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Cover image: Regina Lynch, Executive President of ACN International is shown around a damaged church in Venezuela, after the devastating earthquakes

INTRODUCTION

Will You Help us Help our Children to Pray for Peace?

MICHAEL KELLY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Dear Friends,

In 1917, amid the darkness of the First World War, Our Lady appeared to three poor shepherd children in the remote village of Fatima, **Portugal. Lucia dos Santos, Francisco Marto, and Jacinta Marto** were ordinary children – simple and full of childlike trust. Yet Our Lady entrusted them with a message of urgent importance for the whole world: prayer, penance, and conversion.



At the heart of that message stood the Rosary. In every one of her six apparitions, the Blessed Virgin urged the children to pray it daily. On May 13 she said, **“Pray the Rosary every day to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.”** In later apparitions she repeated the call and finally declared, **“I am the Lady of the Rosary.”** She asked that the Rosary be prayed in honour of her Immaculate Heart and promised that through it peace would come.

The children obeyed with heroic fidelity. They prayed the Rosary every day, offered sacrifices for sinners, and lived the message so completely that two of them - Francisco and Jacinta - were canonised saints.

Their example shows that the Rosary is not merely a devotion for adults; it is a powerful prayer that even the youngest souls can wield with tremendous effect.

More than a century later, Our Lady’s call remains as relevant as ever. In a world still scarred by conflict, division, and spiritual confusion, the Rosary continues to be the ‘*weapon*’ she gave us for peace. It leads us into the mysteries of Christ’s life, unites us with his Mother, and obtains graces that no human effort can achieve on its own.

This is why the *One Million Children Praying the Rosary* campaign, organised by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), is so timely and so fitting. Inspired by the words attributed to **St Padre Pio** - “*When one million children pray the Rosary, the world will change*” - the campaign invites children around the globe to unite in prayer each year on October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

On that day, children in families, schools, and parishes pray the Rosary together for peace, for the unity of hearts, and for the suffering Church. They meditate on the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous Mysteries, and they conclude each decade with the Fatima Prayer: “*O my Jesus,*

forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those most in need of Thy mercy."

The campaign provides beautiful, free resources - posters, leaflets explaining why we pray the Rosary, our famous 'Rosary Cards' containing all the prayers - so that parents, teachers, and catechists can easily introduce or deepen this devotion. Children are encouraged to pray as a group, to experience the joy of praying with their peers, and to share photos of their gatherings using the hashtag **#1MillionChildrenPraying**.

What makes this initiative especially powerful is its connection to Fatima. Just as Our Lady chose children to be her messengers in 1917, she continues to look with special love upon the prayers of the young today. A child's simple, trusting Hail Mary carries immense weight before the throne of God. When a million such prayers rise together, they form a spiritual tidal wave capable of obtaining peace, protecting the persecuted, and drawing countless souls closer to Christ.

As a pontifical charity assisting Christians facing persecution and hardship worldwide, we see this campaign as a direct response to Our Lady's call. By praying the Rosary, children intercede for their brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer for the faith. They also grow in their own relationship with Mary, learning that she is a tender Mother who listens to every child's prayer.

Participation is straightforward. Families can pray the Rosary at home. Schools and parishes can organise a special Rosary on or around October 7 using the free materials available on the ACN website (acnireland.org).

Even a small group of children praying together adds to the global chorus. We are also pleased to offer rosaries and additional resources to help get started.

In a culture that often underestimates children, Fatima and this campaign remind us of their immense spiritual dignity. The same Mother who appeared to Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta is appearing to the children of our day through the gift of the Rosary. She is inviting them - and through them, their families and communities - to become little apostles of peace.

Through the *One Million Children Praying the Rosary* campaign, we can help fulfil the promise of Fatima: that through the Rosary, peace will come to the world - one child's prayer at a time.

If you would like more information, or to participate in the campaign, you can email **Brandon Scott** on **brandon.scott@acnireland.org**

God bless you,



MICHAEL KELLY

Director of Public Affairs, ACN Ireland



ACN Ireland Welcomes New Chapter with Move to Clontarf

For almost 40 years, Aid to the Church in Need Ireland has called 151 St Mobhi Road in the Dublin suburb of Glasnevin home.

And for anyone who has ever visited us at what we called ‘*St Joseph’s*’, you could see why we called it a home – it literally was a terraced house that had increasingly become unsuitable as a place to carry out the ministry of the charity. This became all the more obvious when Aid to the Church in Need took on the new role of ACN Church Resources, providing Irish parishes with all of the materials that they need to serve the mission of the Church and renew the faith in Ireland.



