



Dear Friends,

Yesterday, a young man from France asked me, “Father, what can I do in order not to lose hope in the face of all that is happening in society and around the world?”

As we were talking, we quickly agreed that our sense of hope and Christian joy has to be rooted in faith and trust in the Kingdom of God and not in world developments. True hope can only spring from the knowledge that suffering, want, and even death – which we can neither ignore nor trivialise – do not have the last word or, to put it in another way, do not last forever.

History tells us that in every age we are confronted with sorrow, violence, suffering and even death and we always will be. And yet, in two ways, we find reason for hope in what the Prophet Isaiah foresaw and what St Peter confirms in so many words after the Resurrection of Jesus: “By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pt 2:24).

On one hand, this tells us that all darkness and evil is swallowed up in the

passion and death of Jesus – in other words it is truly “healed”. And so, it is not insurmountable for us as well.

And on the other hand, the fact that we are healed by his wounds directs us to a specific aspect of Christian hope, namely that suffering and death are not destructive and without meaning or value. As with Jesus himself, they can instead be

wounds will be healed in the very deepest depths of our souls.

In every age such faith gives rise, ever anew, to a confident trust, freedom and strength which render sin, suffering and Satan powerless. And we are thereby made able to perform those good works which embody the love of God – and bring this love to others.



“With the crucified Christ, suffering and death are transformed, in the deepest sense, into good and thereby totally redeemed.”

the highest expression of love – the expression of his loving self-sacrifice for the “beloved thou”. Suffering and death are transformed here, in the deepest sense, into good and thereby totally redeemed.

And so, we too are individually called to offer up our own experiences of suffering in life – that is to say our “wounds” and even our death – in and with the wounds of Jesus to the Eternal Father, in reparation and for the redemption of the world, just as Jesus Christ himself has done. Then everything we have to suffer acquires meaning and value and our

I am blessed, here at ACN, to have come to know so many people who truly live by this hope. People who by their lives and their work illustrate what is so beautifully expressed in St Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

With these thoughts, I send my greetings to you and extend to you my warmest blessings.

Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



A life more freely lived in **JESUS**



Fear of violence is sadly an everyday reality for Pakistani girls.

Again and again in the Gospel, there are women who approach Jesus with the boldness of a strong faith and ask for his help. Indeed, the woman with the issue of blood even believed that merely by touching his garment she would be healed. And so, it was.

Still today, women come to Jesus to seek his help and protection, not least in **Pakistan**, where Christian women are doubly discriminated against – both as women and as Christians. Christians are already on the bottom rung of society and subject to constant pressure to convert to Islam. On top of this, Christian women are seen as easy prey for sexual assaults, abduction and forced marriage, and are threatened with false accusations of blasphemy against the Quran or the prophet Mohammed – which would mean years in prison or even the death penalty. In fact, such incidents are now on the increase, the Pakistani bishops report.

“The deep scars inflicted on souls can last for generations,” says Father Bernard Emmanuel of the bishops’ Justice and Peace Commission. And so, women are being offered specialised training to help protect young women and girls from the danger of such a fate. This includes information and awareness-raising courses via the internet, and various other events and initiatives are also being planned.

We are offering €20,000 to help the Church in Pakistan in its battle against this threat of forced conversions and “marriages” of young women – which not infrequently involves girls even as young as 12.



The Church is helping young women to live a more self-directed life.

The Capuchin Fathers in Lahore are also launching a programme for 120 young Christian women and girls.

This programme aims to make them aware of their inherent God-given dignity as women, to deepen their faith and teach them how to respond appropriately to provocative questions about Christianity. Since most of these women are poor and obliged to work in vulnerable positions such as housemaids, cleaners and factory workers, they are very much at the mercy of their employers and work colleagues and often exposed to extreme pressures.

This six-month course includes workshops with psychologists, who address such problems as fear and trauma. Another aim is to help these young women to gain in self-confidence and to equip them to cope with sexual harassment and the constant pressure to convert to Islam. They are also taught about their basic rights and given the chance to advance professionally. Finally, prayer and quiet contemplation help to give them inner healing and guide them to a more fulfilling way of life and faith.

€13,800 is required for this programme. With €115 you can help one of these young women to consciously choose Jesus and, with his help, to lead a freer, healthier and happier life.

“The deep scars inflicted on souls can last for generations.”

Father Bernard



Praying trustingly for protection.



First Holy Communion:
These children have grown up in the shadow of the war.

HELPING to restore souls

For the past 15 years most people in Syria – and above all the Christians – have been walking a Way of the Cross. Many have now left the country. But Christianity still lives on – thanks not least to your help.

