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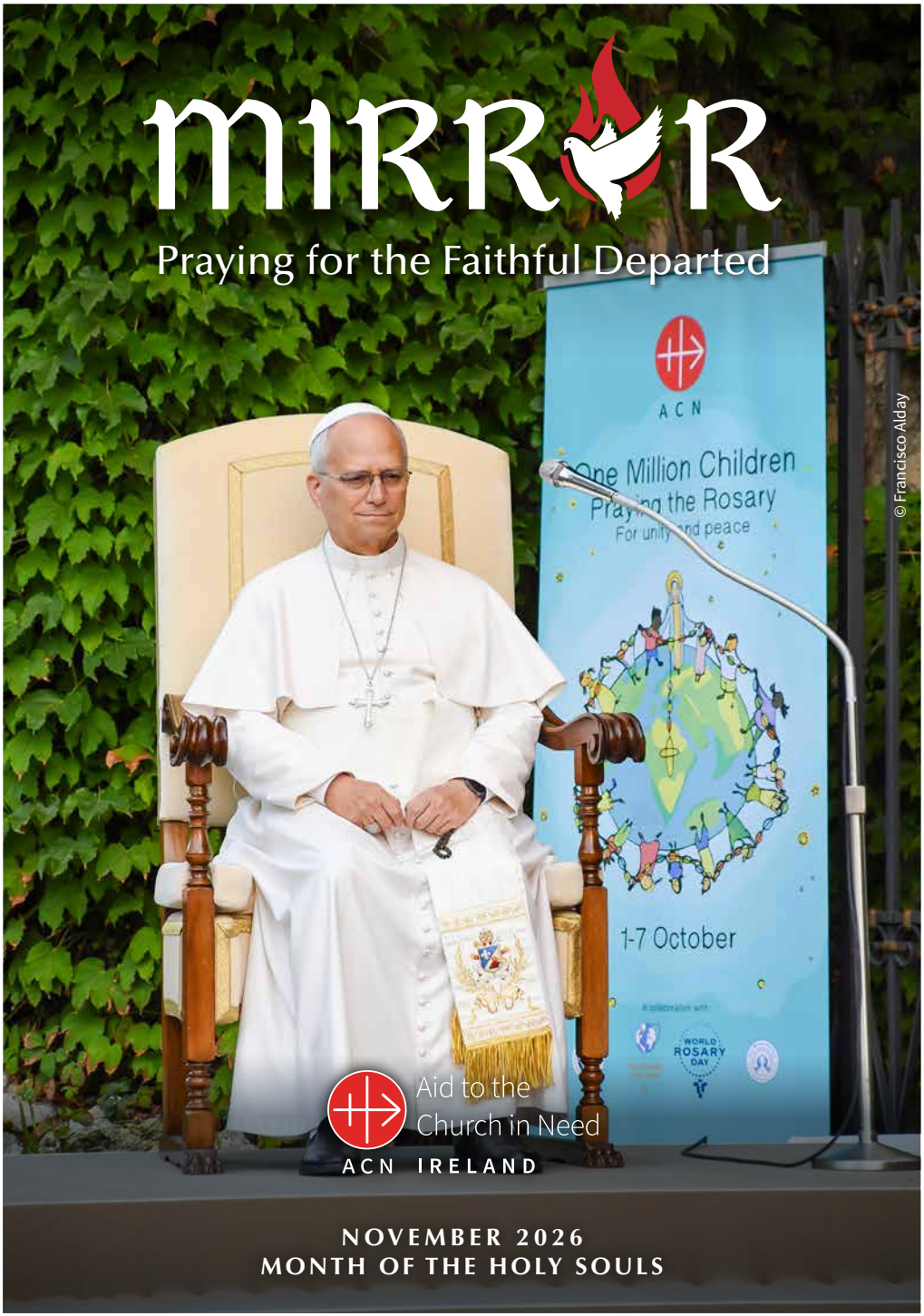

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Aid to the Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

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Cover image: Pope Leo XIV prays the Rosary with children at the Lourdes Grotto on October 1st, 2026.

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INTRODUCTION

November is a Time to Remember Christians who Suffer for Their Faith

MICHAEL KELLY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Dear Friends,

As Irish Catholics, we live in a country where the right to practice our faith is largely taken for granted. We can gather for Mass on Sunday without fear of a bomb or a mob. We can wear a crucifix, teach the faith to our children, and speak of Christ in public life, however contested that space sometimes feels. That freedom is a gift. It is also a responsibility.

The latest *Religious Freedom in the World Report* from Aid to the Church in Need, covering the period from January 2023 to December 2024, makes the scale of the opposite reality painfully clear. Almost 5.4 billion people — two-thirds of humanity, or 64.7% of the world's population — live in countries where serious or very serious violations of religious freedom take place. Of the 196 countries surveyed, 62 show grave violations: 24 classified as places of persecution and 38 as places of discrimination. Only two countries showed any material improvement. Authoritarian governments are the principal drivers of this repression. Islamist extremism is the main cause of persecution in 15 countries and contributes to discrimination in a further ten. The Sahel has become an epicentre of jihadist violence, with groups such as Islamic State – Sahel Province and JNIM responsible for mass killings, the displacement of millions, and the destruction of hundreds of churches and schools.

Christians remain the most widely persecuted religious community on earth. In **Nigeria**, the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Burkina Faso**, **Pakistan**, **India**, and parts of the **Middle East**, following Christ can mean the loss of home, livelihood, liberty, or life. In **Gaza**, the tiny Christian community has been reduced still further by war and hardship. In the historic cradle of Christianity, the space in which believers can live and worship continues to shrink. These are not ancient stories. They are happening now.