Fr Timothy Bartlett, President of ACN Ireland, blessing the new offices.

With thanks to God, and after over a year of careful planning, Aid to the Church in Need Ireland has now made the move to our new ‘home’ in Manresa in Clontarf.

For many years, Manresa has served as a retreat centre run by the Society of Jesus, and the transition has proved to be a happy one for Aid to the Church in Need. Manresa provides us with the space that we need to serve the mission of the charity to the suffering and persecuted Church.

Next year we will mark 80 years of this mission, carried out solely with the support of our very generous benefactors – but more on that another day.

Please note, from now on the postal address for Aid to the Church in Need Ireland is:

Aid to the Church in Need (Ireland)

Castle Building
426 Clontarf Road
Dollymount
Dublin

Phone numbers, email addresses and the website remain the same.

Archbishop Eamon Martin leads huge Rosary Rally at Knock

Aid to the Church in Need was delighted to be on-hand at the **All-Ireland Rosary Rally** on Saturday June 6, at Knock Shrine to promote our work with the suffering Church.

ACN distributed thousands of Rosary beads from Bethlehem in the Holy Land, as well as rosary cards and prayer cards aimed at helping spread devotion to the Rosary around Ireland.

Organisers say around 13,000 people participated, and the highlight was the Mass presided over by **Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin**.

The archbishop said that he “felt a tremendous sense of joy and hope among the people who were gathered there. And it was especially gratifying to see many

young people, including the children’s rosary group, who made a very important and beautiful contribution to the day.”

The archbishop added: “I really felt that Knock was alive, and it makes me realise that our Blessed Mother continues to speak into the troubled world in which we live, with many new problems and new challenges. From the point of view of Ireland, it’s very important for us to have a gathering like this, to affirm the very many people who have remained strong and steadfast in their faith and who need this kind of gathering in order to give them encouragement and a strong sense of mission.”

Dr Martin said that the word “mission” stayed with him after leaving the rally. “That’s a word that I went home with in my head,” he said. “There is a wonderful mission involved in the rosary rally. It’s about gathering people but also about sending them back into their homes, parishes, and communities, to continue to make the beautiful graces of our Blessed Mother well known, to continue to pray for peace.”



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Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin at the ACN stand at the All-Ireland Rosary Rally.

FEATURE

Understanding the Depths of God's Love

FR ANTON LÄSSER CP



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Dear Friends,

I invite you today to reflect on a reality that sounds hard but is yet fundamental to our understanding of God's love and mercy.



Let us start by considering the astonishing insight of the **Prophet Isaiah** into the person of the coming Messiah: *"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5).

After the Resurrection, **St Peter** confirms this very same vision as the fulfilment of the promise of salvation: *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By*

his wounds you have been healed."
(1 Peter 2:24)

When we reflect more deeply on this, God's chosen path of salvation, and lovingly contemplate the wounds of the Redeemer, we begin to grasp something of the unfathomable depth of God's benevolence and love for us. God's love includes the willingness to be wounded and suffer – and even die for us – merely in order to save us. For *"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Ephesians 5:2).

Is it not evident, then, that Christ, who in baptism made us members of His own body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26), now longs to encourage and enable us to love in just the same way that He loved? Will the Holy Spirit not lead the disciples of Jesus to that very height of love in which all evil is

overcome by goodness and love?
(cf. *Romans* 12:21).

And so, we can understand that true mercy necessarily includes the willingness to embrace penitence and atonement. Repentance for our own sins and the readiness to make reparation for the sins of others has little to do with moral toughness or exterior strictness. Rather it is a path of spiritual growth, to the point of embracing the Cross which is fundamental to our Christian Faith. For *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”* (Luke 9:23)

Today we are called to do penance, but not so much with penitential cords or strict fasting, but rather by enduring silently, in a spirit of loving patience, as an expression

of loving devotion or as an exercise in self-denial, including perhaps at times by exercising restraint in conflict situations, silently enduring injuries or remaining constant in the face of misunderstanding.

In the willingness to embrace penance and reparation, our prayer assumes a new depth and redemptive power. I would be delighted if you would join me today, in the spirit of the message of Fatima, by interceding in this deeper sense for our brothers and sisters in need.

With my best wishes and blessing,

F. Anton Lässer CP

FATHER ANTON LÄSSER CP

Ecclesiastical Assistant, ACN International



SYRIA: Summer camp for 300 youth from different governorates in Marret Sednaya.

SUCCESS STORY!

Retreats for Religious Sisters



CAMEROON

“*I experienced a renewed sense of God’s love and call in my life,”* says **Sr Camila** as she reflects on the annual retreat that she was recently on. Thanks to your generosity, 130 sisters of the Tertiary Sisters of St Francis of Assisi in **Cameroon** were able to attend annual retreats in 2026.

