

MIRROR



Aid to the Church in Need

No 2 – February/March 2009
Published
eight times a year

ED/2/3/11

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*I do everything for
the sake of the Gospel.
St Paul (1 Cor 9:23)*



Somewhere in China: Catholics united in prayer.

“Take up the little crosses of your life and bear your share of the heavy cross that the elect must now carry. And make a small gift to console the persecuted Church, a gentle gift of love, a personal act of self-denial.”

**Father Werenfried (1913-2003),
founder of Aid to the Church in Need**

Dear Friends,

The dome of the Pantheon is open to the sky, admitting the sunshine and the rain. Once the religious centre of pagan Rome, it is now dedicated to Mary, Queen of Martyrs. Here 30 musicians, a choir, and actors perform, sing and dance. So far they have staged the musical *Pelican* in 17 different European cities. ACN has entrusted the performance of this play to a Polish theatre troupe, responding to a prayer by Pope John Paul II in the Jubilee Year

2000 that the faith of the martyrs of the outgoing century might be the foundation for the New Evangelisation. In no other century have so many died for their Lord and for the Church. The play recounts the heroism of individuals, victims of Nazi and Communist brutality, of Latin American dictatorships and racist idolatries in Africa. They include laity, priests and religious. They were beaten, shot or hacked to death. Their stories are set in Russia, Spain, Mexico, Poland, Germany, Burundi and Thailand. They are

Catholics, an Orthodox, a Lutheran. All of them forgave their murderers as they died.

“*Pelican in the Pantheon*,” proclaimed the posters for the performance, in various churches in Rome. The title refers to Jesus and the legend of the Pelican, pecking her breast in order to feed her young



“The Catholicism of mere custom has had its day; now we must make a radical option for the Faith.”

with her blood. Christ is our Pelican, the wound of the beak the stab of the lance, opening the wellspring of the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist. Jesus is the master of all martyrs. He prays, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. In this world of war and discrimination, in which Christ is slandered and despised, it is harder and harder to be a Christian. We quickly yield to cowardice. But we cannot duck the clear choice: are we to be faithful witnesses, or are we to be like Judas? The

Catholicism of mere custom has had its day; now we must make a radical option for our Faith. A Lent that is mere lip-service will not help us – it will not touch or change our lives. Either the Church of the 21st century will grow on the foundation of the martyrs, or she will simply waste away and become an easy prey for the mighty ones of this world. As we left the Pantheon, one priest confided to me, “As the music ended, I had only one wish, to go to confession”. And another, quite elderly priest told me quietly: “As a

priest I felt as though reborn. I wanted to baptise, to celebrate the Eucharist more worthily, to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth”. Yes, the martyrs truly call us to conversion. May your Lent and mine be a time of inner conversion – of turning to God and to our neighbour, in prayer and with almsgiving.

P. Joaquín Alliende

Father Joaquín Alliende, President



.... because in the Cross lies our hope

“The Church has once again become a Church of martyrs” (Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 37). So wrote Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter to mark the Jubilee year 2000. He continued:

“The persecution of believers – priests, religious and laity – has caused a great sowing of martyrdom in different parts of the world. The witness to Christ, borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants”. How true. Around the world over 200 million Christians are persecuted and oppressed today.

Subtle forms of oppression

In **Bolivia** the government is talking about taxing the celebration of Mass, because it is, they say, a “service”. And now Bishop Jesus Juarez Parraga of the diocese of El Alto, one of the poorest in Latin America, even fears that his Church premises may be confiscated, if additional security measures are not taken, such as building small walls around them. We have promised him help to build the walls and put in place other security measures, with further help to come. A total of



He too needs help. Bishop Max Rodrigues in his burnt-out church in Sukkur, Pakistan.



Hope for Kaduna, Nigeria. The children are eager to see the new parish house.

€10,000 to head off the oppression in El Alto. Will you help us to help him?

One year ago, in Lahore, **Pakistan**, a massive terrorist bomb attack on an adjacent government building almost destroyed the library of the Sisters of Saint Paul, and other buildings and diocesan facilities inside the cathedral compound. Many of these have now been rebuilt, and catechism classes have also resumed, but the library, once the centre of their mission, is still in ruins. “We don’t know who to turn to any more,” sighs Sister Daniela. “We need a helping hand to pick us up and help us to start over. We can no longer find anyone in Pakistan. It is enough to make you weep when you see the destitution all around”. In this, the year of Saint Paul, we have promised to help the Sisters of Saint Paul with €35,000 – a little over half the amount they need. Who will help us?