It is precisely because the suffering is so widespread, and so often under-reported, that Aid to the Church in Need organises the annual **Week of Witness**, with its focal point on **Red Wednesday**. This year, the *Week of Witness* runs from **November 15-22** with Red Wednesday falling on November 18. Red is the liturgical colour of the martyrs. It recalls the blood of those who, from the earliest centuries to the present day, have refused to deny Christ. During the *Week of Witness*, churches and cathedrals are illuminated in red. We will have a special Mass in St Mary's Church, Chapel Lane Belfast on Sunday November 15 which will be

broadcast on *RTÉ*. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to join us in person or by watching on television.

People are also invited to wear something red — a scarf, a tie, a jumper — as a quiet but visible sign of solidarity. Parishes are encouraged to pray at the Angelus and during Mass for those who cannot gather freely. The point is simple: to remember, to witness, and to refuse the silence that leaves persecuted believers feeling forgotten.

For Catholics in Ireland, this is more than a seasonal campaign. We belong to one Body. When one member suffers, the whole Body suffers. The Acts of the Apostles records the early Church holding its persecuted members in constant prayer. The same duty falls to us. Prayer is not a substitute for action; it is the foundation of it. It keeps us from the comfortable amnesia that treats persecution as someone else's problem. It reminds us that the freedom we enjoy was bought, in part, by the witness of earlier generations who also faced discrimination and violence for their faith. And it places us, spiritually, alongside the priest in northern Nigeria who digs his own grave under the eyes of his captors, the family in the Sahel who bury their dead and still gather for Mass, and the young person in India who risks everything to be confirmed.

ACN's work is concrete as well as spiritual. In 2025 the charity was able to support 5,368 projects across 141 countries, thanks to the generosity of hundreds of thousands of benefactors worldwide, including many in Ireland. That aid helped one in every ten priests in the world through Mass stipends, supported the formation of one in every eight seminarians, and provided pastoral and emergency assistance where churches had been burned or communities uprooted. Irish generosity has long been part of that response. It is a practical expression of the same solidarity that Red Wednesday seeks to make visible.

The *Week of Witness* asks something of each of us that is within reach. Soon, ACN will send resources to every parish in the country to mark Red Wednesday. You can help by playing your part: Wear red on Red Wednesday. Light a candle or illuminate a church. Pray deliberately for those who suffer for the name of Christ. Support the projects that keep the faith alive in the places where it is most under threat. Speak, when opportunity arises, of the reality that so many prefer not to see. These are small acts. In the economy of the Church, they are not insignificant. They tell our brothers and sisters who live under the shadow of the cross that they are not alone, and they remind us that the freedom we enjoy is meant to be used in the service of those who do not share it.

The blood of the martyrs, Tertullian wrote, is the seed of the Church. In our own time that seed continues to be sown. Our task, as Catholics in Ireland, is not to look away.



MICHAEL KELLY
Director of Public Affairs, ACN Ireland

FEATURE

Over 10,000 Irish Children Pray for Peace with Aid to the Church in Need

BRANDON SCOTT



INDIA: One Million Children Praying the Rosary in the Diocese of Idukki, Kerala.

© ACN

Over 10,000 Irish children came together with Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) and **Pope Leo** in a prayerful plea for peace in the world during the week of October 1-7 as part of the *One Million Children Praying the Rosary campaign*, promoted by pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need.

This year's initiative was stretched out over seven days, and ended on October 7, the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary. It was kicked off by a very special event, when hundreds of young children joined Pope Leo in the Vatican gardens to pray the Rosary with him, on October 1.

In **Ireland**, from Kerry to Dublin, Donegal to Tipperary, Irish schools united to pray for peace with ACN in a world currently scarred by conflict and bitterness. Prayers were especially made for peace in the war-torn **Gaza Strip** and **Ukraine**.

Speaking after the event, coordinator for the Irish campaign **Brandon Scott** said he was delighted with the high numbers for the second year in a row.

"I'm delighted that we've had another very successful campaign from an Irish perspective. This year's numbers are on par with last year's and it's really testament to the popularity of the rosary and the worthiness of the campaign's purpose."

"In a time of ongoing unease and trouble in the world, people can often feel so helpless, but prayer is the one thing that they can do. Schools and parishes always

express an interest about coming onboard to pray for peace, especially in places like Gaza and Ukraine."

"We're privileged that we can get Rosary beads blessed and made by Christian families in Bethlehem, which we can distribute to schools. So, the campaign is really benefitting the local Christian community in the Holy Land whose livelihoods have been completely ended by the war."

"Children respond so well to the campaign themselves and love the tangible aspect of the rosary as they get to hold something directly in their hands while learning, which makes it all the more memorable. We're very proud of this campaign in ACN."



NAIROBI: One Million Children Praying the Rosary in Don Bosco Makuyu Day Secondary and Senior School.

According to the interactive map on ACN's website, where people could sign up themselves, over one million children participated in the global rosary event. **ACN has now surpassed the one million figure for 4 years in a row**.



IRELAND: Pupils from Steelstown Primary School, Derry, take part in ACN's One Million Children Praying the Rosary event.

FEATURE

I am Here Today Because of Forgiveness

CARDINAL ERNEST SIMONI IN CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL KELLY


© ACN

During his recent visit to Ireland, 98-year-old Cardinal Simoni reflected on his remarkable life.

MK: Just to begin with, cardinal, you were ordained in 1956 at a time of growing persecution. How did that growing persecution shape the early days of your priesthood?