The sisters play a vital role in the life of the Church in Cameroon. In fact, they have one of the largest numbers of professed sisters of any female congregation in the country and have many new vocations. The charism of the sisters centres on living contemplative lives in the present and seeing the will of God in the signs and needs of the times. The sisters have discerned that it is their role to remain close to the people as parts of Cameroon experience uncertainty and instability.

In line with the sisters’ charism, the congregation mandates daily meditation and an annual retreat. Due to insecurity in parts of Cameroon, the sisters were unable to raise the funds needed to cover their annual retreats. This is where you stepped in. Thanks to your support, we were able to support the sisters and they could hold their annual retreats.

The theme of the annual retreats was “*Effectiveness of mission through prayer*” and included spiritual direction and reflection. The fruits of the retreats were plain to see.

After being at the retreat, Sr Camila wrote: “*I was encouraged to return to the source of my vocation and rediscover the joy of serving God’s people.*”

While **Sr Anne Marie** also shared: “*I now carry out my responsibilities with renewed enthusiasm and a stronger sense of purpose. I have become more intentional in fostering positive relationships, encouraging those who are struggling, and witnessing God’s love through my actions.*”

Thanks to your loving support, the sisters are now able to return to their communities with a refreshed sense of purpose and spiritual renewal.



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Help Support the Sanctity of Life



CHILE

In 1995, **Pope Saint John Paul II** issued the papal encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* in which he outlined the sanctity of human life and how society must foster a “*culture of life*” to counter the growing “*culture of death*”. The Pope’s words are as relevant today as when they were written in the 1990s.

In many parts of the world, the culture of death threatens the sanctity of human life. This is true in Chile where there are attempts to advance abortion and euthanasia.

In order to safeguard the sanctity of life, the Diocese of Villarrica runs a pro-life project to promote the culture of life as taught by recent popes, including John Paul II and **Leo XIV**.

This project is multifaceted and includes talks and conferences at schools and parishes, the production of pro-life videos and audiovisual material, and the facilitation of an online pro-life diploma programme that shows respect for life from its conception until natural death.

The project also includes spiritual adoptions. This is where groups of people come together with the intention of

praying for a baby who is in danger of being aborted.

The groups praying for the unborn children include students, parishes and prayer groups. Each member of the group carries a card with a prayer directed to Jesus, Our Lady and St Joseph on behalf of the child.

The culmination of the project is the annual “*I March for Life*”, organised by the Diocese of Villarrica. The march brings together people of all ages, backgrounds and parishes, united in their commitment to promoting a culture of life.

The Diocese of Villarrica has asked for our support to continue this important work. Will you help promote and defend a culture of life in which every human person is valued and protected from conception until natural death?





Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

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Pastoral Summer Camps for Young Christians

JORDAN



Through your love you can give young Christians one of the most precious gifts a person can receive: deeper faith. The strengthening of young Christians' faith is also the goal of the Youth Chaplaincy in **Jordan** or JEC Jordan.

Run by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, JEC Jordan focuses on developing young Catholics to become leaders and to educate them and deepen them in their faith.

Christians are a small minority in Jordan but are accepted as part of wider Jordanian society. However, given their status as a religious minority, it is very important that Jordanian Catholics have a strong community and sense of faith.

A key way to do this is to develop young Catholics as active and engaged members of the Church and society at large.

The JEC Jordan seeks to better guide young Catholics through a variety of activities, including summer camps. A key goal of the camps is to strengthen the spiritual foundation of the participants by teaching them about the principles in the Bible and exploring how to actively apply them in their own lives.

The camps also try to create a sense of community, help the participants improve teamwork and foster other skills on the path to personal development.

For **Lina**, this meant that last year she learned more about the Holy Trinity and was able to deepen both her prayer life and relationship with God. She is now looking forward to developing her prayer life even more to help her face future challenges.

Likewise, **George** was able to learn more about the Holy Spirit and pray the Rosary with other young Catholics.

The JEC Jordan is determined to continue this vital work in forming the next generation of young Catholics in their faith and in how to best serve society and their community. **With your love you can give to Christians, just like Lina and George, the most precious gift of all: the gift of faith.**



SUCCESS STORY!

Transportation for a Hospital Chaplain in a time of War

UKRAINE



© ACN

We read in the Gospels that man “does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). This reveals the profound truth that we are not just physical beings but also have deep spiritual needs.

This is something long recognised by the Church and can be shown by the complete and comprehensive care of the patient as a whole person shown in the vital work of hospital chaplains.

