfort Fathers. He was a German priest who died many years ago already, but he was supported back then by ACN. And so, without knowing it, you were already helping me to become what I am today."

The situation in Haiti has worsened alarmingly in recent years, as Father Jean-Jacques tells us. "My country is

going through one of the worst moments in its history. Every day we face insecurity and political instability." The Montfort Fathers minister in five different dioceses,

though, sects are spreading everywhere. So now the missionaries in the diocese of Jérémie want to train up lay catechists in three of the parishes they run, so that they too can help to pass on the true Faith. Because "catechesis is a vital source of joy and hope for our Catholic faithful", he explains.



Training catechists... soon they will be passing on the Faith.

not only addressing people's immediate material needs but also providing their souls with nourishment and strength through the Good News of Christ. Sadly,

They need a total of €9,000 to fund this missionary formation project that will spread the Kingdom of God still further.



Bishop Roszyński with his seminarians, celebrating in traditional tribal dress.

The Church in Papua New Guinea also needs your support.

Priests can find it difficult to carry out their mission, especially in remote regions. A number of the vast parishes here cover several outlying islands. And many of the people are simply overwhelmed by the glaring clash between their traditional tribal culture and modern life. Polish Bishop Józef Roszyński of Wewak diocese has been a missionary in this country for 24 years now, and he is very happy that 15 young men from his diocese are currently training to become priests.

However, he needs an additional €30,000 this year for their training. Please help us, so that more priests who were born in the country can continue the work of the European missionaries who preceded them!



“CHRIST Himself is the greatest missionary of all”



Father Leopold, celebrating Mass.

Father Leopold Kropfreiter was only meant to be spending five years in Kazakhstan. But that has already stretched to 17 years. And the priest, who was originally from Austria, is now 45.

Pages could be written about his pastoral work in this Central Asian nation, once part of the Soviet Union. But Father Leopold himself insists, “Christ Himself is the greatest missionary of all.” He describes how a Kazakh woman used to pass by the cathedral every day, where they were holding perpetual Adoration. One day she felt she was being called to go inside. At the spot where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed she saw a brilliant light, brighter than anything she had ever seen before. She was so terrified that she turned around and ran straight home. But after calming down, she wanted to find out more about it. From then on she spent time every day in front of the Blessed Sacrament, in order to be “near this Light”. She knew nothing about the Eucharist, Jesus, or the Church. One day she asked the priest, “What is that?” He replied, “It is Jesus!” Eventually, this woman was baptised, and today she is one of the pillars of the Catholic community in Astana, Father Leopold tells us.

The story of Svetlana, a young woman who spent her youth in a state orphanage,

also impressed him. When she came of age, they sent her away with absolutely no support, leaving her hungry and alone in the bitter cold. One night, in a dream, she saw Jesus walking through the crowds, healing the sick and helping the

needy. Soon after that a priest arrived in her village. After praying together with the people he started giving out clothing to those in need. Svetlana was given a coat, just as she had dreamed. Father Leopold reflects on this episode: “Often we simply don’t realise that God really wants to enlist us as His co-workers. Some kind person donated this coat, and this very same coat saved a young woman from the cold and kindled the flame of Faith in her! Kind deeds are never done in vain!”

But he stresses that the work of the Church in Kazakhstan would be impossible without the support of ACN. The charity’s aid is essential to build up the Church’s structures, and moreover her work with the people. “We must be courageous, innovative and open in proclaiming Christ as our Lord and Redeemer”, he concludes.

ACN is supporting priests in Kazakhstan by providing vehicles to cover their vast parishes. We are also providing basic support for religious brothers and sisters, essential renovation work on Church-related buildings and support for their youth apostolate. “Your support is an enormous help to us in our work”, says Father Leopold. “May God reward you for everything!”

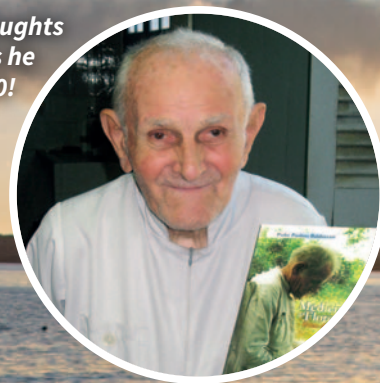


Prayer is their life: young Catholics in Kazakhstan.



Saving the PASTORAL MINISTRY from shipwreck

*Father Paolino had no thoughts
of retirement – even as he
approached 90!*



“He taught the people from the boat” (Lk 5:3), the Gospel tells us. Shortly afterwards, Peter and the other disciples cast out their nets and hauled in a great catch of fish. In many regions of the world today, rivers are the main way to travel, and so once again the priests are bringing Christ’s message to the people by boat.