ES: *So, we were going through all that situation and Stalin had then given an order to satellite countries to sever all ties with Rome [the Vatican]. And that's what they tried to do. And we went back and forth, and eventually then the communist prime minister back then, Mehmet Shehu, gave in and said: fine, you carry on with that, but your allegiance is with the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. So, eventually we were allowed to have a statute – but still under very difficult circumstances.*

With the hope of Christ, and in Christ, we survived. And despite that situation, in the statute we managed to put in the first law that was: the Church of Albania is in unison with the universal Church founded by Jesus Christ and in allegiance with the Holy Father, the Pope.

There were various dangers that we faced, and despite having been spared my life they tried a few things on me as they did on others. They would call us to national service in the army, so that they could kill us and say, 'he escaped the country, and we don't know what happened to him'. Be killed without facing any consequences. And they tried that a few times on me, as they did with others. Jesus protected me for

those years in the army, and I don't want to try and show off, but I was very fortunate that by going there – where everything was set up in a way so that they would be able to kill me without consequences – I ended up being the top soldier amongst the 20,000 that were in those battalions simply through my hard work and Jesus' protection, when the very people that were prepared to kill me ended up becoming my friends because of my hard labour.

So, despite all this, by the grace of God on April 7, 1956, I and Fr Shtjefën Kurti – who is now one of the Albanian martyrs beatified – were given our orders of Mass [ordained] and the next day, I for the first time, managed to celebrate Mass on Easter Sunday, 1956.

MK: Your Eminence, while in captivity you managed to celebrate clandestine Masses, as you had memorised the Mass by heart. You had grape juice brought into prison, you were able to make hosts from other pieces of bread. How did that shape your understanding of the Eucharist?

ES: *It was an entirely touching experience. Throughout all my time there, I was able to have the Blood of Christ brought in as grape juice by the wife of one of my fellow brothers – a Muslim professor imprisoned. His wife would sneak and smuggle in the grape juice. I was able to find other breads and burn it and turn it into hosts to celebrate Mass on a daily basis.*

Many of the people that were at my Mass were Muslims, and people were crying and people were being touched. The duty of every priest is not just to have the title, the duty of a priest – when he gets his orders of Mass [ordination] is to celebrate Mass on a daily basis. It's not a means for profit, but it's a means to express God's will. Because he is not just the word, he is not just on



IRELAND: Cardinal Ernest Simoni in conversation with ACN Ireland's Michael Kelly.

paper, God is alive on a daily basis – and can be alive for each and every one through these sacraments.

MK: Cardinal, you have said that you offered Mass for your captors, and you forgave them. And forgiveness was hugely important for you. How was that possible, and what would you say now to people who find it difficult to forgive?

ES: *The reason why I'm alive today, is because of this forgiveness. When I was first captured and under torture, they would put microphones to try and test me and force me to speak against communism, and against the regime. And all I did was tell them that I am commanded to love everybody and forgive everybody. That recording, I learned later, was directed by Enver Hoxha, the head of the communist regime. And when he heard of this, instead of the sentence given to me which was to be hanged, it was commuted to 25 years in prison. But with a very, very severe warning to avoid any liturgical or religious exercises especially exorcisms – because they saw that as a sign to be quite feared.*

So, the reason why I am here today is because of that forgiveness, one. And two, Jesus commands us to forgive people. He is our father, and he is father to all of us – not just me. So, I was able to do that in captivity, and then in freedom it was even easier to forgive them after that regime fell.

MK: Many people, Eminence, including many Christians find it difficult to forgive. What would you say to people who find it difficult to forgive?

ES: *St Paul says that there are many difficulties in life, but real men and women and brave ones are those who grab Heaven here on earth. The only way to do that is to love, because love will cure and conquer everything.*

MK: You, Your Eminence, have lived through much darkness and persevered in your faith. Would you have a message today for people who are persecuted for the faith, Christians who are persecuted for their faith around the world. What would you say to them, in order to help them persevere?

ES: *Jesus himself has said, all of you who will suffer in any way whatsoever in my name, remember that you shall receive immense joy. You shall receive blessings of 1,000 times, and I will be there for you.*

You can watch a video of this interview on the Aid to the Church in Need Ireland YouTube page www.youtube.com/@aidtothechurchinneed2967



PROJECT NEWS

Will you Help ACN Support the Church in Africa?

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." (*John* 6:54)

In 2025, ACN supported roughly every tenth priest in the world with Mass stipends. On average, a Holy Mass was celebrated every 17 seconds for the intention of an ACN benefactor somewhere in the world.

These Mass stipends are an essential means of material support to priests worldwide, particularly in **Africa**, where 44% of ACN's Mass offerings were directed in 2025.

Your Mass offerings are not just a means of material support but also an act of Communion with the Universal Church. For example, **Fr Guy in Burkina Faso** tells us that he feels united with you and the Church around the world when he celebrates the Eucharist: *"These Mass intentions, which provide us with undeniable support, foster Communion in prayer with the benefactors and eloquently remind us of the universal solidarity of the Church, the Body of Christ."*

For other priests, your Mass offerings provided an opportunity for them to grow spiritually. Offering Holy Mass for your intentions allowed **Fr Solomon in Uganda** to deepen his understanding of the liturgy and to *"become a better instrument of God's grace."* He also told us that he used the stipends to buy **Bishop Robert Barron**'s latest book, *'What Christians Believe',* to continue his formation and better serve his community.

Your offerings also help to form the future priests of Africa through the stipends that are gifted to priests forming seminarians in seminaries throughout Africa. **Fr Patrick**, a formator in St Patrick's Seminary, **Nigeria**, explained that your support allows him to fully concentrate on his mission of educating seminarians *"without undue anxiety"* about material needs.

With your Mass offerings you help priests around the world to minister to their communities and through their ministry at the altar, bring Christ's presence in the Eucharist and feed hungry souls with the Bread of Life.



