



Farewell to a founder, friend, shepherd and father

Cardinals, bishops, abbots and priests - representatives of the Universal Church, united around Father Werenfried and his Charity, ACN



An apostle of charity

The Holy Father has sent us the following message of sympathy:

The Holy Father has learned with great sadness of the death of Father Werenfried van Straaten, an outstanding apostle of charity, and he wishes to express his deepest sympathy to you and to all those working for Aid to the Church in Need, the excellent association he founded. In these painful moments His Holiness assures you of his prayers as you mourn this priest and religious; and he gives thanks for the exemplary apostolic zeal he showed, in fidelity to the teaching and spiritual legacy of St. Norbert, and also for his deep human and spiritual qualities and his commendable contribution to unity among Christians. To all those who have been enriched by Fr Werenfried's outstanding gifts of mind and heart the Holy Father imparts the consolation of his Apostolic Blessing.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano
Secretary of State

His measure was the grace of God

Some excerpts from the moving tribute by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, during the Solemn Requiem Mass:

"I weep with you, I pray with you, and with you I mourn the loss that has afflicted you. A priest and a friend has returned to God, richly laden with numerous merits which shine like precious jewels, so that these talents may bear fruit in material and spiritual well-doing - for the poorest, for the least, for the most needy. Today I place on the altar the gratitude of all those who have received from him the essential nourishment of Faith. Deep in his heart he knew that all the wonderful things that Christ has taught us about the goodness and faithfulness of our Heavenly Father are quite literally true. His measure was the all-powerful grace of God, and the boundless trust in God that kept him faithful to the goal of ACN.

In the clarity of the Gospel and in the boldness of love, Father Werenfried has made the seemingly impossible possible, has leapt over barriers, opened hearts and reconciled former enemies with one another...

And so I am not ashamed to say that for me he is a holy priest - for if ever the life of a priest and religious corresponded to the will of God, then unquestionably it was his. In his love for the Church and for the Pope he let no one outdo him. He remains for us a model, a father and an intercessor, and I bow my head in respect for him."

His wish alone should suffice

On 31 December 1994 Father Werenfried set down his last Will and Testament, while in hospital in Hanau, Germany. In it he expresses the deep and enduring bond that links the charity he founded in 1947 with the ministry of the Holy Father. Here is an excerpt from this document:

“I give thanks for all the good things I have received from God, from the Norbertine Order, from my parents, my fellow priests, from four Popes, my numerous co-workers, countless benefactors and benefactresses and above all from my niece, Ton [Antonia Willemsen, secretary general of ACN] who for 35 years and more has been my closest and truest associate. At the same time I ask forgiveness for all the faults I have committed in their regard and, for my part, I forgive the injustice that some have done to me or to my organisation.

It is my wish that my “Spiritual Guidelines”, which have been approved by the Holy See as a constituent part of the statutes of “Aid to the Church in Need”, may be made available to all staff in an accessible form and regularly and repeatedly read and re-read. In order that the founding spirit of trust in God, of boldness and creative dynamism may not be lost in our charity, an appropriate excerpt from them should be read out at every meeting - including those at the higher and indeed the highest levels.

Since we are an association of pontifical right and as such also an executive organ of the Holy See, it should be sufficient for the Holy Father not even to instruct, but simply to express a wish, as reason for us to approve a project. Any deviation from this rule could create internal conflicts which might damage our charity and even undermine the health of those leading it.”

Hanau 01. 31 december 1994

Werenfried - Hanau



A message for the future



In Limburg Cathedral our international spiritual assistant, Father Allende Luco, recalled some of the important symbols in the life of Father Werenfried:

“The last message of our founder to our national offices was a hat - black, empty, hungry. A tool for begging [...]

For 24 hours we kept watch by the open coffin of our founder. During that night we placed a crucifix in his hands. On the 24th of April 2002 he had given an exact copy of this crucifix to each of the national spiritual assistants. As he did so, Father Werenfried said “Fidelitas creatrix - creative fidelity”. And each of the national assistants replied: “Serviam - I will serve”. As he awaits the Resurrection, beneath the soil of Königstein, Father Werenfried’s hands are clasped around this crucifix, unique in design, while in many regions of the world this commitment of fidelity and service lives on. [...]

Dear Father Werenfried, thank you for the battered hat. [...] Thank you for the Cross of Christ. Werenfried, father and friend, priest, shepherd and founder, in this cathedral we who follow after you wish to imitate you, to take the seed that you have sown and continue to sow it. May our own enthusiasm be kindled from the fire of your charism, and so serve the Church, the Mother of all the needy. Werenfried, we intend to follow the path you have marked out.”

Days of powerful symbolism: the snow-covered brightness of the cemetery with the uplifted Christ before the people of God and the sisters who had cared for Fr. Werenfried during his final years; in Saint Peter, Louvain, Belgium: the abbots of the Norbertine order, gathered in commemoration of Fr. Werenfried around the Table of the Lord (see right); Werenfried himself, and the things he he needed for life - the Rosary, the Word of God, the begging hat for the poor. Sad though the occasion was, these images point the way for the future.

