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SEPTEMBER 2026
MONTH OF THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

One Million Children

praying the Rosary



For unity and peace
On the 7th October



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

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Cover image: Fr Javier Arle next to the cross in Limones, a town deep in the jungle near Guapi, in Cauca, Colombia. The region is facing challenges with guerrillas and drug trafficking. However, there are also reasons for hope, as ordinary life continues and the sacraments are celebrated by people who live their faith and radiate charity, thanks to the generosity of the benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need.

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INTRODUCTION

The Cross: Life Conquering Death

MICHAEL KELLY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Dear Friends,

When you look at salvation history, it is a long story of God's people often feeling far from him, only to discover God afresh.



Imagine the dismay of the disciples of Jesus at the Last Supper when he told them he would soon suffer and die, and their fragile little community would collapse.

They had given up everything for Jesus, but would soon lose him. But, it was precisely in this moment of despair, when all seemed lost, that he gave them himself. *'This is my body given for you...'*

The truth of the Eucharist has sustained Christians for over 2,000 years. It is no bulwark against suffering, nor is it a banal promise that those who believe in Jesus need have no fear. Instead, it is the promise of the Cross – the promise that life overcomes death.

That is what we celebrate this month in the feastday of the Exaltation of the Cross, and it is the triumph of life over death that sustains the millions of Christians who suffer and are persecuted for their faith whom we serve in ACN.

Picture this: in a cramped church in northern **Nigeria**, a widow named **Rebecca**

sings softly while sweeping bullet casings from the floor. Boko Haram – the Islamist terrorist group – raided her village three nights earlier, killed her husband, and burned the building.

Thousands of Christians are murdered in Nigeria every year. Yet on Sunday morning she is back, leading the choir with a voice that trembles only slightly.

When asked how she can still praise God, she answers without hesitation:

"Because Jesus is alive, and my husband is with him. The grave could not hold my Lord, and it will not hold us forever."

Remarkable, but Rebecca is not an exception.

From house churches in **North Korea** to underground churches in **Iran**, from prison cells in **Eritrea** to refugee camps in **Syria**, millions of Christians today live under the shadow of persecution – and yet they live in hope.

Believers face extreme levels of danger simply for following Christ. Beatings, imprisonment, forced displacement, and execution are not theoretical possibilities but weekly realities.

In the face of such darkness, where do they find hope tough enough to outlast the fire?

First, they anchor their hope in the resurrection of Jesus. Not as a comforting doctrine recited on Easter, but as an historical bedrock that changes everything.

The same power that raised Christ from the dead is, **St Paul** insists, already at work in those who belong to him.

Persecuted believers drink deeply from the theology of the cross. Western Christianity often presents the cross as something Jesus endured so we would not have to. Suffering believers see it differently: the cross is the pattern, not merely the price.

When they are mocked, they remember Jesus was mocked. When they lose everything, they remember he became poor so they might become rich in God. This identification with Christ's sufferings transforms pain from meaningless cruelty into purposeful fellowship.

The Bible they smuggle page by page does not promise exemption from suffering; it promises vindication after it.

Christians who suffer also know that hope grows in the soil of community. Isolation is one of persecution's sharpest weapons, yet the global body of Christ refuses to let its members suffer alone.

Every year, Aid to the Church in Need brings millions of bibles and prayer books into countries where Christians are persecuted. The knowledge that they are remembered — by brothers and sisters halfway around the world who send letters, funds, and advocacy — turns suffering into shared witness and solidarity.

Wherever I have met people who suffer for their faith, their final words to me are always *“don't forget about us, and don't forget to pray for us...”*

I was in **Pakistan** recently, a country where Christians are severely persecuted. What I learnt there is that people who suffer for their faith discover a strange joy that defies their circumstances.

This is not denial or what the psychologists might call emotional dissociation; it is the stubborn miracle Jesus promised when he said, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

I want to finish now by returning to our friend Rebecca in northern Nigeria whose husband was murdered and who was leading the choir.

After she finished sweeping the bullet casings, she lights a small candle on what remains of the altar, and begins to sing again.

The melody was old, carried across centuries and continents by others who knew the same fire.

The words are simple:

“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future, And life is worth the living, just because He lives.”



MICHAEL KELLY

Director of Public Affairs, ACN Ireland



FEATURE

ACN Invites Young People to Pray the Rosary for Peace

BRANDON SCOTT



“Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war,” the poignant and timeless message from Our Lady, who spoke to three ordinary children in Fatima, **Portugal** over 109 years ago.

Our Lady’s deep message has resonated with Aid to the Church in Need ever since its foundation almost 80 years ago and has formed the basis for our works and mission. When all looks lost and impossible, when hope is dwindling, when despair sets in, pray the Rosary and let Mary take control.

Our generous benefactors, ordinary people who want Christian communities around the world to thrive, collectively donated over €148 million to fund our works in 2025, giving life to Catholic communities who can now afford to train priests/religious sisters, educate Catholics, purchase modes of transport for priests in rural parishes, and build places of worship so Catholics can be closer to Christ.