BURKINA FASO: Emergency Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons

ACN IRELAND

WEEK OF WITNESS

FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

NOVEMBER 15 – 22, 2026

Shining a Light on Christian Persecution Worldwide



©NCJP

PROJECT NEWS

Standing United in Faith

LEBANON



LEBANON: Mass with Archbishop Georgas Iskandar, Greek-Melkite, Tyre.

© ACN

"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (*Galatians* 2:20)

"Our archeparchy, though wounded, remains standing, believing that prayer opens paths where human circumstances seem to close every door." These are the words of **Archbishop Georgas Iskandar** of the Melkite Archeparchy of Tyre, Lebanon, as he reflects on the impact of Mass offerings made possible by your generosity.

It has been a tough few years for the Lebanese people. Economic depression and inflation have plunged many into poverty. On top of this, recent war and conflict have shaken the Middle Eastern country and driven many people from their homes.

Throughout all of this uncertainty, the Church has remained by the people, reminding them that, despite all these trials and tribulations, God is still with them. It is in this context of fear and instability that the mission of priests is of greater importance than ever. They console displaced families, bring comfort to the bereaved, lead the community in prayer, and spread the hope of the Gospel message to those who need to hear it.

Your Mass offerings offer a vital lifeline that enables priests in Lebanon to remain with their people. *"Your gracious and generous support sustains me despite the severe economic hardship that our country, Lebanon, is enduring,"* writes

Father Antoine, one of 14 priests in the Archeparchy of Tyre to receive Mass stipends from ACN.

But your Mass offerings are not only a means of material support. They are also a tangible sign of the Communion within the Church and of spiritual solidarity. They are a reminder to us that through the Sacraments and the Church we are united. We hope that you will continue to show the unity of our faith and join us in accompanying the priests and people of Lebanon during this time of need.

QUOTES FROM ARCHBISHOP GEORGAS ISKANDAR

"We pray to the Almighty Lord to bless abundantly all the benefactors of ACN, to reward them many times over for what they offer with such generous hearts, and to fill their families with peace, health, consolation, and grace."

"For our bishops and priests, they were a tangible sign of ecclesial communion, fraternal closeness, and spiritual solidarity. They helped them continue their ministry with dignity, fidelity, and hope, while carrying in their prayers the intentions of the benefactors who accompany us with such love and delicacy."

"I would like to assure you that these Divine Liturgies are celebrated in a deep spirit of gratitude, according to the intention of the donor, in conformity with the canonical norms concerning Mass offerings, and in prayerful communion with all those who wished to support our Church in these particularly difficult times."



PROJECT NEWS

Creating 'Good Samaritans' SYRIA

"When he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him." (*Lk* 10.33-34).

Medical care in **Syria** has been in crisis for years. The war has destroyed many hospitals, medical facilities and factories where medicines were manufactured, while numerous doctors, nurses and nursing staff have gone abroad.

Medicines and medical treatments, especially operations, have become extremely expensive. Many patients, especially the elderly, unemployed and single people, do not seek treatment at all for fear of incurring heavy debts. The situation is particularly dire for cancer patients. While the diagnosis itself is already difficult for anyone to cope with, if there is no money for treatment, it means a certain death sentence.

The lives of heart patients can also often be saved through an operation. In other cases, an operation can prevent a person from becoming severely dependent on care and no longer being able to lead an independent life.

The Bishops' Aid Committee, based in Aleppo, is the last hope for many patients suffering from cancer or other serious illnesses. Here they find support so that they can receive treatment. Without your help, this would not be possible.

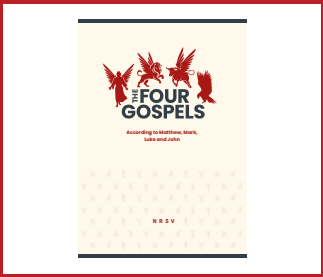
Every year, you have become the *"Good Samaritan"* who did not look away when he found the severely injured man on the road to Jericho. Again and again, you have shown compassion and opened your hearts to save lives, alleviate suffering and give new life.

Now, once again, 1,800 sick people are waiting for the news that there is still hope for them – that their tumour can be operated on, that they may soon be able to walk again, that their eyesight can be restored.



Aid to the Church in Need
ACN IRELAND

Online Shop



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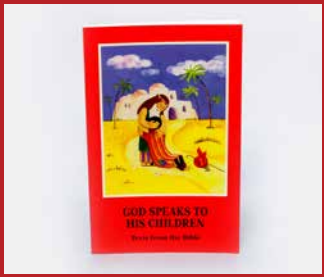

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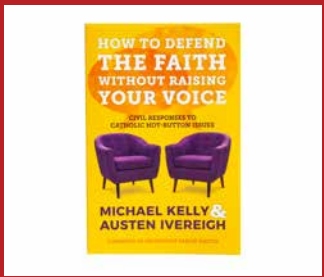

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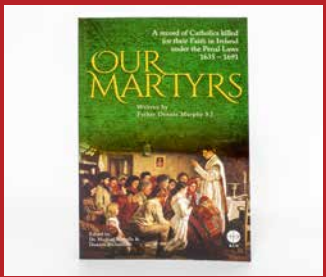

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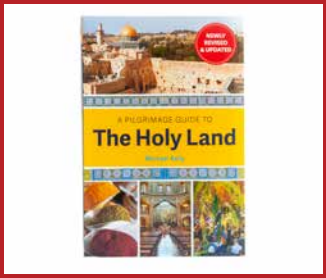

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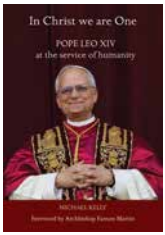