Since 2022, **Fr Taras Viliura** has been a chaplain at St Luke’s Clinic in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Ivano-Frankivsk. As part of their approach of seeing the patient as a whole human being,

the clinic offers palliative care in addition to medical treatment and diagnosis.

An essential component of Fr Taras’ ministry is the spiritual accompaniment of patients receiving palliative care. For patients with serious conditions or terminal illness, pastoral care and the administration of the Sacraments, such as the Anointing of the Sick, are of particular importance.

Hospice beds are in short supply in the region, meaning that many palliative care patients spend much of their time at home. The war in **Ukraine** has meant that many people, particularly from the younger generations, are no longer in their hometowns, either having left Ukraine or serving in the military. This has

left many of the patients without family and a support network.

This was the case for 78-year-old **Olena**. Her children had moved abroad and she was living alone. When Fr Taras first began to visit her, she was filled with fear and loneliness. Fr Taras was able to help her by talking and praying with her. *“Father, you made me feel seen and not forgotten,”* she told him.

Fr Taras visits people like Olena every day and, on top of this, he also provides support to the families of patients, celebrates Holy Mass and hears confessions and answers urgent calls to provide support and the Sacraments to patients in the final moments of their lives.

There are not only many patients in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk who Fr Taras visits, he also visits patients in the surrounding areas, some of whom are over 10 kilometres away.

Public transport is not always reliable, and it is not practical to rely on every day. Challenging terrain, climate and costs make the daily use of bicycles and taxis unfeasible.

Therefore, Fr Taras has asked us for help in purchasing a suitable vehicle to help him carry out his ministry. **Will you help Fr Taras to minister to some of those in most of need?**

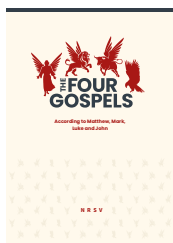


UKRAINE: Fr Taras Viliura during his service as a hospital chaplain in Ivano-Frankivsk.

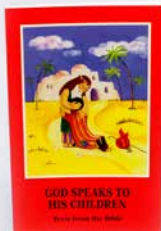


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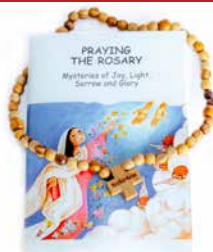
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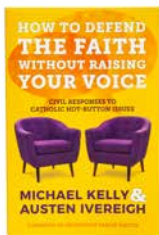
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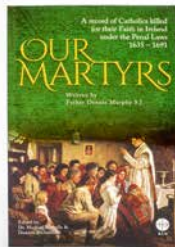
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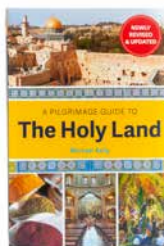
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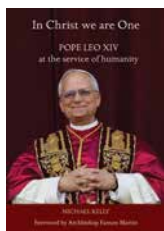
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Our Home Jerusalem Cross**
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**Hand Carved Bethlehem
Olive Wood God Bless
Our Home** – €20



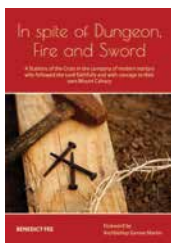
**Olive Wood Crucifix on stand
or Olive Wood Crucifix
for wall** – €20



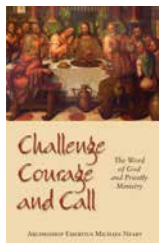
**Olive Wood Jerusalem
Rosary Beads**
– €10



Dilexi te
– €5.99



**In spite of Dungeon,
Fire and Sword**
– €6.99



**Challenge Courage
and Call**
– €9.99



Magnifica humanitas
– €6.99

PETITION

Stand up for the Persecuted Church by Signing our Petition

No one should have to choose between their faith and their life. Yet, 5.4 billion people, almost two-thirds of humanity, live in countries where individuals and communities continue to face harassment, violence, and even death because of their beliefs.

Aid to the Church in Need has uncovered that approximately 220 million Christians face severe, direct persecution, making Christianity the most widely persecuted religion in the world today.

In 32 countries worldwide, Christians are exposed to high levels of persecution or direct discrimination. Christians face physical violence or detention in 57 countries, with physical or verbal attacks reported in 73.

In 33 countries, Christians are forced to flee their homes, becoming internally displaced or refugees. Christian property—primarily churches—has been damaged or destroyed with religious bias in 68 countries.

Religious persecution does not occur in a vacuum. Violations of freedom of religion or belief are driven by identifiable political, social and security dynamics that lead to discrimination, violence and restrictions on

religious practice.