Although this area of work is our trademark, you would be forgiven if you thought that’s all we did. As ACN is a Pontifical Foundation, it has a special mandate to promote the Rosary, its works, and its beauty.

In a rampantly secular west, we paradoxically find that when it comes to familiarity around the Rosary, it is the local Church in the west and not the growing Church around the world, who is in need here, and this is where we step in.

Every year since 2005, ACN has promoted a children’s Rosary initiative called *One Million Children Praying the Rosary*. What started off as a modest campaign has blossomed into something beautiful,

with records being broken each year (the latest records show 1,218,372 children prayed the Rosary for peace last year).

Last year, the Irish office set a record it is immensely proud of. Over 16,000 children on the island of Ireland came together to pray the Rosary on behalf of ACN. This year, our goal is to surpass that figure and reach out to thousands more who have been waiting for an initiative just like this one.

Although we're all aware of the power of the Rosary as a meditative and spiritual tool, ACN's Rosary campaign has another very important dimension to it in that the children taking part are all praying for one common goal: Peace.

Visualise this, over 1,000,000 children from around the world, coming together to pray the Rosary for peace at a time

when it feels like the world is so devoid of it. How powerful that is.

As conflicts rage on and divisions consume parts of the world, Aid to the Church in Need calls on children to counter the forces that wreak harm and instead raise their Rosaries in defiance. Let their Rosary, as **St Padre Pio** said, be *"the weapon for these times."*

In a world marked for so many of us by anxiety, fear and insecurity, Aid to the Church in Need is inviting you this year to join in our wonderful worldwide prayer campaign **One Million Children Praying the Rosary on the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary, October 7.**

*For more information on Aid to the Church in Need's children's Rosary campaign, please email me at **brandon.scott@acnireland.org***



SIERRA LEONE: One Million Children Praying the Rosary in the Kenema Diocese.

Sadness as ACN Holy Land Pilgrimage Postponed

MICHAEL KELLY

If you're like me, towns like Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth are not just places on maps. For me, they immediately bring to my mind all of the great biblical events – particularly those connected with the earthly life of Christ.

Over the years, I have been blessed to visit the Holy Land on more than 30 occasions. I have prayed at the site of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, and inside the empty tomb in Jerusalem.

I have reflected on the fact that without Nazareth, there is no Incarnation. Without Bethlehem, there is no Christmas and without Jerusalem there is no Easter.

At ACN Ireland, the Holy Land, has always held a special place in our hearts – not just as a place to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, but also as a place to encounter the living faith of the Christians who call it home. Those people we call the '*living stones*' who are descended from the first people to hear the message of Jesus.

That is why our planned pilgrimage to the Holy Land this autumn was so important for us: to have the opportunity to be pilgrims in the land God chose as his own, but also to share something of the lives of the local people.

It is with deep sadness that we have made the painful decision that the ACN pilgrimage planned for this October will not now go ahead. This has been a decision made after much prayer, discernment and reflection with our friends in the Holy Land.

Unfortunately, events have overtaken us, and the Irish Government have issued travel advice warning pilgrims not to travel on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. While we believe that it is safe, and we would receive a very warm welcome from our brothers and sisters there, we also believe it would not be prudent to go against the advice of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I know this will come as a deep disappointment for anyone who was planning to travel with us. Please do continue to keep the people of the Holy Land and the cause of peace in your prayers. Know too that we are constantly monitoring the situation, and as soon as we believe that group travel is prudent we will announce details of future pilgrimages.

For my part, I hope to make a working visit to the Holy Land in coming weeks. Know that I will bring with me to those most holy of places all of your prayers and intentions.

Belfast Parish United to Support Palestinian Christians

STAFF REPORTER

A CN Ireland president **Fr Tim Bartlett** has opened a new café at his Belfast city centre parish, proceeds from which will support struggling Christian communities in the Holy Land.

The iconic St Mary's Church on Chapel Lane has re-opened the '*Foggy Brew*,' a not-for-profit venture that will help fund local outreach initiatives and support partnerships in the **West Bank** and **Gaza**.

The café sells products including Palestine Cola and will contribute to the work of the combined parishes of west Belfast, as well as their collaboration with Catholic parishes in Palestine.

The partnership forms part of an official link between the Diocese of Down and Connor and the local Church in the Holy Land.

Any surplus revenue generated by the café will be reinvested into parish projects, including the upkeep and development of the parish hall, which is used by a wide range of community groups, including weekly Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

According to Fr Bartlett, "*We're not interested in making money. We just want to cover costs and maybe generate a little bit of*

revenue for our collaboration with Palestine, but also for our different projects here."

The aim is to help build and develop the use of the parish hall, which is in the grotto of St Mary's Chapel. It is used by a variety of community groups including the Egyptian, Vietnamese and Chinese Catholic communities, along with many AA meetings and youth organisations.