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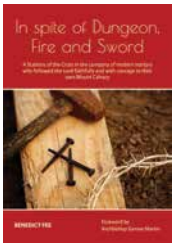

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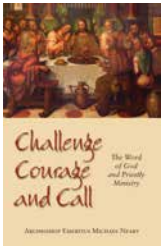

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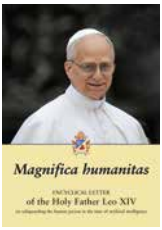

Magnifica humanitas – €6.99

PROJECT NEWS

Young Women who have given up Everything to Follow Christ

UKRAINE


© ACN

"See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (*Mt* 19:27)

As young women, they left everything behind to follow Christ. They gave up a family of their own, comfort and a professional career in order to serve God and all those He would entrust to them along their path. At the same time, like religious everywhere, these sisters pray for the salvation of all souls and for peace throughout the world.

However, illness, old age and frailty do not stop outside the convent walls. So now, 19 sisters of the **Studite Order at the convent of Our Lady's Mantle** in Lviv (Lemberg) are in need of medical care. The older ones joined the order during the time of the communist persecution of the Church and kept the faith alive in secret. Some of these elderly sisters now need regular care. The oldest of them is 97 years old.

Some of the less elderly sisters also suffer from various ailments which require treatment. However, the price of medication and medical care has risen sharply in **Ukraine** – as have the costs of other necessities such as energy and food. For these religious women, who already live a life of poverty, this is a heavy burden that they cannot shoulder alone.

You can become *'ministering angels'* to these women and help the most elderly

to receive the care they need after a life of hardship and sacrifice. And by contributing to the medical treatment of some of the younger sisters, who are already suffering from various illnesses, you can give them the strength they need to continue their service for many years to come. Their selfless commitment is more urgently needed today, in this time of war, than ever before, because they are helping others to experience the love of God in a very tangible way.

Mother Maria, the abbess, makes this personal appeal to you: *"The war in Ukraine has brought suffering and illness to many people, and we are aware that this war affects the whole world. So, we understand that the resources of our benefactors are also very limited, but we are grateful for every response to our appeal. May the loving hand of our Creator bless all our benefactors and their families with peace, health and the gifts of God, so that they may experience many happy years."*

Through your generosity, you are also helping the sisters of the Studite Order in Ukraine to gain the education and further training that will help them to better accompany their people, as well as to participate in spiritual retreats that will nourish and strengthen their vocation.



UKRAINE: Subsistence aid for 19 elderly and sick sisters.

PROJECT NEWS

The Power of God's Grace in Weak Souls

IVORY COAST


© ACN

"He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." (*Psalm* 40, 3-4)

This psalm precisely reflects the experience of some of the young men at the Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Abidjan (**Ivory Coast**, West Africa) who are now preparing to one day become priests.

For some have lived through difficult circumstances and suffered deep psychological wounds, while others had previously become deeply entangled in various sins. No one would have believed that one day they could become priests – least of all they themselves. But God calls whom He wills, and He can heal all emotional wounds and inwardly transform a person – so profoundly that he can turn around and even become a priest. As priests, these men will bear living testimony to the power of God's Grace in weak souls and will thus be able to help others turn back and become whole within.

Yves Guillaume (36) is one of those who have been permitted to experience this truth. He acknowledges: *"Today, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I understand that my entire story is holy and has an ultimate meaning, which is God. It is a masterpiece of God, the Father, through the mediation of His only Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy*

Spirit and through the Church. Therefore, as a sign of gratitude, I can come before Him and say: Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will." He describes the years of his formation as a *"special grace through which God purifies me daily, just as gold is purified in the crucible".*

Needless to say, resources are needed to educate and form these future priests, who will one day serve as missionaries of the universal Church – intellectually, spiritually, and in community life. But the seminary itself survives solely by trusting in Divine Providence. And you are part of this providence, because you can help make it possible for these 19 young men, most of whom come from poor families, to follow God's call.



Grégoire, one of the seminarians, has written to you: *"Your decision to help me is a gift to me, and I cannot thank you enough. Your donations are a real encouragement and a sign of trust in me, so that at the end of my formation, with God's grace, I can stand entirely at the service of the Universal Church. Your contributions enable me to continue my formation with enthusiasm and dedication."*



IVORY COAST: Formation of major seminarians and propaedeutic students, Abidjan.

TRAINING OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

Our aid has always focused on the theological training and qualification of seminarians. After all, future priests will ultimately be spiritual pillars and safeguard sacramental life.

Therefore, our educational assistance mainly flows into countries where the suitable and continuous training of future priests is endangered or not adequately ensured due to poverty, war, or persecution.

10,991 SEMINARIANS SUPPORTED

One in every ten candidates training for the priesthood was supported by ACN in 2023. Most of these were in Africa (5,793) where priestly vocations are the most numerous, followed by 2,103 in Latin America, 1,996 in Asia and 1,099 in Europe, including over 600 seminarians in Ukraine.

Your support is essential to continue this vital mission. By donating to Aid to the Church in Need, you can help ensure that future priests receive the training they need to become the spiritual leaders their communities desperately need.

Every contribution makes a significant difference. Please consider donating today to support the theological education of seminarians and strengthen the Church's presence in regions affected by poverty, war, and persecution.

