

MIRROR

Aid to the Church in Need

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“We are all called to comfort our brothers and sisters, to testify that God alone can eliminate the causes of existential and spiritual tragedies.”

Pope Francis, Angelus message, December 7, 2014

Priests and sisters are the hands of God. Today they reach out to the poor – even high up in the Andes.

Dear Friends,

The Year of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis, will run throughout most of 2016. And so the Holy Father draws our attention to one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s nature. There is no greater or more consoling truth than the truth that God is Love and Mercy. Indeed, He even reveals Himself to us as Father, so we may confidently address God with childlike familiarity, as “Abba – Father”.

But if God is infinitely good, then why does He permit suffering? Is He not in some way responsible for all the misery in the world? Absolutely not. God never wanted suffering and death, just as He never wanted their cause, which is sin. In His mercy, God took upon Himself the suffering of the entire creation. And by bearing it in infinite love He overcame evil and gave all suffering a redemptive power, a redeeming value. The sin of the first man, and the sins of us all have given the evil one increasing power. In his hatred, Satan uses this power to hurt us through catastrophes and wars, through suffering and death and wherever possible, he uses it to separate us from God. But

through love he can be disempowered and defeated.

When suffering, sickness or misfortune befall us – if we, like Jesus, make them into an offering through love, then He can continue his work of redemption in us, so to speak. Saint Paul confesses this, in fact, when he writes: “It is no longer I who live,



God has given suffering redemptive power!

but Christ who lives in me.” In other words, “it is no longer I who suffer, but Christ who suffers in me.” If we can bear suffering, with our gaze fixed on Jesus, enduring it in His strength, then we can strip Satan of the power that our sins have given him. Moreover, we can apply the redemptive value of our suffering, borne with selflessness and love, to others. And so it becomes a blessing and a saving power, not only for us, but also for those entrusted to our love. This is the profound mystery of Divine Mercy, of redemption and co-redemption. What a consolation it is for us Christians to know this! And how greatly this divine consolation is

needed – not only by those visited by war and disaster, but also by the sick, the lonely and the elderly. We all have a great mission – to participate through love in the salvation of the world, in the victory over evil. This is exactly what Pope Saint John Paul II described when he wrote of “a marvellous exchange of spiritual gifts, in virtue of which the holiness of one benefits others in a way far exceeding the harm which the sin of one has inflicted upon others. There are people who leave in their wake a surfeit of love, of suffering borne well, of purity and truth, which involves and sustains others.”

Dear Friends, you are not just giving money, but also consolation – and in doing so you even forget your own needs. May your merciful generosity, which brings such blessings to so many others, be a source of consolation to you as well.

With my grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

*Father Martin M. Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant*



Support for our shepherds

Saint Augustine defines mercy as “our heart, sharing in the suffering of another person”. Saint Thomas Aquinas goes further and says that the only person who shows true mercy is the person who actively strives to alleviate the suffering of others.

This is exactly the spirit in which the Institute of Saint Augustine, in Kampala, **Uganda** strives to carry out its work. Suffering and need can take many forms, and can be experienced by priests as well as lay people. In applying to ACN for help, the Institute wrote: “Those who always only give and care for others can risk

one day becoming emotionally and spiritually exhausted themselves.” Priests pouring out their lives like this need a time of prayer and recollection. If he does not have time to spare for his own spiritual development he can run the risk of sinking into a kind of spiritual rut. He needs to recharge spiritually and theologically. And a priest whose seminary studies were made many years ago, before the technological revolution with its computers and smartphones – and that was only around 30 years ago – can run the risk of being thought outdated, backward or even IT illiterate. He may be in need of an “update”, so to speak. It is this sort of practical and theological knowledge, this spiritual refreshment and revival of the priest’s relationship with his Creator, that the Institute of Saint Augustine offers to all priests, regardless of age or previous formation. It organises “alumni days” for former seminarians after 25 years; it teaches priests how to use computers and offers study sessions on the



Brotherly embrace: joyful reunion after years of arduous ministry.



Studying together: not simply a refresher course.

most recent papal documents. It organises retreats and prayer sessions, and gives health advice for those suffering burnout or doubts about their mission. Every priest has his own particular struggles, and the better he can cope with them, the better he can then minister to his flock. Identifying this need and supporting these shepherds – this is the mission of mercy here. We are helping too, as we know how greatly such institutes are needed in our hectic times – and not just in Uganda!

Food for the body, food for the soul

The rising number of seminarians in the “Regina Pacis” seminary in Butembo, (DR Congo) inevitably raises the question, “Where are we to find bread to feed them all?” (cf. Mk 8:4).