Fr Bartlett added: "*A key part of our outreach here in St Mary's, is to our rough sleepers and our neighbours and friends who are suffering from addictions of various kinds. The café will also support our work and the work of others.*"

"We will have some of the least expensive coffee in the city. But it's good stuff, we're not compromising quality. We will be hosting special days for special groups in the area, including some of our seniors, to provide them with an opportunity to come down and meet each other and have a cup of coffee and a scone without it costing the earth. We hope people who are visiting the city centre will also call in and support us."

"We're thrilled to open this new space here, in this little oasis in the middle of the city centre," Fr Bartlett said.

Urgent Action Needed to Preserve Holy Land Christian Village

MICHAEL KELLY

The last all-Christian village in the **Palestinian West Bank**, where the Bible records Jesus stayed just before entering Jerusalem before undergoing his passion and death, is under increasing threat from Israeli settlers.

There are real fears for the future of Taybeh, with the parish priest **Fr Bashar Fawadleh** calling for urgent action from the international community as Israeli settlers seem poised to seize more village land for an illegal outpost.

Thanks to the generosity of the benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need, 161 children from the village have been attending an ACN-sponsored summer camp where they grow in faith and participate in sports and other activities.

Fr Fawadleh has described the current situation as an “*unprecedented threat*” to

the small Christian community there, who trace their roots back to the first followers of Jesus.

After months of appeals over repeated violence targeting the village, Fr Fawadleh has warned that a new danger has emerged. According to eyewitnesses and local monitoring groups, Israeli settlers have begun constructing what is believed to be an illegal outpost in the Jabal Al-Massis area, a mountainous tract of land belonging to villagers.

The prospect of a settlers’ outpost being established only a few metres from parishioners’ homes has heightened anxiety among local residents, with many now considering leaving the Holy Land forever.

Fr Fawadleh told ACN that families fear living under constant intimidation, while farmers worry they may no longer be

able to reach their fields and farms in the eastern part of the village.

Under the current Israeli government, with many members of the settler movement in power, Jewish extremists have increasingly moved to create ‘*feet on the ground*’ by seizing Palestinian land, with seeming impunity even though such moves are even illegal under Israeli law. International law considers all settler activity in the Palestinian West Bank to be illegal.

He said the settlers want to impose “*a new reality*” by force to pressure the people of Taybeh to leave their land forever, erasing another part of the Christian presence.

Currently in the West Bank, Christians make up fewer than 1%. Taybeh has a population of around 1,300, with some 12,000 former residents of the town having fled to the **United States, Chile and Guatemala**.

The land in question lies in the so-called ‘*Area B*’ established by the 1993 Oslo Accords, where civil administration is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority, with security jointly managed by the Palestinian police and the Israeli Defence Forces.

Fr Fawadleh, the Latin Catholic parish priest, has been working alongside the Melkite Catholic parish priest and Greek Orthodox parish priest to raise awareness of the villagers’ plight, even gaining the

support of US ambassador to Israel **Mike Huckabee**.

During a visit to the village last year, Mr Huckabee described a settler attack on a church as “*an absolute travesty*” and demanded Israeli authorities bring a halt to such activities.

Despite this, Fr Fawadleh says violence and intimidation have continued. Settlers have reportedly been preventing workers from accessing a local cement factory.

“We are simply asking to remain on our land without fear,” Fr Fawadleh said.

“The time to act is now,” he insisted.

Fr Fawadleh is appealing for the international community to raise the plight of the Palestinian Christians with the Israeli government, and demand action.

“The Holy Land cannot be preserved through words alone. It must be protected through concrete action,” warning that allowing another outpost to be established would send a devastating message to the local Christian community that their security, rights and future are no longer being protected.

“Do not wait until it is too late. Do not wait until yet another irreversible reality is imposed. The time to act is now,” he said.

Thanks to so many committed benefactors, ACN is continuing to support the people of Taybeh and the other vulnerable Christian communities in the Holy Land.



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SUCCESS STORY!

Thanks to you, Catholic Children are Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

PAKISTAN



Imagine being obliged to work, day in day out, in the harshest of conditions and exploited by unscrupulous employers, simply to be able to support your family, pay the rent and try to pay for your children's schooling. And even then, while on minimum wage and facing constant rising prices, being unable to afford their school uniform, exercise books or even pencils, pens and rulers...

This has long been the reality of life for so many parents whose children attend the 'Canon Triest Middle School' run by the Brothers of Charity in Eisa Nagar, a suburb of the teeming city of Lahore in **Pakistan**.

Most of the people living in this quarter are part of the poorest levels of society

and are employed as bonded labourers in brick-making – harsh, dangerous and poorly paid work. In the rainy season the brick kilns are often closed, and the people suddenly find themselves without any work or income.

Yet they know how important it is for their children to gain a decent education if they are to have any hope for a better future. They are willing to make great sacrifices in order to try and raise the money for their schooling.