Azza Al-Bittar (42) lives together with her husband and her son in Homs, where the war began in 2011. She tells us: “My faith was born and grew in a wounded country. I lived through the civil war, with all its devastation and instability. Then the pandemic struck, raising a great question mark over our life and death. And in 2023, as though we had not already suffered enough, the earthquake shook the ground beneath our feet.” But then she

adds: “I have also known liberation and resurrection. God has revealed himself, even in the darkest moments. Each day I brought my sufferings before God and repeated inwardly the words of the Psalm: ‘Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you!’”

For Azza, faith was never just an idea or a mere tradition. “For me it is a living relationship that is tested in adversity. I would often ask God, ‘Why is all this happening?’ Each time I heard in my heart an echo of his words: ‘In the world you will have trouble but have courage; I have overcome the world.’”

Although she herself is often tired and exhausted, she nonetheless supports the young people, helps with catechesis and cares for children with disabilities. “War brings division to people, but Christ teaches us to love. And so I decided to cling to my inner peace, even when it was difficult,” she says with conviction.

Through this experience Azza has learned something important. “Christian joy is not the absence of suffering, but the presence of God in the midst of suffering. Faith in God does not always change the circumstances, but it changes the person. This hope in Christ can carry us through war,



“Jesus, I trust in You!”

sickness, earthquakes and fear and do so even with an inner peace, quiet joy and unshakeable trust that God is still at work in the Middle East and in every human heart that believes in him.”

The Jesuits in Homs, to whom Azza owes her profound faith and inner healing, are currently setting up a centre in this city deeply wounded by war. This centre will be a place of inner renewal, reconciliation and peace. All who come here will find help to gain new confidence, with all their heart, mind and spirit. As a place of hope, it will act as a counterweight to both the despair in so many human hearts and to the profound divisions within society.

It will cost €450,000 to complete this centre. Please help us to help them rebuild these broken lives and souls! Every euro counts.



Colouring the Good News.



Hospitals for SOULS

“Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43)

That was the promise of Jesus to the good thief, hanging beside him on the cross. Today it is often the prison chaplains who witness similar miracles of conversion in the hearts of former criminals, when they encounter Jesus.

“Special hospitals for souls” is how one priest, who worked for many years as a prison chaplain, once described prisons. Many of the prisoners are broken, spiritually, psychologically and morally, and simply don’t know how to escape the vicious cycle they are trapped in. And so, the priest must exercise a great deal of patience, tact and empathy in order to gain the trust of those involved.

Tangible acts of kindness are often what prompts reflection by those who initially wanted nothing to do with faith or re-



Young inmates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

ligion. “Why is this priest doing this for us?” they ask themselves when the chaplains press for the prisoners to be treated more humanely. For the conditions in many countries are appalling, with tiny, vermin-infested and overcrowded cells. Many prisoners die for lack of medical treatment; brutality and torture are common. That anyone should even care about their wellbeing is the first sign for these prisoners of love and respect shown for their human dignity. It is then that many begin to ask questions and talk to the priest about their lives.

The most important step, then, is to acknowledge their sins, feel remorse and resolve to start anew. Once they are able to open their hearts to God’s mercy, they are able to start on the road of inner healing and to a new life.

But support and accompaniment are also vital for the prisoners’ families, who are often left without their sole breadwinner

and face real material, social and spiritual poverty. And so, the chaplains are also there for them.

Thanks to your help we are able to support the prison ministry in various different countries. In **Egypt**, for example, the prisons are deliberately built way out in the desert, far from the population centres, so that a vehicle is an indispensable necessity for the chaplains.

And so, in the Diocese of Al Qusia, we are helping with €10,000 for a suitable vehicle.

Again and again, we are asked to help with the training of the prison chaplains, and also for Bibles and other religious texts, so that the prisoners can learn more about Jesus.

Will you help us, so God’s mercy can continue to work miracles of conversion in the hearts of former criminals?



Ecuador: Holy Mass in a prison.



“From victims to witnesses of **HOPE**”

Whereas in the early months of the war in **Ukraine** the immediate need was material aid for the refugee families, the need now is above all for spiritual and psychological help. And the priests are often the first ones the people turn to.

Iryna is from Konotop, in northeast Ukraine. She had been baptised but didn't have any faith. She recalls: “After panic attacks had literally robbed me of the last of my strength, I found comfort in the Church. Fear entered my life in February 2022. Enemy tanks were in the next street, there was shooting; we hid with the children in a freezing cellar. That was the first time I really prayed properly.” Soon after that she was diagnosed with cancer. “I prayed to God for one thing only: to help me keep my children safe. And then a rocket struck close to our home and we were miraculously saved, although the apartment was destroyed.” Talking to the priest was the one thing that saved her. “I began to rediscover my faith in people and in life. I began to believe in redemption. I felt like a child, loved by Almighty God. Now I go to church and to Communion with real faith and thank God for every single day.”