Please donate what you can at

acnireland.org/donate

or call [RoI] +353 (0)1 837 7516

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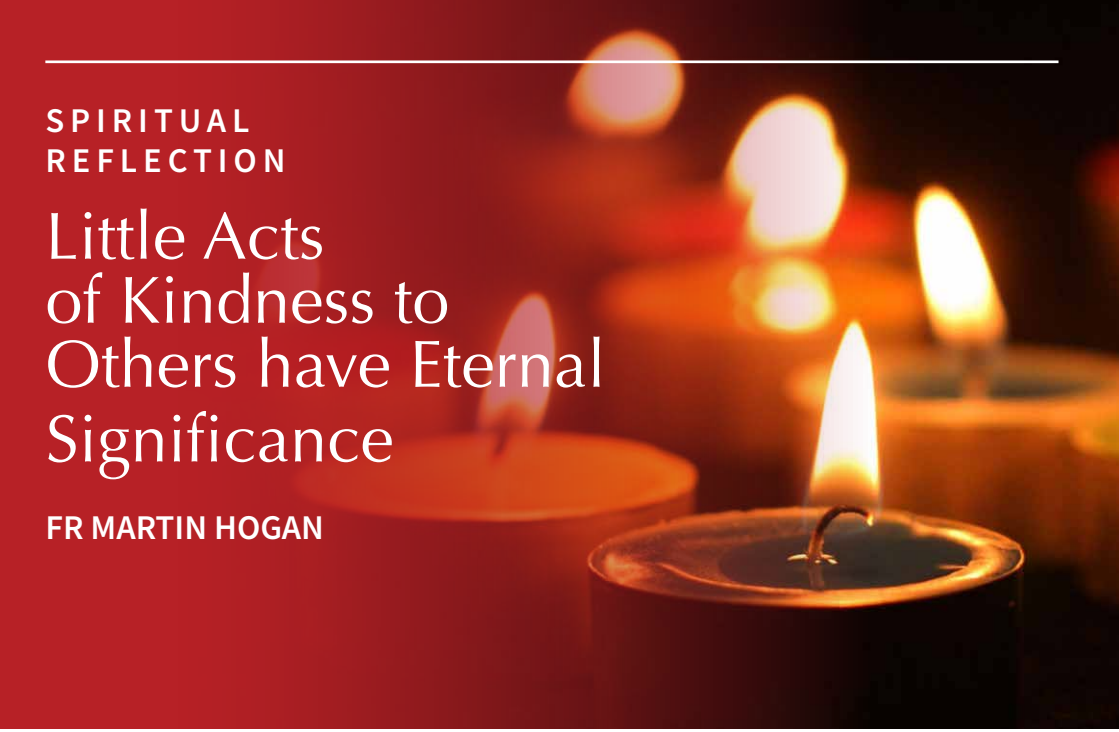
TANZANIA
A seminarian walks down a corridor of St Augustine's Major Seminary in Peramiho.

© Ismael Martínez Sánchez

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Little Acts of Kindness to Others have Eternal Significance



FR MARTIN HOGAN

The Church's year doesn't quite coincide with the calendar year. Sunday November 22 is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. As we come towards the end of the Church's year, the Gospel readings often relate to the end of our earthly lives or the end of time itself. I often associate the whole month of November with endings. It is a month when we remember our deceased loved ones in a special way. It can be a somewhat sombre month.

Once we get to the first Sunday of Advent, the liturgical mood changes. It is not so much endings as beginnings that become the focus. In Advent, which begins on Sunday November 29, we are looking ahead to the beginning of Jesus' earthly life. The beginning of Jesus' life was a beginning for us all. Bethlehem was not only the birthplace of Jesus, but the birthplace of our Christian faith.

The Gospel reading for the feast of Christ the King this year is the concluding passage of Matthew's account of the public ministry of Jesus. Immediately after this passage, Matthew tells the story of Jesus' passion and death. Matthew ends his account of Jesus' public ministry with Jesus' great vision of the end of time, the final judgement. The Gospel reading suggests that, at the end of our lives, at the end of time, what matters is how well we have cared for the most vulnerable among us.

In the centuries before Jesus, the kings of Israel were called to be shepherds of their people. They were to give expression to God's loving care for his people. Because the kings of Israel so often failed in their role as shepherds, God says in the first reading for today's feast that he himself will be a good shepherd to the people.

As Christians, we recognise that this promise of God came to pass with the coming of Jesus. Here finally was a king who was a true shepherd to God's people. Throughout his public ministry, in the words of the first reading for today's feast, he kept everyone in view. He was attentive to all, especially the most vulnerable. He went looking for the lost; he brought back the stray; he bandaged the wounded; he made the weak strong.

As risen Lord, he continues to be our good Shepherd today. As shepherd, he is close to us, journeying with us, especially whenever we find ourselves in some valley of darkness. We can draw on his strength in our weakness, saying with St Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, *"whenever I am weak, then I am strong."*

According to the Gospel reading for today's feast, the Lord who journeys with us as our good shepherd also comes to us through all those who need our shepherding. We are all called to be shepherds to one another. We are to be present to others, especially the most vulnerable, in the way that the Lord is present to us in our own frailty. When we care for others in their need, their brokenness, their weakness, it is the Lord himself we are caring for. Aid to those in need is aid to the Lord. In the gospel reading, both groups ask the Lord the same question, *"When did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison?"*

Jesus once said to his disciples that whoever welcomes a child welcomes him. In this Gospel reading Jesus goes much further, declaring that in serving those whose need is great, we are serving the one who is portrayed at the beginning of this gospel reading as the glorious Son of Man. People are declared blessed by the chief shepherd for the simplest of actions, giving food to the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and those in prison.

There is nothing too heroic here. Little acts of kindness to others have eternal significance, because it is the Lord of heaven and earth we are serving through them. At such times we stand on holy ground.