In the hardest cases, and wherever possible, they are given help by the Brothers of Charity, who run the school. Yet even then, some of the parents have still been unable to find the money

for the basic materials, such as books, stationery and school uniforms. As a result, many of the pupils suddenly started missing school, or even dropping out altogether.

There was a danger that they would end up being forced to work in the brick kilns themselves, just to support their families. So, for them, the cycle of poverty would always continue.

But thanks to your generous support, the school has been able to break this cycle. In the past year, 200 of the poorest pupils, including many who have lost one

or both parents, were able to be subsidised and given a satchel, schoolbooks, writing materials and a uniform.

Thanks to this help, the children were not only better able to study and successfully complete the school year but – and perhaps still more importantly – have gained a new sense of dignity, self-worth and a new perspective on life.

Parents who were unsure if they could even afford to send their children to school have been encouraged to do so – with the result that the school attendance has actually increased by some 20-30%.

TESTIMONIES

Aster Wasseem, 44 years old, mother and teacher at the “Canon Triest Middle School”

*My name is Mrs **Aster Waseem**, and for the last eight years, I have been teaching at Canon Triest School in Eisa Nagar. Our school is located in an area where many families work in brick kilns, and they face numerous hardships.*

Frequently, when the kilns are closed due to heavy rainfall during certain seasons in Pakistan, families struggle to find even one meal a day. These challenging circumstances make it very difficult for parents to send their children to school.

At Canon Triest, we are determined to help free these families from the cycle of bonded labor through education.

This year, thanks to the generous donations we received, the school distributed free books, stationery, and uniforms to our students. This initiative has made a significant difference. In the past, we experienced low student attendance because while some parents could manage to pay minimal fees, they often couldn't afford educational materials.

Now, thanks to the support from our donors, these families feel relieved as their children receive the necessary supplies for their education. We've seen a remarkable increase in class attendance, and I am genuinely grateful for this change. My heartfelt thanks go out to those who have so generously contributed to making this possible.

Anaya Shakeel, 10 years old, 5 siblings, student at the “Canon Triest Middle School”

My name is **Anaya Shakeel**, and I am a 10-year-old student living in Eisa Nagar, Lahore. My family's life revolves around the demanding and often harsh realities of working in a brick kiln, where my parents toil long hours to make ends meet. We reside in a modest rented house, which adds to the financial pressures we face daily.

Education is a passion of mine, and I hold a deep desire to help my family escape from the cycle of bonded labour that traps many in our community.

However, financial constraints have made it incredibly difficult for my parents to afford even the minimal school fees I need to attend class. Thankfully, the management at Canon Triest School has shown incredible compassion for families like ours.

Many parents struggle to pay tuition, yet the school encourages us to pursue our education regardless of our financial situations.

This year has been especially transformative for us. The school took a meaningful step by distributing free syllabus books, notebooks, stationery, and uniforms to its students.

I can't express how uplifting this initiative has been! The joy and relief among both students and parents are palpable, as these essential materials are crucial for our education, and many families simply cannot provide them.

I am overflowing with gratitude for these changes. With the provision of free educational materials, I can now concentrate fully on my studies without the fear of falling behind due to a lack of resources.

Instead of being confined at home because of missing books and supplies, I am eager to learn and thrive at school. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the generous donors and the dedicated management at our school for their unwavering support in making this possible!

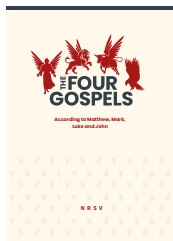


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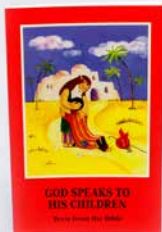


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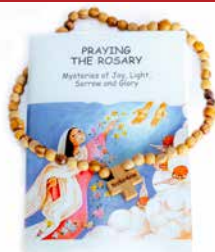
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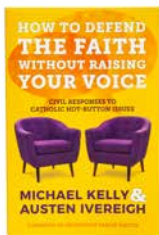
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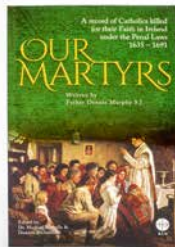
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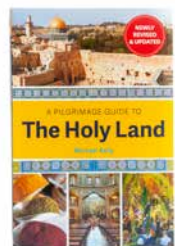
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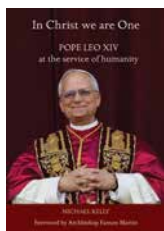
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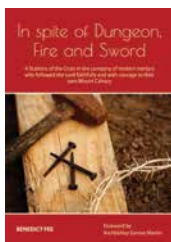
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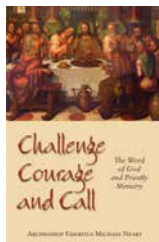
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SUCCESS STORY!