In actual fact, the seminarians themselves help to multiply the loaves, so to speak, in this case. They sow and till the fields. They raise goats and sheep, growing cabbages, carrots, potatoes, bananas and beans, milk, wool and even providing meat once a week. It is just enough to feed the 67 seminarians and their tutors. But of course, even planting their own crops and raising their own livestock costs money. For example, two shepherds are

needed to look after the small flock of sheep, and from time to time the services of a vet are need – to say nothing of the seed for the sowing or the irrigation of the crops. But in an unstable region like this they also give independence and guarantee the continuing studies of the seminarians. And so the seed of the Word can likewise fall here, quite literally, on fertile soil.

Many applicants continue to knock on the door. So the bishop and the rector of the seminary want to extend the building further, so that all who have a genuine vocation can take their place at table in the seminary, both in the refectory and in the classroom. They too will bear fruit later, par-



Each seminarian has his own particular task. Joseph is working in the cabbage patch.

ticularly for their local parish communities. We have promised a contribution of **€15,000** for this investment in the future.

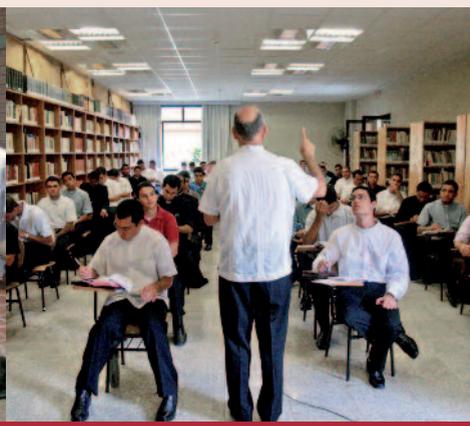


Grateful for God's call

The criteria for acceptance in the seminaries have now been overhauled worldwide, since the abuse scandals of around five years ago. Now there is greater attention to psychological health and a well-adjusted character.

Now there is only one area in which the future priest is allowed to be somewhat "crazy"— and that is in his love of God. In fact this burning love is a crucial element in the formation of his priestly personality. We receive numerous letters from the almost ten thousand seminarians we support worldwide. One virtue we particularly notice in them is gratitude. Gratitude to God, who has granted them this vocation, and gratitude to you all, in whom they see the hand of Divine Providence. For example, Gover Chavez of Yurimaguas in **Peru** is conscious of the "difficulties of the world" and of his own weakness – yet he sees that God nevertheless helps him to fulfil his vocation with understanding. Julio Cesar, at the same seminary, sees further and sees your help as a spur to remain faithful to his vocation and "to be able to express his gratitude one day in service to the Church". All of them – Gover, Julio, Enrique, Juan and the rest – justify us in the hope that they will worthily receive the sacrament of ordination and allow themselves to be enlightened by it in the way that Saint Augustine described: "The spiritual power of the sacrament is like the light: the one who is to be illuminated by it receives it in its clarity." There are 26 young men from Yurimaguas preparing for the priesthood, one of the very poor apostolic vicariates of Peru. Your support of **€7,200** strengthens them in their vocation.

Likewise in the 172 candidates, from 27 different dioceses, currently studying for the priesthood in the seminary of Christ the Priest (Cristo Sacerdote) in La Ceja, **Colombia**, we can confidently hope for



Stages in the life of the seminarian: clothing, study, prayer, ordination.