Father Oleksandr Ryepin ministers to people who have been spiritually deeply wounded. “At first”, he says, “the overwhelming feeling is shock, numbness, a



Almost every family in Ukraine is mourning a loved one.

sense of emptiness and the question ‘Why?’. Many people pray wordlessly or are simply unable to pray at all. Then, with time, the heart gradually opens, the pain starts to ease. The tears are no longer a sign of despair, but turn into prayers. The most moving thing is when, after a while, and despite their own woundedness, many people start to be concerned about the sufferings of others.

From victims, they become witnesses of hope – people who can feel for, support and pray for others. This transformation is not quick or easy, but it shows that it is possible to bring life and light, even from the experience of war, death and trauma.”

Treating traumatised people often requires professional training that goes beyond the normal pastoral experience of most priests. And so, ACN is helping with specialised psychological training, so the priests can effectively help not only others who are deeply psychologically wounded but also look after their own psychological health.

In Donetsk, for example, we are giving €30,000 for 25 priests to follow a three-year course, which will directly or indirectly benefit thousands of people. And in other places too we are supporting similar pastoral care for traumatised victims, so that they too – like Iryna – can become “witnesses of hope” for others.



Father Vasyl Kolodiy counsels traumatised mothers.



Your voice matters: Sign our petition for religious freedom!

Last October, when presenting the Religious Freedom in the World Report, ACN also launched an international petition in defence of religious freedom, addressed to the United Nations, the European Council, and democratic world leaders. Faced with the dramatic reality documented in our Report, we felt compelled not only to inform, but also to act.

Religious freedom, enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protects the dignity of every person and lies at the heart of the Church's social teaching and pastoral mission.

Thanks to the generous commitment of so many people, tens of thousands of signatures have already been collected worldwide. But far more is needed before the campaign concludes in November 2026, to ensure our appeal is truly heard.

The petition, available in six languages, gives voice to those who cannot speak freely and stands beside persecuted Christians and people of all faiths. A simple gesture can become a powerful act of solidarity — transforming care into action and hope into change.

Sign our petition: <https://acninternational.org/petition/>



Shagufta Kausar from Pakistan spent years in prison for her faith.



Regina Lynch
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Religious freedom lies at the very heart of human dignity. Where this fundamental right is respected, peace, justice and social harmony can flourish. Where it is denied, the human spirit is diminished and communities are deeply wounded. Defending religious freedom, therefore, is not merely a legal or political task, but a moral responsibility that concerns us all.

As Christians, faithful to the teaching of the Church, we are called to uphold this right for every person, without distinction. When Pope Leo XIV received us in audience last October, he reminded us that “religious freedom is not merely a legal right or a privilege granted by governments”, but a “foundational condition” and “rooted in the dignity of the human person”. Today, two thirds of humanity live in countries where this fundamental right is violated. Inspired by this call, I warmly invite you to sign our global petition in support of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where religious freedom is enshrined, as explained in the article alongside this column. Your voice and your prayers can help ensure that those who suffer for their faith are not left unheard.

Regina Lynch

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Praying for the persecuted

Whenever I get the Mirror, I am shaken to read about all the suffering in the world. I would love to be able to defeat all this cruel pain that is inflicted by such heartless people, and so I pray for all my persecuted brothers and sisters and for all of you who are supporting them and lovingly helping them. May the Lord strengthen you in your mission! I am praying for ACN and find comfort in your prayers also.

A friend and benefactress in Portugal

Committed to helping ACN

I was moved to become an ACN parish representative and fundraiser after I heard a talk about the plight of Christians in the Middle East. That ancient Christian heartland where our faith first blossomed had become a place where Christians lived in fear of persecution. ACN seemed

to be the only organisation that focused directly on this need in a coherent and practical way. We keep the parish and other local faith communities informed and updated about ACN efforts, emphasising that those who persecute don't usually bother about the religious details of whom they are persecuting. The message is always: all Christians are important, and everything helps.

A friend and supporter in England

Proud to be a part of it

I do love your Mirror! I love receiving it, and I love reading it! It makes me feel so much more involved in the lives of my many suffering brothers and sisters and enables me to pray more for them in their suffering. May God bless your work! I am proud to be a part of it!

A benefactress in Brazil

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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