Often it takes years to make good the damage done by persecution. In Kaduna, **Nigeria** there were riots a few years ago over a beauty contest, and fanatical Muslims destroyed the churches, and Christians’ homes and shops. Father James, the first native priest in the archdiocese, was murdered as he tried to protect his flock. His church was burned down. After the riots the people built a makeshift church and a forum for dialogue was established in order to try and forestall future riots in good time. Now parish life is once more full of hope and attention is turning to rebuilding



Will they soon be taxing love? Celebrating Mass in El Alto, Bolivia.



Teaching the faith to Coptic children in Egypt. The Sisters bring reassurance.

the parish house. However, Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso has nothing left. The house is to be called the House of the Holy Cross, because in the Cross is our hope. We have promised €25,000. Will you help us to bolster their hope in Kaduna? ●



This sign in a church in China reads: “To heal the world, we must be ready to suffer and die”.



New foundations have been laid

“Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope,” Pope Benedict has written. But hope too needs a home, so that God can dwell among us.

God has no need of a house, of course, but we need such places of hope. Especially when our hope, our faith and our love are threatened. Jarmak is one of just a handful of Christian villages in southern Lebanon. It is surrounded by Muslim villages. The centre of their hope, their church, was destroyed in the wars. It was dedicated to Saint Maron, the monk who first brought the Good News of Christ to the people of **Lebanon** in the 5th century.

Many Christians have fled from the warfare in recent decades. But in their hearts they have retained the memory of the peaceful coexistence with their neighbours, and they still hear the bells of Saint Maron, the shared feasts and processions, the Liturgy in the language of Christ himself. They want to return. So far there are just 1,700 Christians, but there could be many more. Of the 320 houses that once stood in Jarmak, just 30 have been repaired.

Now they have laid the foundations of a new church of St Maron. For without a



Memories of a Maronite hermit – Praying in the Monastery of Saint Anthony in the Kadisha Valley, Lebanon.

church the spiritual magnet of hope is lacking. They are rebuilding the walls with their own hands and they are even planning a community hall for shared celebrations and ceremonies – including baptisms, weddings and funerals.

They have appealed to their countrymen abroad and pooled all their savings. But it is still not enough. And so we have promised **€30,000** for the parish hall. Now we



They never left. Bishop Chucrallah and a local Christian in Jarmak, Lebanon.

are turning to you in hope, so that Christ may once more be able to live close to Tyre, where he once preached. His people wish to embrace him, but the war has emptied their hands. They are willing hands, however, if we can only pay for the materials. ●

A spiritual centre for the future

This convent is truly unique, for these are Catholic Carmelite Sisters of the Byzantine rite.



They live in a suburb of Sofia, **Bulgaria** – seven young Sisters from all over Eastern Europe. Their Superior, Maria Theresia, is a native Bulgarian. The only elderly Sister, Theresa, can still vividly remember the horrors of communism. She survived those decades hiding with others in the attic of a small and now decaying church. Through her prayers, she has kept the flame of the Faith alive in Bulgaria. Pope

They depend on the charity of the faithful – and on their own work of icon painting. Five of the Sisters with their work.

John Paul II gave these Sisters a mission, to which they remain true to this day – to pray for Christian unity.

Their convent has made a big impact. More and more people are asking to come here on retreat, while the Carmelite Fathers are ready to give talks and hear confessions. But their chapel is too small for the many faithful who knock at their door. They need a proper church; and then the convent could be converted into a spiritual centre. We have promised **€50,000**, but they need almost three times this amount. Perhaps we were too timid? Would you like to invest more in this spiritual centre for the future? ●



From a region of Ukraine where Catholics are few comes this letter of thanks from Bishop Vasyi Ivasyuk. This is just the kind of place where it is vital for the priests of the Eastern rite Catholic communities to receive ongoing training in their pastoral mission. This, thanks to your help, is precisely what has happened. And even the families of these priests have learned a great deal in these three days. The Sisters of St Joseph the Bridegroom have for example introduced the children to the topic of "Knowing your Christian vocation". "This strengthens our unity", the bishop writes gratefully. Through your support for such retreats you are helping entirely in the spirit of the Holy Father.