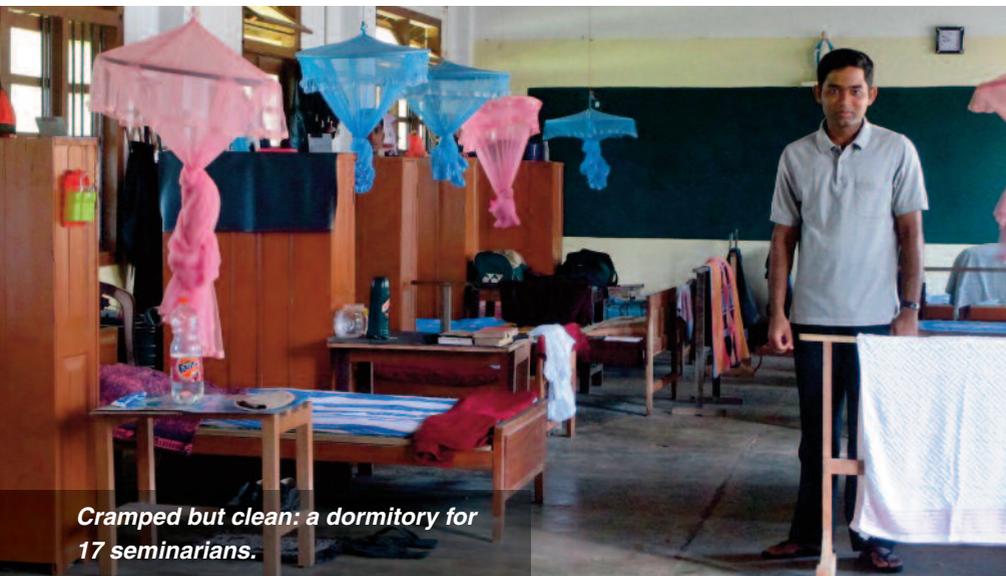
faithful pastors and missionaries. We are helping here with **€21,500**. The selection criteria are strict, and the expectations high. German Dario sensed his vocation even as a small child. "One day a Capuchin priest came to our village and sang the song El Sembrador (the Sower). That struck me very deeply and I knew that this was the path for me." His mother did not understand him, nor did his parish priest. He entered the seminary, but was forced to work because of financial problems. Now, at the age of 32, he is delighted to have returned. "I thank God with all my heart for this wonderful vocation, and also all the benefactors who are strengthening me in my vocation. You will always be in my prayers, so that God may reward you

with many blessings." Reinaldo too had to take a roundabout route. But the seed of his vocation – planted in his heart by his grandmother, "who taught me a great love for God and his Church", and by his parish priest "through the witness of his life" – sprouted and flourished within him. Reinaldo was successful in many occupations – and yet he still found his way into the seminary. Others have come here straight from school and are grateful, like Oscar Alirio, to everyone "who has helped me to hear the call of God within me, since the day he first tenderly called me". Each of the 172 candidates has his own story, for God calls each one by his name. And we have the privilege of helping each one to respond.

The many different paths of vocation



Christ, the guarantor of success



Cramped but clean: a dormitory for 17 seminarians.

Future priests must be witnesses to the Resurrection, Pope Francis teaches, for “ultimately, it is not administrators and managers we are training, but brothers and fathers, who will accompany the people on their journey through life.”

These words of the Pope are quoted with feeling by the rector of the Saint Francis Seminary in Jaffna, **Sri Lanka**, in his annual report. For his most heartfelt concern is to train

good shepherds, and the words of Pope Francis are an encouragement to him. Naturally, all the other subjects are also taught, starting with Philosophy, via Canon Law and right through to Dogmatic Theology. But after 25 years of civil war people in Sri Lanka are in need of a helping hand rather than a wagging finger. Love and Logos – this is the rector’s motto, which echoes the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “Love alone is not enough; only when love and truth agree, then man is made free.”

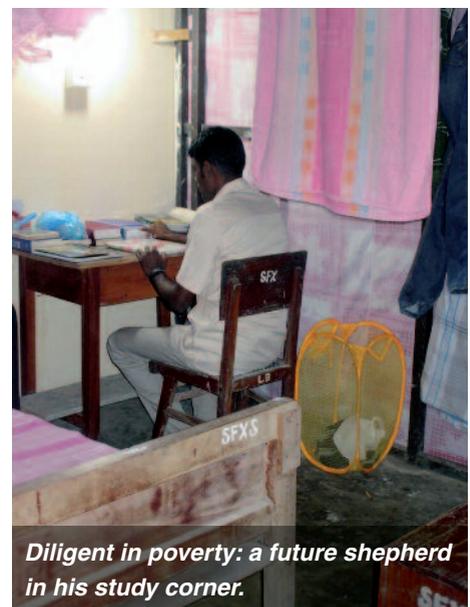
Hold on to your relationship with Christ.

The seminary in Jaffna is almost 35 years old. Several times the seminarians were forced to flee during the war. They could take no more than a few books and other essentials with them. And yet despite these circumstances, 125 priests were trained during this time. At first there were just five of them; now there are 34 young men, and it is becoming cramped – very cramped. At present they share two large dormitories. Yet the