We are witnessing a human rights emergency on a global scale. Be a voice for the voiceless today and stop the atrocity of religious persecution by signing our Religious Freedom Petition.

ACN will bring every signature to the highest international stages—including the UN, the EU, governments, diplomats and international decision-makers—to ensure your voice is heard.

Your signature demonstrates global public support for religious freedom and places the issue on the agenda of international institutions and policymakers.

By showing widespread concern, the petition strengthens advocacy efforts, supports dialogue with diplomatic representatives, and encourages concrete policy action to protect this fundamental human right.



© Ismael Martínez Sánchez

1 We want to ensure that those in positions of power:

- Publicly condemn all forms of religious persecution.
 - Make religious freedom a priority in foreign policy and diplomatic relations.
 - Enforce appropriate measures against regimes that repeatedly violate this fundamental right.
 - Take concrete steps, including educational and legal initiatives, to prevent violations, ensure the effective protection of this right, and promote the socio-economic development of religious minorities.
- ## 2 Grant at-risk religious communities protection, especially in countries suffering from sectarian violence or religious extremism to avoid forced migration, thereby enabling them to stay in their ancestral homes and lands.
- ## 3 Make sure that individuals and groups suffering religious persecution receive the emergency and legal aid they need.

During a visit to ACN's international headquarters in Königstein, ACN President, **Cardinal Kurt Koch**, reiterated that freedom of religion is a “cornerstone of human dignity and social justice,” echoing the words of **Pope Leo XIV**. The cardinal encouraged people everywhere to support the initiative and to uphold the fundamental right to believe.

Drawing on the findings of the *Religious Freedom in the World Report*, the campaign aims to raise global awareness and mobilise civil society in defence of a fundamental human right. It also underscores the urgent need for coordinated international action to protect this right.

ACN invites people of all faiths and beliefs — as well as all those committed to human dignity — to stand together in defence of religious freedom.

Please sign our petition and take a stand with the persecuted Church around the world. Stand up for the right to believe by signing ACN's global petition for religious freedom at acninternational.org/petition/



SUCCESS STORY!

ACN Offering Hope in the Darkness

VENEZUELA

© Rubén Darío Castillo Ugas

As search and rescue efforts continue, following the devastating earthquake that shook **Venezuela**, the Church has begun to deal with the great challenge of accompanying a deeply traumatised population. *“For those who survived, it was a miracle, but we lost many people,”* says **Archbishop Raúl Bior** of Caracas speaking to international charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

The magnitude of the tragedy continues to grow. According to the latest official figures before going to print, **over 3,800 people have been confirmed killed** and an estimated 60,000+ currently unaccounted for.

Several regions still don't have electricity and many buildings collapsed completely, while others suffered such

structural damage that they are effectively unusable, so people cannot return to their homes. Church sources who spoke to ACN estimate that around 250,000 people may have been left homeless due to the earthquake. Many banks are still closed, so people are unable to access cash to cover their most basic needs.

“We should take time to organise the aid we require. The needs are immense. Naturally, the main priority now is to rebuild lives,” says the archbishop.

A REAL MIRACLE

The diocese that was most severely hit by the earthquake was La Guaira, especially the region near the coast, beside Caracas. The Seminary of St Peter and St Paul, for instance, suffered severe damage. *“The seminarians were in the*

building when the earth shook. There were some lightly wounded, but nobody was killed and both the seminarians and their formators were able to leave. We can say that it was a miracle. However, the building is inaccessible, it cannot be used and it was heavily damaged. They lost everything, even their clothes and shoes... Nothing was left."

Faced with this immense suffering, Archbishop Biord believes that one of the most urgent challenges now is to accompany the survivors. *"We have lost so much. We need to care for those who survived. Priests and religious, as well as Caritas volunteers and pastoral agents must tend to the needs of thousands of people who have been badly traumatised. This will be one of the biggest priorities for the diocese over the coming months, to support and train those who will be on the front lines of this pastoral accompaniment,"* he explains.

Archbishop Biord also expressed his gratitude to ACN and other international charities, saying *"we really need your support. It helps us to rebuild our lives and our country, together"*.

ACN has approved a first support package of €100,000 to help the Church in Venezuela respond to the tragedy. The aid will help to support priests, religious communities and other pastoral agents who, despite having been badly affected themselves, continue to take in families,

accompany victims and offer spiritual support in the wake of the tragedy.

Representatives from the charity will travel to Venezuela to touch base with our project partners and survey the earthquake's impact on the Church's functions and services. Among the ACN representatives in Venezuela will be Executive President of ACN International, Tyrone woman, **Regina Lynch**.

At the same time, the charity continues to evaluate the needs on the ground, with the help of the local Church, and has also committed to helping with long-term reconstructions support.