**Pierre-Marie Morel,
Secretary General**

**Dear
Friends,**

Man cannot live without hope. But with hope we can even find the courage to die. The martyrs prove this, for in them the Light of Christ shines in the darkness. It is the light of true hope. The martyrs remind us that it is in the Good News that we find this hope for which people long.

The mission of the Catholic Church, which you are supporting in over 140 countries, is to bring this message of hope and love to all the nations on earth. It is a message of the profoundest humanity – and the Church is an expert in humanity. This message also sustains us through the crises of this world. But the appeals are increasing, both in number and urgency. Not infrequently we find ourselves unable to respond to them.

You are already helping us to ease this need, by being ambassadors of mercy, who are making our work known. We are counting on you. There are many who, with tears in their eyes, ask us to pass on their heartfelt thanks to you. Their gaze tells us that there is hope in prayer too – hope for us all.

Yours, with gratitude,

Need, love and thanks – Your letters

Money well spent

It was my birthday and I felt like giving myself a present. And so, as I always do, I asked Our Lady to guide me. And the very next day your Mirror No. 7 arrived. "The Perpetual Adorers of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar" in Mexico need €1,500"... We can't save the world, so we must decide on the priorities. This is money well spent.

*A woman from Saint Raphaël,
France*

Thanksgiving for 40 happy years

Laura and I were 40 years married in July. They were happy years interspersed with sickness. But sickness also brought blessings. We have three children and thanks to a life-saving heart-transplant, I have lived to see them grow. On this special year we are sending you €2,600 which we know will be a little help to you.

*A married couple from Drogheda,
Ireland*

God's Heralds

This is just a letter to say how much I enjoyed receiving and reading the Card which shows the Holy Icon as found in Lebanon. I was deeply moved by the sentence – "In many parts of our planet war brings yet more bloodshed and tears. But still the Christmas angels will arrive on time." There is so much suffering and hurt in the world and we are so much in need of God's Heralds. May all connected with ACN be blessed.

A benefactor from Victoria, Australia

Driving out the sects

With great gratitude I am reporting back to you. With the €5,000 that you gave us we were not only able to build our church but also to drive out the sects in our locality. Or to put it more precisely, it was the presence of Our Lord in the new church that has driven away the sects. Thank you!

*Father Gregorio Carazi, El Beni,
Bolivia*

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need:

Please use the **Freepost** envelope – it saves you money and helps us.

In Ireland: Aid to the Church in Need, 151 St Mobhi Road, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, tel. (01) 8377516. (Registered Charity No. 9492).

In Great Britain: Aid to the Church in Need, 12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 4DA, tel. 020 8642 8668. (Registered Charity No. 1097984).



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Editor: Jürgen Liminski, Claude Piel
Responsible Publisher: Kirche in Not/Ostpriesterhilfe, Postfach 1209, 61452 Königstein, Germany; For Belgium: Oevelsedreef 1, 2260 Tongerlo, Belgium. De licentia competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae - Printed in Ireland - ISSN 0252-2535
www.acn-intl.org



Where do you need us, Lord?

“From the Handmaids of Mary, Helpers of the Sick” in Cuba

They work through the night, from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m. Then they come home, pray for a time and at 7, in Holy Mass, entrust their charges to Jesus and Mary.

Already they have sat with so many on their deathbed, these Handmaids of Mary, Helpers of the Sick. They are a congregation of nuns with a special charism - to seek out the sick and elderly and tend and serve them with selfless devotion. They also teach the Catholic Faith to children. But above all they visit the sick in their

homes, in the poorest and most deprived areas, in the slums.