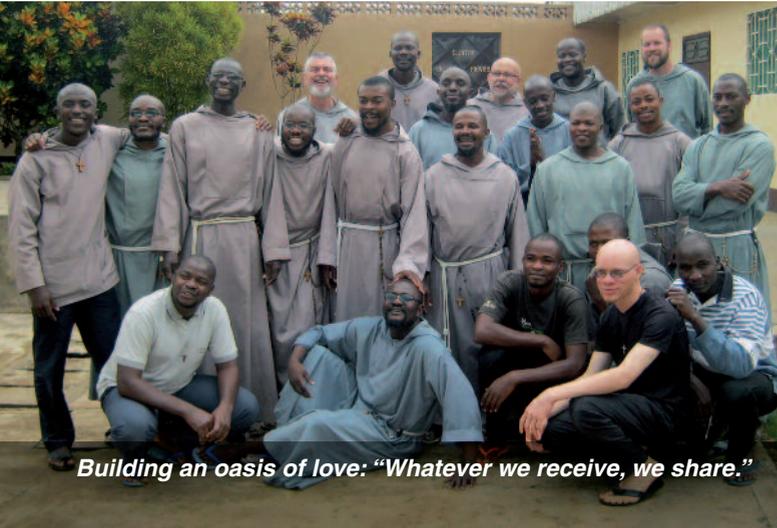
senior seminarians, who are close to ordination, should really have rooms of their own. For as the rector tells them, in the words of the Pope, “even if you lose everything else in life, you must hold on to your profound relationship with Christ in your hearts.” That is why they need a room to which they can retire, alone to seek communion with Christ. So now the seminary is building a new block to house these more senior students. We are supporting the project with **€106,500**. For in the words of Pope Francis, the relationship with Christ is the “guarantee of success, the way forward.” By helping these seminarians in this way you will be showing them that

Christ is indeed the Good Shepherd, who unites love and truth in His Church.

However, seminarians cannot live on words alone. They must eat, drink, sleep as well. And eating and drinking are likewise opportunities for fraternal communion among the seminarians. But they also need a table to sit at and a chair to sit on. As they don’t even have enough for all the students at the seminary of Saint Francis Xavier in Lahore, **Pakistan**. It has been in existence for 15 years, and there are numerous vocations. It has 92 seminarians preparing for the priesthood, including 18 students from different religious orders. Already they have had to extend the refectory, and now they are still short of four tables and 25 chairs, plus another 25 chairs and desks for the study rooms. And there is a pressing need for another 40 beds as well. The diocese and the seminary between them have just about managed for the building work. But now there is nothing left for the furniture. We have promised them **€9,000**, as these future witnesses to the Resurrection ought also to be able to live and study in dignity!



Diligent in poverty: a future shepherd in his study corner.



Building an oasis of love: "Whatever we receive, we share."



The blind, the poor and the lepers: "They are all our brothers and sisters."

"It is love that redeems"

"Bringing the Good News to someone means saying to him, you too, you too are loved by God. And not only to say this, but also truly to think it. And not only to think it, but also to behave in such a way towards this person that he discovers within himself that there is indeed something great: I too am redeemed."

Brother Denis-Antoine of the Franciscan Emmanuel community in **Cameroon** not only quotes Saint Francis but actually thinks and lives these words, together with his 22 brothers and 95 lay members in five dioceses of the country. They go out and visit leprosy sufferers, blind people, prisoners, young people, families, and pray with them.

*Comfort the sorrowful!
A work of mercy.*

"They are my brothers and sisters. In their eyes I see Christ, I see the joy of the redeemed." It was 15 years ago when Brother Denis-Antoine founded the community, together with a few other brothers from Canada, in the diocese of Nkongsamba. Their joy is infectious. "We are children of God. What harm can befall us?"

Their infectiousness also rubbed off on the bishop of the diocese at the time. He invited the community to establish a spiri-

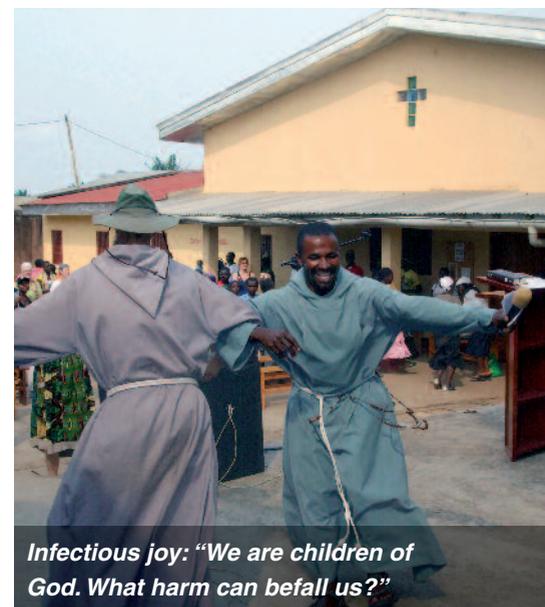
tual centre where seminarians could prepare for their future life, shortly before ordination, and where active priests could gather new strength after years of painstaking labour in the missions. "We give, and we expect nothing in return. And what we do receive, we share." And the present Bishop Dieudonné Espoir Atangana, likewise sees in the Saint Francis Centre a means of support and spiritual renewal for priests and bishops – and for the laity also. But the need is great; many priests are exhausted, some of them burned out. They need a place of silent retreat. So the centre needs to be extended. Once the extension work is completed it

will be able to accommodate over 100 people. Then there are the daily visitors for Holy

Mass and catechesis. For this too they need a large conference hall and public toilets. And at the same time the community kitchens need to be properly furnished and equipped for both modern and traditional methods of cooking. Brother Denis-Antoine has already found help for the furniture, but the overall construction costs fall heavy on his small budget. We have promised him **€150,000**.