Vital Pastoral Work of Diocesan Communities

CUBA



“The pastor must have the smell of his sheep, know their names, share their paths and their struggles.” Echoing Pope Francis, **Leonardo Díaz**, a Colombian seminarian, thanks you for supporting him in his vocational apostolate and pastoral outreach in the community of Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (Our Lady of the Snows) in Mantua, a remote municipality in Cuba’s westernmost Pinar del Río province.

For around a year, Leonardo and four other seminarians had to take on the full pastoral responsibility of three parishes with no priest, plus one parish with only a formator priest present, in one of the poorest areas of the diocese.

The people in these communities are faced with daily challenges such as changes in the prices of goods, shortages of drinking water, fuel for generators, and means of transport.

The seminarians also encountered a sense of discouragement among the faithful caused by the very harsh reality they live in. But these hardships also

strengthened their faith: at the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish in Sandino, there was no nativity scene for Christmas, so the seminarians printed and mounted figure parts on cardboard and built a full-size nativity next to the sanctuary themselves.

Your loving care made it possible for these seminarians to accompany children, teens and young people in their vocational discernment, which in turn has deepened Leonardo’s own vocation. *“I understood that my role wasn’t to ‘convince,’ but to create the space of silence and prayer where God could speak,”* explains Leonardo.

As a benefactor of ACN, you understand how important the integral formation of our future priests is. By supporting the pastoral work of seminarians like Leonardo in Cuba, you help these future priests bring together theory and practice – thus discerning their vocation in a real context and developing pastoral skills through closeness to people.

This provides them a real experience of sacrifice, mission, and what it means to be a priest who walks with the faithful.

“The people of Mantua, with their warm and deeply rooted faith, were my best teachers,” affirms Leonardo. His gratitude is immense for having had this opportunity to serve the faithful and have a *“personal encounter with Christ.”*

He prays that he may be faithful to all he has received, and that *“one day, God willing, I may be a priest who is close, joyful, and ready to serve.”* You can give this gift to other seminarians like Leonardo.

Bishop Juan de Dios Hernández-Ruiz, bishop of Pinar del Río, needs your generous support to be able to continue with this pastoral work.

To our brothers and sisters in Cuba, seminarians are a sign of hope and freshness — they revitalise pastoral life with their enthusiasm, act as a generational bridge, and lighten the load on priests and lay leaders. And for the Church, it’s an investment in the future.

Will you continue to support these priestly vocations in their learning that a future priest is, above all, a servant?



CUBA: Seminarians on a mission in the community of Mella.

Pilgrims of Peace

UKRAINE



Through your love, you have gifted young people in **Ukraine** a space where they can foster hope for peace in their homeland. War continues to have a devastating impact on the country, particularly on the wellbeing of young people. With your help, the Franciscan Friars Minor Conventual are sharing the hope of our faith with Ukraine's youth.

For many years, the Franciscan Friars have held an annual youth meeting, bringing together young people to help them grow in faith and love at the Archdiocesan Sanctuary of **Our Lady of Mount Carmel** in Bólszowce, in the Ivano-Frankivsk region of Ukraine.

This year, the gathering has a special meaning, marking the Jubilee Year of

St Francis of Assisi on the 800th anniversary of his death. As **Pope Leo** wrote in his letter announcing the Jubilee Year, St Francis had a complete view of peace. Peace was not only to be thought of between people, but also between the entirety of creation.

For the friars and the people of Ukraine, St Francis' understanding of peace and harmony with creation has a special meaning. The daily tragedy of war has brought home to all the importance of prayer for peace, and also the need to foster forgiveness, support one another and find ways of dealing with trauma.

This year, thanks to your loving support, the gathering also features a walking pilgrimage for Peace and Reconciliation,

with young people gathered by various Franciscan communities setting out from six cities to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, where a parish feast and the ecumenical youth meeting will take place.

This year's meeting includes prayer, adoration, group meetings, talks, question-and-answer sessions and Holy Mass with the Metropolitan.

Through your loving support, you have gifted young people in Ukraine a space where they can grow in faith and

fellowship and find healing amid the daily tragedy of war.

During this Jubilee Year, you have helped the Church and the Franciscan Friars Minor Conventual in Ukraine realise the mission of St Francis, accompanying young people on a pilgrimage of peace and leading them into a deeper relationship with God.

We pray that you will continue to join us on this path of healing as we accompany the Church and people of Ukraine during these times of need.



UKRAINE: Ecumenical Youth Gathering in Bilshivtsi in 2026.

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





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



AI and What it Means to be Human

FR DOMINIC MCGRATTAN

When **Pope Leo XIV** published *Magnifica humanitas*, his recent encyclical on artificial intelligence, many were surprised that the Vatican had entered a debate more commonly associated with research laboratories, technology companies and government regulators.

Yet the surprise perhaps reveals something about the debate itself. Artificial intelligence is no longer simply a technical question. Increasingly, it has become a question about what it means to be human and the kind of society we wish to build.