In Cuba you don't have to go far to find them. Francisco Espinosa, in Matanzas, was very willing to tell his story, “to anyone who wants to hear it”. His wife has Parkinson's, in an advanced stage, and cannot feed herself or cope unaided with the most basic needs. One of his two daughters is a Downs victim, the other is also handicapped, and bedridden too. His gratitude to the Sisters knows no bounds, for without their help he would not know where to turn. It is the same story with the elderly and the lepers. They can no longer write, but the gratitude in their eyes when they see the Sisters says everything. For many it is the only visit. They clutch at this helping hand as though to life itself. The children also cling to the Sisters, as soon as they appear in the neighbourhood. It is the selfless love of these Handmaids of Mary that brings these brief moments of happiness to children and elderly alike. For the truth is, the four Sisters in Matanzas never ask, What do I need? What do we need? Instead, kneeling before the Tabernacle between 6 and 7 a.m., they ask a different question: Where do you need us,



Photo: Sven Creutzmann

Without the Sisters' help he wouldn't know where to turn.



Clutching a helping hand. Worldwide, the congregation numbers 1,700 Sisters on four continents.



Photo: Sven Creutzmann

The children cling to the Sisters too.



Photo: Sven Creutzmann

Sister Gloria with one of her charges.

Lord? Where can we help? Where are there people waiting for your Love?

In Camaguey and Holguin other Sisters of the same congregation ask the same questions. In all there are 35 of them in Cuba. They depend entirely upon Providence – and hence on us too. For the appeal for basic support submitted by their Superior, Sister Antonia, lies on our desk at present. She tells us about the four Sisters in Matanzas. The eldest is 73 and has diabetes. She looks after the house and prepares the modest meals for the four Sisters and attends to the many needy, who knock at the door begging for medicines or bread. The others care for the sick in their homes, measuring blood pressure, giving injections, cleansing leprosy wounds. Only on Saturdays do they sleep at home at night. Otherwise, they rest for a couple of hours in the afternoon, pray until 7:15 p.m. and then at 8 p.m. they are off again to care for those of whom the Gospel says: “I was sick and you visited me, thirsty and you gave me to drink...”



A place of reconciliation in Kosovo

It is quite common in Kosovo for Muslims to celebrate Christmas too. Not all, and not everywhere, it is true. But in the university town of Pristina it is certainly not unusual. And the Catholic bishop is also frequently to be seen here.

He is also often seen in other places. His workload seems to know no limits. Since 2007 Bishop Dode Gjergji has been Pastor to the Catholics of Kosovo. Their numbers are few, since 95% of the population are Muslims and 4% Serbian Orthodox, Catholics number a mere 70,000 souls in the new diocese of Prizren. But they are the ones who promote peace, organise dialogue and bring together irreconcilable neighbours to the same table. Their presence is a challenge to all to address the issue of peace and reconciliation and hence their presence is indispensable for a better future in this small and barely 1-year-old state.

This presence has to be a visible one. That is why Bishop Gjergji's predecessor began work on a cathedral. Its undercroft is also intended to serve as a cultural centre and a place of encounter. They are not only building for themselves. The church is dedicated to Blessed Mother Teresa, who once said, "Man does not live so much from the love he receives but rather from the love he gives". This is how they want



Faith in the power of prayer. While Dode Gjergji was still bishop of Sape, in Albania, he invited back the Carmelite Sisters and rebuilt their convent in Nenshat.

to see their cathedral – as a place of love for all, a place where people can learn to give love. A place of prayer, of conversion, of vocation. Bishop Gjergji wants to attract young people above all. His hope is that this place of the love of God can be seen as a spiritual home by 20,000 students, regardless of whether they are Catholics or not.

By next year the cathedral is supposed to be finished. But already the costs are spiralling out of reach for the bishop and his 23 parishes. He has called on his own faithful and his 36 priests and mobilised his compatriots abroad. Contemplative Sisters are praying for the project. And he has turned in confidence to us. €5 million is the total cost. We have promised a contribution of €400,000 in two phases. This sounds a great deal, yet it is not so much to

pay for peace in a region where European Christianity has always had to fight for survival. It was here that the Battle of Kosovo Field ("field of blackbirds") took place in 1389. Today some are fighting with other means. Everywhere, mosques are sprouting up like mushrooms, funded with Arab oil millions and with Koranic schools attached. But for now, Kosovo's Muslims are open to peaceful coexistence. They have the historical experience that this peace, for which they also yearn, is possible with the Christians, and especially with the Catholics. But for this to happen, the presence of the Christians must be a visible one. ●



Lofty aspirations: This cathedral is about more than concrete and steel.



A place of encounter. The cathedral in Pristina slowly takes shape.



Bishop Dode Gjergji visiting the headquarters of ACN in Königstein.