"Some of the local bishops' conferences would very much like to hold their retreat

days here", he tells us. "As they also need a few days of silence and recollection from time to time. They too need understanding and to be reminded again and again: I am redeemed." In short, the Saint Francis Centre is an oasis. Islam is advancing in the north of the country, while in the south Evangelical sects and superstitions are spreading like wild fire. "The remedy for all this is love, is friendship." The radiance of this spiritual centre is the power of love. "It is love that redeems, that takes shape in our friendship with one another. A friendship built on mutual trust and esteem. Such a friendship conveys the feeling of being loved by God." ●



Infectious joy: "We are children of God. What harm can befall us?"



Success story in East Timor

God speaks to His children – “Maromak koalia ba nia oan sira”. This is the name of the ACN Child’s Bible in East Timor. The Salesians of Don Bosco have now distributed copies to the 50 primary schools in their parishes. It is used here as part of the school curriculum, and now many teachers in state schools are increasingly interested in this little children’s Bible. And so the Good News success story continues. The children are delighted with it, and so too is the provincial Superior of the Salesian Fathers, Father João Paulino Aparício Guterres. He thanks you for your generosity, on behalf of the children, and the teachers too.



**Johannes
Freiherr
Heereman,**
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Just under two years ago I told you how we felt the time had come for ACN to adopt a more unified, worldwide identity as a charity. For even as the world seems to be falling apart, yet in terms of the information media it is growing ever closer together. Having a unified name and identity enables us to present just who we are – and what makes us distinctive in terms of our priorities as an international charity – in a much more coherent manner.

Initially we attempted, with your help, to think of a new international name to be used in all our different national offices. We ended up with over 600 different suggestions, but none of them, we felt, would ultimately justify the risk of changing our name, which for so long has symbolised the immense trust placed in us over so many years by our benefactors in all the different countries where we are present. So our name will remain unchanged. But it will be supplemented, in every country, by the abbreviated form ACN – already familiar in the English-speaking world. And the graphic design of the name will also be unified across all countries in order to emphasise that we are one unified charity. The first step will be the change of name at our international headquarters in Germany, from “Kirche in Not” to the universally recognised form: “Aid to the Church in Need”, or ACN for short. Nothing dramatic, then, but still a step forward for us. Thank you once again for your continuing faithful support.

Need, love and thanks – your letters

A drop in the ocean

Just a little drop, for our suffering brethren in the East: we enclose the offerings from Jeanne’s Baptism. Our little girl has just been operated on and offered up her sufferings in her own way for the Christian martyrs. She’s doing well now.

A benefactress in France

Wedding gift for eternity

I had long wanted to help persecuted Christians, but didn’t know how. As my wedding day approached, the desire grew stronger, so I asked ACN’s Madrid office how I could combine this desire to help with my wedding. The solution they suggested was simple but beautiful: have a Mass celebrated for each wedding guest. This way I would be helping the priests of the persecuted Church and at the same time giving our guests a spiritual gift for all eternity. So I gave one hundred Mass offerings and at the same time sent out Holy Mass

offering cards to each of the guests, so that they would know where it came from and at the same time perhaps use the idea themselves for other occasions.

A young bride in Madrid, Spain

Bringing God’s Word to the children

I have recently realised the importance and power of God’s word in the Bible, something I wish had happened in my childhood. How different my life would have been. This word is now changing me and changing my life, and I want for this to happen for others also. I believe it is important for children to be taught God’s word at an early age, and so I am enclosing a cheque for \$50 to enable you to provide Bibles for children, or to spend as you see fit.

Thank you for doing God’s works in the world, and for spreading God’s light and strength in the darkness.

A benefactress in Australia

How to make your contribution to the Church in Need:

1. Go to our Head Office website: www.acn-intl.org
2. Click the **donate now** button
3. Either: Go to the National Office of *Aid to the Church in Need* in your country.
4. Or: Make an online donation (if you live in a country without an ACN National Office).



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