The Church does not claim expertise in computer science, nor is Pope Leo attempting to compete with engineers or software developers. His intervention is significant for a different reason. He recognises that artificial intelligence has become more than a matter of technological capability. It is also a question about the human person and the society we are shaping.

Artificial intelligence undoubtedly promises remarkable advances. Few would wish to forego the possibilities it presents in healthcare, scientific discovery and countless other fields. The question is not whether innovation should be welcomed. It is whether innovation alone can tell us where it ought to lead.

Last year, the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University welcomed Boston College's **Fr Philip Larrey**, one of the world's leading voices on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

A philosopher, theologian and adviser to both the Vatican and leaders within the technology sector, he spent time with researchers and academics from across the university whose work lies at the forefront of developments in the field.

What interested him most, however, was the opportunity to explore the wider questions that artificial intelligence raises with those working at the cutting edge of its development.

No single discipline can answer such questions alone.

Indeed, one of the more encouraging features of the current debate is the renewed attention it has brought to disciplines sometimes regarded as peripheral to practical decision-making.

Philosophy, ethics and theology do not offer technical solutions to technological problems. What they offer is a tradition of reflection upon questions that become unavoidable whenever societies acquire new forms of power. What is intelligence? What does it mean to act freely? What

distinguishes calculation from judgement? Are there areas of human life where efficiency should not be the highest value?

Such questions may appear abstract until one realises that they already shape decisions about healthcare, education, employment, criminal justice and democratic life.

Artificial intelligence has exposed a curious tension within contemporary intellectual culture. We have become remarkably skilled at analysing the world. We are often less comfortable evaluating the ends towards which that knowledge is directed.

A university can explain how a technology works, estimate its economic impact and model its likely consequences. All of this matters. Yet eventually a further question presents itself: does this development genuinely serve the human person, or does it simply extend our power?

That question cannot be answered by data alone.

Perhaps this is why the debate surrounding artificial intelligence has proved so compelling. Beneath the excitement surrounding innovation lies an older and more enduring question: not simply what machines can do, but what belongs uniquely to human judgement. Artificial intelligence can generate answers with astonishing speed. It cannot assume responsibility for them. It can assist decision-making. It cannot bear the moral weight of a decision.

Wisdom begins precisely there.

Wisdom involves judgement. It requires the ability to distinguish not simply between success and failure, but between better and worse, just and unjust, worthy and unworthy. It carries responsibility for consequences. It cannot be delegated in the way a task can be delegated.

This, ultimately, is where Pope Leo's intervention deserves attention.

One need not share his religious convictions to recognise the importance of the challenge he poses. Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly reshape many aspects of our common life. The deeper question is whether we possess the intellectual resources to govern that transformation wisely.

Universities emerged from the conviction that different disciplines illuminate different aspects of reality, and that truth is best pursued through their encounter rather than their isolation. Artificial intelligence may prove to be one of the developments that invites us to recover something of that vision – not because it threatens humanity, nor because it promises salvation, but because it confronts us with questions that no single discipline can answer alone.

Those are questions worthy of every university. They are also questions that will shape the kind of society we become.

Fr Dominic McGrattan is chaplain at Queen's University, Belfast.

Reflection – Spirit, Wind & Breath

DAVIDE BARBIERI

REFLECTION

R*uach* is a Hebrew word that signifies ‘*breath*,’ ‘*wind*,’ and ‘*spirit*.’



To me, it is important that we understand the power every Catholic receives on the day of Baptism. Many Catholics follow the Bible in their daily decisions and challenges. Unfortunately, many do not fully understand it or use it as an instrument to find inner peace and discernment.

Through this personal reflection, I hope that by opening your soul to the gift of wisdom, many will begin to call upon, rely on, and live in the power of *Ruach*—the wind and breath of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

These words are taken from my personal prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, where I asked Jesus to grant me words of understanding. Some references are inspired by the Holy Bible.

I hope you will enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed praying over it and writing it. It is my gift to the Lord and to all benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need Ireland.

SPIRIT, WIND, AND BREATH

The Hebrew word *ruach* carries several meanings: spirit, wind, and breath.

It describes the air between heaven and earth - sometimes calm, sometimes powerful - and, by extension, the life-giving space in which humanity lives and moves. In Scripture, *ruach* reveals something profound about the Holy Spirit: God’s life-giving presence active in creation and within every believer.

The Bible often uses simple images from nature to communicate spiritual realities. Wind expresses the power, freedom, and transcendence of God. It cannot be controlled or confined. As Scripture reminds us, it can be a force capable of “*splitting mountains and breaking rocks*” (1 Kings 19:11). In the same way, the Holy Spirit acts with divine freedom, beyond human control.

At other times, *ruach* is understood as breath. Breath is intimate, life-giving, and essential. Without it, life ceases. This image reveals the gentleness and closeness of God’s Spirit.

Just as breath sustains physical life, the Holy Spirit sustains spiritual life. When

we neglect prayer, our souls can become spiritually suffocated, longing once again for the life-giving breath of God.