Something similar to this “miraculous catch of fish” was the result of the ministry of Father Paolino Baldassari. In 1968, when he first arrived in the diocese of Rio Branco in the Amazon region of western **Brazil**, there was no priest, and many of the families had drifted away from the Church and even gone over to the sects. But when he died in 2016, at the age of 90 – already acclaimed by many as a saint – the people were all Catholics.

And yet initially, things had seemed very different. In the very first week after arriving, this Italian missionary of the Congregation of the Servants of Mary almost died of malaria. The fact that he even survived and continued to work for 48 years in the parish of Sena Madureira was already approaching a miracle. Even at the age of almost 90, Father Paolino continued to travel long journeys in his simple boat, often for weeks on end, visiting the people. And he always wore a life jacket and a motorcycle helmet on these perilous voyages, as he could not even swim. The cause for his beatification was opened in 2022.

Again and again we receive appeals for help from priests who need a sturdy and powerful boat in order to reach the many riverside communities in the rainforest. Not only do they need to cover long distances but at the same time cope with rapids, floating trees and sudden rainstorms, which frequently turn their pastoral travels into perilous adventures. A reliable motorboat allows them to more quickly and safely reach their destination, where the faithful are eagerly awaiting them.

Father Bruno Nirmal is from India and working as a missionary in the prelature of Itacoatiara, in Brazil. Thanks to your help, he already has a boat. He tells us, “The people have a deep faith and are thirsting for the Mass, the Eucharist and for God. When the priest arrives, they drop everything and hurry to greet him.”

Sometimes, priests have told us, dying people even seem to hang on and wait in order to be able to finally receive the Sacraments, before dying peacefully soon after. The riverboats are also frequently used to transport the sick, and one missionary told us of a time when a baby was actually born on his boat!

It is thanks to your generous support that Jesus is able to reach these remote rainforest settlements today. And the missionaries often report with wonderment on the “miraculous catch” of souls that results. Please continue to help them, so that their devoted pastoral ministry need not suffer the threat of shipwreck!



A greeting from our new President

Dear benefactors,

Pope Leo XIV has appointed me as President of the international Catholic charity ACN, a foundation of pontifical right. I am most grateful to the Holy Father for the trust he has placed in me and I look forward to this new task. For I have known and admired ACN for many long years, initially on account of its work in Switzerland, where I was formerly Bishop of Basel and took part in various educational and prayer events. And now, in my present role as Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, I am still very close to this organisation. For ACN itself is also at the service of Christian unity in supporting projects in many different local Churches around the world and also in other Christian Churches, and thereby promoting a harmonious coexistence with the Catholic Church.

One particular and notable service of ACN that I admire is the way this charity reminds us again and again just how many Christians in the world are persecuted on account of their faith and killed, even today. We must not forget the martyrs in today's world but always accompany them with our solidarity, our practical support and above all our prayers. Again and again I hear from persecuted Christians just how greatly it helps them to know that we are keeping them in our prayers.

ACN reminds us of the critical situations faced by many believers and local Churches, evoking the beautiful admonition of St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (12:26). I see this as one of the most beautiful images of what our Catholic Faith understands by the word "Church". It is the living Body of Christ, with many members, all complementing one another and dependent on one another.

This reciprocal help flows from love for those who suffer and is at the same time a response to the great love which God bestows on us. For our acts of charity are powerful and credible only if we perform them as an "echo" – a reflection – a mirror of that love with which the living God always richly blesses us.

I wish you all a prayerful Lenten season in preparation for the great pascal gift of the Resurrection of the Lord, and I gladly take this opportunity to thank you most warmly for your generosity as benefactors. And I look forward to remaining in touch with you in time to come.

Cardinal Kurt Koch
President of ACN



Regina Lynch
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

In December 2011 Pope Benedict XVI elevated Aid to the Church in Need to the status of a pontifical foundation. This great honour confirmed our charity's close link to Peter's successors since the very beginning of ACN in 1947. Our pontifical statutes even state that the Foundation "is animated by faithful obedience and devotion to the Roman Pontiff" (Art.4 §1).

Pope Benedict appointed His Eminence Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, then Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, as the first President of the Pontifical Foundation. He went on to lead ACN until late 2025 when he reached 81 years of age. We are most grateful to Cardinal Piacenza for being a steady and trusted mentor who guided us with great wisdom.

Now our new pontiff, Pope Leo XIV, has blessed ACN by appointing His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch as our new President. Swiss-born Cardinal Koch, who is Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, knows ACN well as a result of our work with other Churches, especially in the countries of the Middle East where Christians are a dwindling minority.

We welcome Cardinal Koch and commend him to your prayers. It is a great privilege to have him leading ACN in its service to the suffering and persecuted Church.

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

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Editor: Stephen Axisa

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

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ecclesiasticae*

www.acnmalta.org