Fr Martin Hogan is Ecclesiastical Assistant to Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland and a priest of the Archdiocese of Dublin.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Not Even Death can Break the Bonds with Those We Love

FR BILLY SWAN



PERU: Father Oliver Muñoz blessing two women after the mass on All Souls' Day.

© Ismael Martínez Sánchez

One of the strongest features of the Irish Catholic tradition is praying for and remembering the dead. It is the one time that still draws us all together. On Patron Day, on anniversaries and for the feast of *'All Souls',* we make a special effort to recall those who have gone home before us to God.

We decorate their graves, book their anniversary Mass and gather as families to share, tell stories and keep their memory alive. I would like to reflect on our ongoing connection with the dead through faith and explore how this connection is something to be celebrated by Christians everywhere. I do so in the light of the words of the prophet where Isaiah declares that God *"will destroy death forever"* and the Gospel story where Jesus shows that divine power by raising a young man from the dead.

In the creation accounts in the *Book of Genesis*, we are told basic things: first that God made us in his own image and likeness. If this is true then you and I are made in the image and likeness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is one with three persons who know each other and are open to each other in love. Since we are made in the image of God, it means that the human person is made with this same openness to others. To be human is to be in relationship with others. To be human does not mean to be closed off as an island of isolation.

Also from the account of creation in the Bible, we are told that *"it is not good for man to be alone."* So God made us to be together, not to use each other, but to delight in the presence of the other as companions and friends. Isaiah has the image of the banquet that the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples. It is a very rich image with God as host seated at table with all peoples sharing a meal of good food and fine wines. And it is in this togetherness with God and with one another that true joy is found. This is the joy for which we are made.

Our faith tells us that this openness to others and this togetherness is so strong that not even death can break it. The relationships we have with those we love are not destroyed by death but continue, albeit in a different way. Neither does death destroy the sense of togetherness for which we are made. For **Isaiah**, the people who gather at the same banquet with us in the company of God are not just the living but the dead who are alive in Him. For this reason in the creed of every Mass we stand and say *"I believe in the communion of saints."* This is what we mean every time we say the creed: that we are still open and present to our loved ones who have died and they are open and present to us. In the words of **St John Chrysostom**: *"Our loved ones who have died are no further away from us than God and God is very near."*

This closeness to the dead and togetherness with the dead is the fabric of our faith. Many times I have been with families who gather around the bed of a loved one who is dying. I have seen many examples where the dying show signs of being connected to the people who have gone before them and being open to the great communion of saints who wait to



COLOMBIA: After All Souls Day Mass in the Quasi-Parish Our Lady of Guadalupe.

receive them and welcome them home to God. Many others testify to this too. In a book called Heading for the Light: 10 things that happen when you die, **Colum Keane** has put together remarkable stories from people that confirm the power of the human soul being connected to others, in this life and the next.

We totally underestimate the power of all of this. When we become self-absorbed, we cut ourselves off from a vital source of life that flows through our friendships that we enjoy with both the living and the dead. But when we are open to others in this world and to the communion of saints in the world to come, then we are nourished and are never alone. The old Celtic tradition describes the boundary that separates us from the next world as but *'a narrow stream'.*

Never underestimate the power of openness to others and the togetherness that not even death can destroy. If you have hurt someone who has died, it is not too late to ask forgiveness. If someone has hurt you, tell them of your pain. If you miss and love someone who has died, tell them. You are not talking into an empty space. Love passes into prayer and prayer leads us to God. Openness to each other and being together is only possible in God. He is the one who makes love possible for he is love. And it is this love that rose from the dead on Easter Sunday and that lives still. He made us to be open and He wants us to enjoy this togetherness with him for all eternity.

This is why we come to the Eucharist where it all comes together. Joined with each other and with God in the communion of saints, we gather at this banquet table at Mass. Thank God for the gift of our faith.

Fr Billy Swan is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns and an official at the Vatican Dicastery for Clergy.



NIGERIA: Remembering the deceased on All Souls' Day at St Theresa Cathedral.

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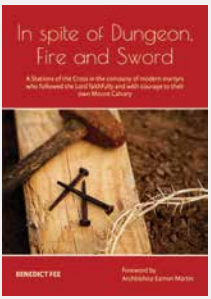

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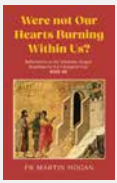
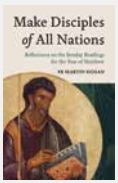
In spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword, meditations on the Way of the Cross, reflecting on the *'martyrs of our times'* by Benedict Fee.





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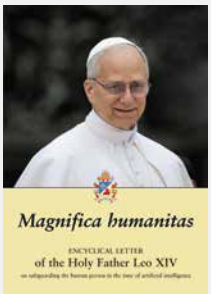
Were not Our Hearts Burning Within Us? and ***Make Disciples of All Nations*** are two new titles from Fr Martin Hogan on weekday and Sunday reflections for the coming liturgical year.



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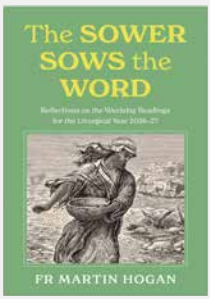
Magnifica humanitas, Is the new Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Leo XIV.



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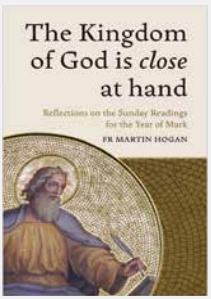
The Sower Sows the Word, Reflections on the Weekday Readings for the Liturgical Year 2026–27.



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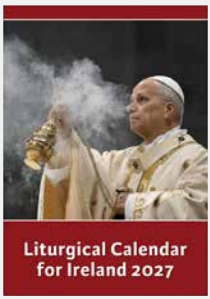

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Liturgical Calendar for Ireland 2027 (Ordo), The Liturgical Calendar for Ireland is the essential guide to the Church's daily round of prayer.