The Spirit reveals Himself differently according to our needs and circumstances. Moses encountered God's presence amid thunder and fire on Mount Sinai, while **Elijah** encountered Him in a gentle breeze on Mount Horeb (*Exodus* 19:18–19; *1 Kings* 19:12). Both experiences reveal the same Holy Spirit - powerful yet tender, majestic yet intimate.

One of the most beautiful biblical illustrations of *ruach* is found in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (*Ezekiel* 37:1–14). Here, wind, breath, and Spirit come together.

The dry bones receive breath and come to life, symbolising God's promise to restore His people through the gift of His Spirit. This is more than physical renewal; it is a sign of the new life that God offers through the Holy Spirit.



THE HOLY SPIRIT: CREATOR

From the beginning of creation, the Holy Spirit has been the source of life, order, and beauty. Where there was chaos, the Spirit brought harmony. The Spirit continues this work today, constantly renewing creation and drawing humanity closer to God.

To invoke the Holy Spirit as Creator is to place ourselves entirely in God's hands. It means surrendering our plans, fears, and limitations, trusting that God can shape us according to His will. Like clay in the hands of the potter, we allow God to mould and transform us.

The prophet Isaiah expresses this beautifully: *"We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand"* (*Isaiah* 64:8). Mary demonstrated this same openness when she responded to God's call: *"Let it be done to me according to your word"* (*Luke* 1:38).

When we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we allow God to renew our hearts, strengthen our faith, and guide us into the fullness of life He desires for us.

PERSONAL CONCLUSION

When Christ died, the Gospel writers tell us that *"darkness came over the whole land"* (*Mark* 15:33). This is a profound allusion to the primordial chaos into which humanity had fallen because of sin - a darkness that reached its climax in the killing of Christ.

In this grand vision, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms chaos into cosmos. This time, however, it is not the vaguely understood “*Spirit of God*,” but the Spirit flowing from Christ on the Cross.

The chaos is no longer the primordial darkness of creation, but the moral darkness of sin and evil; and the cosmos is no longer merely the material universe, but the Church itself.

God performed this miracle in my own life on 21 August 1996, in a dark and lifeless train station in Turin, in north-west **Italy**. Through a simple man named Peter - whom the homeless affectionately called “*the Saint*” - God breathed the Holy Spirit into my heart with a power that felt like a spiritual explosion. Yet at the same time, it was as gentle as a breeze.

No words can adequately describe what happened to me that day. I truly encountered the love and divinity of God in a way I had never experienced before.

I was twenty-five years old, but spiritually dead. From that moment onward, the darkness of sin that had dominated my life began to give way to the light of Christ. I found the courage to rise from a life marked by addiction and criminal behaviour and to follow Jesus, carried by the powerful yet gentle breath of the Holy Spirit.

Today, a few months after my fifty-fifth birthday, the Spirit transformed me, cleansed me, and filled me with hope, perseverance, and love for His Word. Nineteen years ago, He blessed me with a vocation through marriage. He has blessed my wife and me with six beautiful children, and together we strive to raise them according to the teachings of Jesus.

For the past decade, God has entrusted me with a mission: to be a voice for the voiceless - especially persecuted Christians, those suffering from addiction, and the poor within the Universal Church. Through fundraising and sharing my testimony, I seek to help Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) Ireland bring souls closer to Christ.

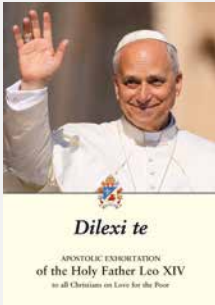
My prayer for everyone reflecting on this piece about the *Ruach*, the Holy Spirit, is that you too may be led by Him to support the work of ACN Ireland.

As a leading Catholic charity serving the suffering and persecuted Church throughout the world, ACN Ireland relies entirely on the generosity of its benefactors and receives no funding from the Irish State or major government aid programmes.

I invite you to join us in this mission. Together, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can help transform lives, strengthen faith, and bring hope to those who need it most.



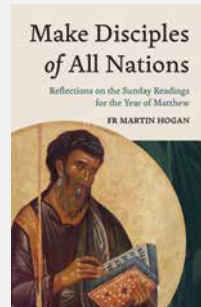
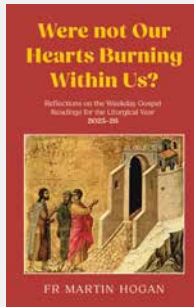
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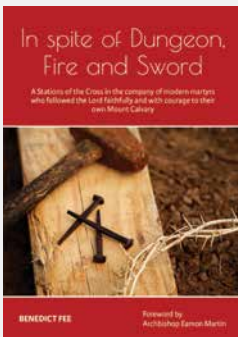
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Were not Our Hearts Burning Within Us? and *Make Disciples of All Nations* are two new titles from Fr Martin Hogan on weekday and Sunday reflections for the coming liturgical year.