Maria Lozano, head of press and media at ACN International, who knows the affected dioceses well, said: *"We have walked these streets, prayed in these churches and spent time with the priests and families who are now living this nightmare. That is why this tragedy seems so close to us. In every major catastrophe, there comes a time when statistics are no longer enough to describe what people are living through."*

ACN is in continuous contact with the Venezuelan Church and is preparing to support both emergency assistance and the reconstruction of damaged church infrastructure, so that local communities can continue to receive spiritual, pastoral and humanitarian support in the coming months.

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
[NI] +44 (0)28 9521 4818



PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Seminarians from
the Wabag Diocese.

SPIRITUAL
REFLECTION

Mary's Immaculate Heart

MICHAEL KELLY



The mission of Aid to the Church in Need is entrusted to the Mother of God in a special way under the patronage of **Our Lady of Fatima**. From his Cross, Christ gave his mother to all believers as a consoler and a powerful intercessor.

Mary's intercession is powerful indeed, for we recall the first miracle of Christ was changing the water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee after he was asked by his mother.

The month of August is a time that the Church sets aside to ponder Mary's Immaculate Heart.

The Immaculate Heart symbolises the interior life of the Blessed Virgin:

her perfect purity from the moment of her conception, her total surrender to God's will, her hidden virtues, and her compassionate participation in the redemptive sufferings of her Son.

In the Gospel, twice **St Luke** tells us that Mary "*kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*" (Luke 2:19, 51). At the Presentation, **Simeon** prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35), a prophecy fulfilled most painfully beneath the Cross.

The heart of Mary, therefore, represents both her unspeakable joy in the Incarnation and her unspeakable sorrow at the Passion — yet always united in perfect love and trusting that God sees a way, even when we can't.

Although traces of this devotion appear in the writings of medieval saints such as **St Bernard**, **St Gertrude the Great**, and **St Bridget of Sweden**, it was **St John Eudes** (1601–1680) who gave it systematic form and liturgical expression.

This tireless French priest and founder of religious congregations promoted devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary together. In 1648 he celebrated the first feast of the Heart of Mary at Autun and composed a Mass and Office in its honour.

His great work, *The Admirable Heart of the Most Holy Mother of God*, remains a spiritual classic. Popes gradually granted wider approval: **Pius VI** allowed the feast in certain dioceses in 1799, and **Pius VII** extended it further in 1805.

A significant boost came in the nineteenth century through the Miraculous Medal (1830) and the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart established at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires in Paris.

The devotion reached its modern peak through the apparitions at Fatima in 1917. On July 13 of that year, after showing the three shepherd children a terrifying vision of hell, Our Lady revealed her Immaculate Heart — surrounded by thorns, pierced by a sword, and radiating flames of love. She explained that these thorns represented the offences and blasphemies committed against her. She then made two urgent requests: the

consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart and the practice of the Five First Saturdays as acts of reparation.

The First Saturday's devotion is simple yet powerful. On the first Saturday of five consecutive months, Catholics are asked to:

- **Go to Confession,**
- **Receive Holy Communion,**
- **Pray five decades of the Rosary, and**
- **Spend fifteen minutes meditating on one or more mysteries of the Rosary.**

Our Lady promised that those who fulfill this request with devotion will receive all the graces necessary for salvation, especially at the hour of death. In direct response to Fatima's message, **Pope Pius XII** consecrated the entire human race to the Immaculate Heart on October 31, 1942 — the twenty-fifth anniversary of the apparitions — via a radio broadcast to the pilgrims gathered at Fatima. He renewed the act solemnly in Rome on December 8 of the same year and, in 1952, specifically consecrated Russia by name.

Later Popes continued this tradition; most notably, **St John Paul II**, in union with the bishops of the world, performed the collegial consecration on March 25, 1984, which **Sister Lucia** confirmed had fulfilled Our Lady's request.

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart, of course, always leads to Jesus. As the Church teaches, Mary is the surest, quickest, and easiest path to her Divine Son.

SPIRITUAL
REFLECTION

The Creed, the Most Powerful Prayer

DAVIDE BARBIERI



“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. Amen.”

Since my conversion thirty years ago, my life has been centred on restoring my relationship with God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and our Blessed Mother Mary. I have experienced many challenges throughout my earthly pilgrimage, during which the Word of God has become true spiritual nourishment in my life and in the life of my wife and six children.



I pray every day for the courage to do His will in my life and not my own. Having been involved with ACN Ireland for almost eight years, I have learned with humility that many of my brothers and sisters live across different continents and countries where poverty is visible and the

persecution of Christians is still a reality today. The stories I have heard and read have deeply moved me and made me feel privileged to be a voice for the voiceless.