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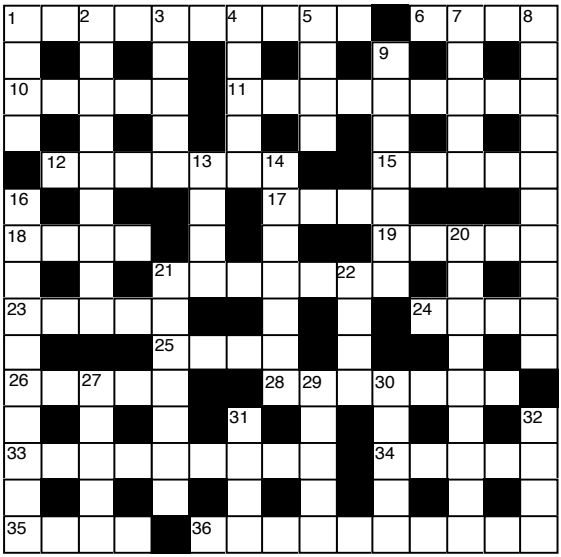
NOVEMBER CROSSWORD

We are pleased to share with you our latest ACN crossword. We will print the answers in next month's edition.

Enjoy!



October Solution

Across 1 Backstroke, 6 Fact, 10 Loner, 11 Modernise, 12 Kingdom, 15 Magna Carta, 17 Asia, 18 Leer, 21 Private, 24 Opal, 25 Real, 26 Coves, 28 Swallow, 34 Glaze, 35 Soak, 36 Tenderness.

Down 1 Ball, 2 Confident, 3 Shrug, 4 Romeo, 5 Kids, 7 Aping, 8 The parable of the Lost Sheep, 9 Grimace, 13 Dear, 14 Marvels, 16 Blood cells, 20 Reprobate, 21 Persist, 22 Tuna, 27 Vesta, 29 Wiped, 30 Lager, 31 Gene, 32 Weds.

ACROSS

1 Structure you may place in your garden to house our wild feathered friends (7,3)
6 Retail outlet (4)
10 Garment worn around the shoulders and over the head (5)
11 & 12 She appeared to St Bernadette in France (3,4,2,7)
15 Dawn (5)
17 Light around a saint's head (4)
18 Strikes (4)
19 Incites, presses (5)
21 Try (7)
23 Underground tomb (5)
24 One due to inherit (4)
25 Pleat (4)
26 Surplus (5)
28 Angels of the higher order (7)
33 Verdi opera (9)
34 & 14d Town at the mouth of the Tyne river (5,7)
35 Obsessive type of the computer world (4)
36 Ancient Greek who famously shouted 'Eureka!' (10)

DOWN

1 American space agency (1,1,1,1)
2 Shipshape, in condition to make a voyage (9)
3 One who perpetually lazes about (5)
4 Mitten (5)
5 Rowing implements (4)
7 Austrian composer of the 'London' and 'Clock' symphonies (5)
8 Flaky creation featuring in Beef Wellington and Pastel de Nata (4,6)
9 Faint, swoon (4,3)
13 Attempt to lose weight (4)
14 See 34 across
16 Hen enclosure, the title of a 2000 animated film (7,3)
20 Dog bred for racing (9)
21 Culpable, responsible for a problem (2,5)
22 The sound of a contented cat (4)
27 Striped predator (5)
29 Age, era (5)
30 State in India noted for its tea plantations (5)
31 Actor or object in space (4)
32 Therefore (4)

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

‘Lord Hear Our Prayers…’



The *MIRROR* magazine, above all, belongs to the friends and benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland. At ACN Ireland, we are a faith-filled and praying community. Every month, we invite you to send your prayers of petition, which will be placed on the altar at ACN and these intentions will be prayed for during that month. We also invite readers, to pray for these intentions.

“May the Lord protect those who are homeless this winter. May he never leave their side during these cold months.”

“I pray for the dead during this, the month of the Holy Souls. I pray for my deceased family members who passed on the faith to me.”

“Please help me to be a kinder person, God. Help me to become more patient with my family and helpful to those who need help.”

“Please pray for a very dear sick person in my life. Without my faith, I wouldn’t be able to keep some hope.”

“Please pray for all of those who struggle with some form of addiction. Pray also for family members and friends who try their best to help them.”

“I pray for those who are lonely and who have nobody to talk to throughout their day. Please remember them and check up on them this winter.”

“I pray for the souls in purgatory during November.”

“I pray for my grandchild who has become very hostile to the faith. Please loosen their hatred, God.”

“Please pray for Catholic teachers who may meet resistance in imparting the faith in schools and pray that they transmit the fullness of the faith to the next generation.”

Please send your intentions, in strictest confidence, to prayers@acnireland.org or write to Castle Building, 426 Clontarf Road, Dollymount, Dublin 3, D03 FP52 marking your envelope *‘petitions’*.

Aid to the Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

Prayer for the Faithful Departed in November



**O Lord, you have shown me my end,
how short is the length of my days.
Now I know how fleeting is my life.
You have given me a short span of days;
my life is as nothing in your sight.
In you rests all my hope.
O Lord, hear my prayer.
In your house I am a passing guest,
a pilgrim, like all my fathers.**

PSALM 39

ROI Castle Building, 426 Clontarf Road, Dollymount, Dublin 3, D03 FP52. **TEL** +353 (0)1 837 7516

NI The Presbytery, 25 Marquis Street, Belfast, BT1 1JJ. **TEL** +44 (0)28 9521 4818

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