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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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SEPTEMBER CROSSWORD

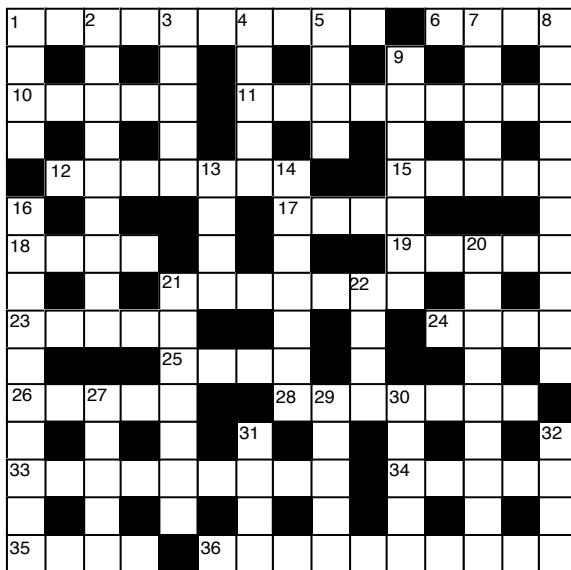
We are pleased to share with you our latest ACN crossword. We will print the answers in next month's edition.

Enjoy!

August Solution

Across 1 Can, 3 Charity shop, 8 Nicene Creed, 9 Vacuumed, 10 Plume, 11 Heels, 13 Helps, 15 Unearth, 16 Quarter, 20 Hated, 21 Seeds, 23 Conga, 24 Portable, 25 Vetted, 26 Lily-livered, 27 Lid.

Down 1 Conspicuous, 2 Nocturne, 3 Canoe, 4 Ravioli, 5 Youth, 6 Hamlet, 7 Pod, 12 Short-handed, 13 Hutch, 14 Squad, 17 Tawny owl, 18 Athlete, 19 Petrol, 22 Small, 24 Pal.



ACROSS

- 1 Dramatist (10)
- 6 Feathered creature (4)
- 10 Indian or Sri Lankan coin (5)
- 11 Abbey in Co Louth (9)
- 12 State formally (7)
- 15 Tier, stratum (5)
- 17 Major military alliance in this part of the world (1,1,1,1,)
- 18 It's hunted by a predator (4)
- 19 Dog associated with Wales (5)
- 21 6 across with magnificent plumage (7)
- 23 Supplement (5)
- 24 Joint covered by the patella (4)
- 25 The Eternal City (4)
- 26 Bunch or band (5)
- 28 Perished in water (7)
- 33 Witch (9)
- 34 Criminal burning (5)
- 35 Band worn round the waist or over the shoulder (4)
- 36 Use it when hanging garments out to dry (7,3)

DOWN

- 1 Meat from pigs (4)
- 2 Currently, right now (2,7)
- 3 Castor (5)
- 4 Turkey's third-largest city (5)
- 5 & 31d A source of miraculous water (4,4)
- 7 What tusks are made of (5)
- 8 Resolute, can't be put off (10)
- 9 Knoll (7)
- 13 Skin complaint characterised by pimples (4)
- 14 Brought in a piece of legislation (7)
- 16 Says sorry (10)
- 20 Silver medal competitors (7-2)
- 21 Confuse, mystify (7)
- 22 Name adopted by Gabrielle Chanel, fashion great (4)
- 27 Man-eating monsters (5)
- 29 Take a test again (5)
- 30 Huge marine mammal (5)
- 31 See 5 down
- 32 Minor problem, catch (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.

“Please pray for my family as we try to come to terms with a recent bereavement.”

“Pray for all of the souls in purgatory who have nobody to pray for them.”

“Please pray for those who struggle with addiction in all of its forms. May God guide those who want to overcome their problems and comfort them on their journey.”

“Please pray that the younger generations don’t forget about God. So many have no sense of God’s love for them and may never truly know him in their lifetime.”

“Pray for our priests who are overworked and underappreciated. Everyone knows a priest who is trying his best to minister to communities in challenging conditions. Please take the time to pray for them.”

“Please pray for me after my hip replacement. The recovery is taking longer than expected and I still can’t walk without pain after a few months.”

“Pray that family values remain at the centre of Irish homes across the country. The family must always come first. Let us pray that we never lose this precious connection.”

“Pray for victims of domestic abuse. May the Lord heal them and give them solace and hope.”

“Please pray for my Latin Mass community as we have been recently told that our Mass must come to an end. Pray for fewer restrictions to this beautiful and holy Mass.”

“Pray for those who see no other option outside of suicide. Lord give them the strength to see the beauty of your ways and enrich their lives.”

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



The Triumph of the Cross



For you placed the salvation of the
human race on the wood of the Cross,
so that, where death arose,
life might again spring forth
and the evil one, who conquered on a tree,
might likewise on a tree be conquered,
through Christ our Lord.

(Preface of the Triumph of the Cross)

AMEN

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