I am continually inspired by the simplicity and deep faith of men and women from countries such as Nigeria, Iraq, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and many parts of Asia, Africa, and South America.

I often pause to reflect on the purity of desire found among persecuted Christians, who even in the presence of persecution continue to praise God and sing “Hallelujah.” Jesus is truly risen - for them and for me.

I hope that, after reading this reflection,

the profound joy I carry in my heart may inspire in others a deeper sense of discipleship and a renewed discovery of how deeply Jesus loves each one of us.

Faith in God generates a new life and a renewed story within me - a life that opens the door to hope and transformation. Those of us who often remain bound to our past, unable to free ourselves from suffering or humiliation, discover that surrendering our 'yesterdays' to the mercy of God allows us to receive a new 'today.'

For many years of my life, I lived in selfishness through addiction to heroin, serious criminal behaviour, and sin. Yet through my conversion, I have learned that we must be sincere in prayer, purified in imagination, and thought, and never allow our time with God to become superficial or empty, so that the miracle of the Resurrection may truly take root within us.

The true gift of prayer is not merely to be before Him, but to welcome Him - to live in Him - and to entrust to Jesus all moments of darkness and light, saying: *"I believe in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit."*

Our lives depend on the depth of our prayer and the authenticity of our faith. If we do things merely out of obligation, we risk losing sight of their meaning. Faith is not a burden to carry, but a gift that opens our horizons, awakens joy, and calls us to serve freely and lovingly.

To profess the Creed with joy is to become free men and women - dynamic, joyful, and committed to serving others. It is to discover the true greatness of life.

Having said this, I would like to share a personal story:

My father, **Walter**, last attended church on the day of his wedding in 1970. For many years, he denied the existence of God, refused the sacraments, and lived what was outwardly a good but empty life.

In October 2019, he was diagnosed with cancer in his lungs, kidneys, and brain. When we received the news, my family began praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet for him each night after the family Rosary. I was able to visit him in Italy later that month, and I arranged for a priest friend to visit him and offer him the opportunity for reconciliation with God.



To my surprise, I discovered that God was already at work: he had received the Sacrament of Confession the day before I arrived. When I met him in hospital, he was very unwell and asked to be brought home. Looking into his blue eyes, full of pain and tears, I assured him that I was there to accompany him home - not the earthly home he had left behind, but the home of eternal life.

We wept together. He looked upward, and in that moment, he understood. I spent four days at his bedside, praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy each day at 3pm. The time came for me to return to Ireland. I kissed him on the forehead and told him that I might not be present at the moment of his passing due to family responsibilities, financial constraints and Covid.

His last words to me were: *"I am sorry for having been hard on you when you were a child."*

My answer to him, to let him relax and go was, looking in his teary eyes, Dad thank you for the cross of being beaten to a pulp sometimes. If it wasn't for all you did I would not be the dad I am with my six children today, I love you and thank you for giving me life and a cross at a very early age.

I returned to Ireland, and he was later cared for at home under palliative care. Shortly after receiving the Sacrament of Confession, he lost his speech. My beloved

father died at 3 pm on 12 December 2019, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

For me and my family, this was a sign of God's mercy in his life - that at the hour of his passing (3pm), he was welcomed into eternal life and entrusted to our Blessed Mother.

For thirty years, I have prayed daily for the Holy Souls in Heaven and in Purgatory, especially for those for whom no one else prays.

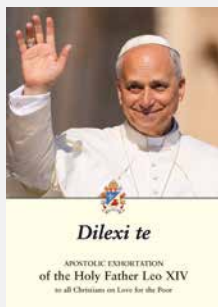
I am deeply grateful for the gift of my faith. Today, I invite you to reflect on your prayer life and to give God time each day, simply saying: *'I love You'* and *'Thank You.'*



Davide Barbieri is Diocesan Liaison Officer with ACN Ireland.



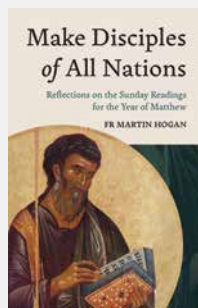
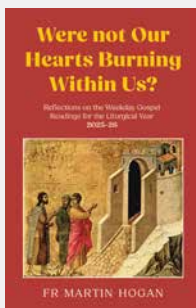
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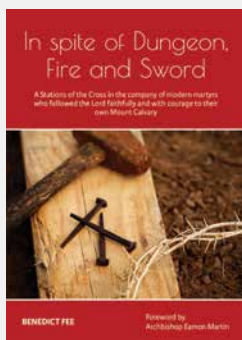
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Were not Our Hearts Buring Within Us? and *Make Disciples of All Nations* are two new titles from Fr Martin Hogan on weekday and Sunday reflections for the coming liturgical year.



€6.99

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

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AUGUST CROSSWORD

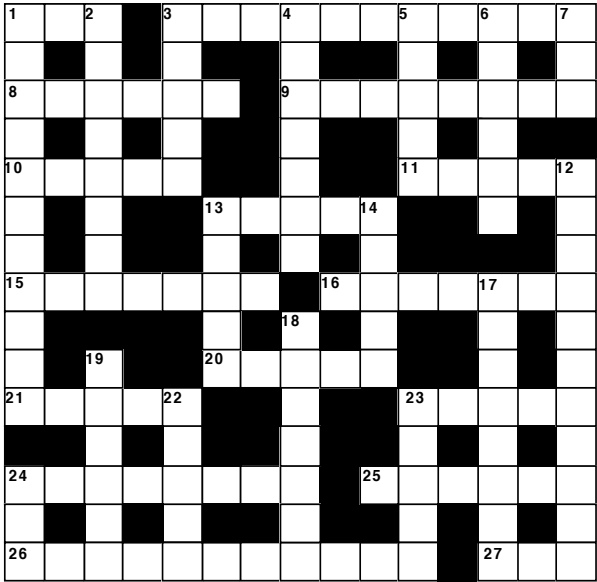
We are pleased to share with you our latest ACN crossword. We will print the answers in next month's edition.

Enjoy!

July Solution

Across 1 Add, 3 Black pepper, 8 Mister Tod, 9 Opponent, 10 Riots, 11 Acted, 13 Grief, 15 Satsuma, 16 Olympic Games, 20 Scone, 21 Paint, 23 Abram, 24 Jerpoint Abbey, 25 Obeyed, 26 Gerontology.

Down 1 Admiral's cup, 2 Dismount, 3 Bless, 4 Crombie, 5 Ebola, 6 Plenty, 7 Rut, 12 Discommoded, 14 False, 17 Peer Gynt, 18 Coastal, 19 Mirror, 22 Thorn, 24 Jog.



ACROSS

- 1 Tin (3)
- 3 Retail outlet where profits go to fund good deeds (7,4)
- 8 & 23d One form of a profession of one's faith (6,5)
- 9 Cleaned, using a machine that sucks in air (8)
- 10 Feather (5)
- 11 The backs of the feet (5)
- 13 Assists (5)
- 15 Dig up (7)
- 16 Twenty-five per cent (7)
- 20 Abhorred, detested (5)
- 21 Plant them to grow crops (5)
- 23 Dance involving many dancers in a "train" (5)
- 24 Easily carried (8)
- 25 Used one's blocking vote (6)
- 26 Cowardly (4-7)
- 27 Cover (3)

DOWN

- 1 Striking, easily noticeable (11)
- 2 Piece of classical music relating to the night (8)
- 3 Kayak (5)
- 4 Italian dish (7)
- 5 Immaturity, or a person not quite at adulthood (5)
- 6 Shakespeare's longest play (6)
- 7 In which peas grow (3)
- 12 Lacking the necessary manpower (5-6)
- 13 In which to keep a pet rabbit (5)
- 14 Small group of specially trained police officers or soldiers (5)
- 17 Nocturnal woodland predator native to Britain (5,3)
- 18 Track and field competitor (7)
- 19 It is used to fuel a car (6)
- 22 Tiny (5)
- 23 See 8 across
- 24 Friend (3)

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.

*"Please pray for peace among siblings and their families –
Lord grant peace and reconciliation."*

*"Grant us peace in our immediate family. Lord guide us to sort out our affairs
and to be kind and just to our youngsters."*

*"Please pray for the purification of the Church. Pray that priests and religious
never abandon their flock."*

*"Please pray for the recovery of a grandson who is in a treatment centre for
drug abuse. I hope God enters his life and gives him comfort."*

*"Pray for more vocations to the priesthood as my priest has retired
and we don't know if he will be replaced."*

*"Please pray for unborn children at a time when it seems like very
few people appreciate them."*

*"Pray for the people of Venezuela after the terrible earthquake that
has affected so many lives."*

*"Pray for my health concerns. I feel so alone and have no one who
will pray for me in my life."*

"Pray that I find someone to share my life with and get married to."



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



O Immaculate Heart of Mary



O Immaculate Heart of Mary,
full of goodness, show your love towards us.

Let the flame of your heart,
O Mary, descend on all people.

We love you immensely.

AMEN

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