



The confessional: place of light and forgiveness.

“Let us bring to Christ’s Cross our joys, our sufferings and our failures. There we will find a Heart that is open to us and understands us, forgives us, loves us and calls us to bear this love in our lives, to love each person.”

**Pope Francis, Stations of the Cross with the young people,
26 July 2013, Rio de Janeiro**

Dear Friends,

As we begin this Lent in the Holy Year of Mercy, I would like to share a personal thought with you. It is about the adoration of the Holy Cross. From this Cross, and with the Precious Blood of our Redeemer, the healing balm of Divine Mercy is poured out upon us. By this means we are totally renewed, above all when, following a sincere confession, we have received the priestly absolution. For the Cross bears witness to the tragedy of sin and yet at the same time brings us the inextinguishable joy of forgiveness that makes us new.

When we look at the various characters who play a role during the days of the Passion, we see a sort of representative sample of all humanity. There is Judas, creeping about in the darkness with his hard-to-fathom act of betrayal. Then there is Peter, at once the most reckless and yet at the same time most cowardly of all the disciples. He was so reckless as to attack the servant of the high priest, and then so cowardly as to deny his association with Jesus in response to the questioning of a serving maid. Then there are the priests of

the Sanhedrin, who harangue and interrogate Jesus. Their minds are closed to the truth because they are too deeply entrenched in their own prejudices. Then there is Pilate too, for whom the truth must be subordinated to his career ambitions. There also are the “friends by night”, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, honourable and well-disposed and genuinely



The Cross brings us the joy of forgiveness!

interested in Jesus; yet at the same time they are fearful he will involve them in something risky, so they remain in the background. They would like to be on the side of truth, only they do not feel brave enough to accept the consequences. For in a world where truth is not “fashionable”, it takes a lot of courage – then as now.

We meet all these people on the road that leads from Gethsemane to Golgotha, the hill of the Cross. But despite all the bleakness and darkness, we do find a ray of light. It shines out in the women, the “pious women” in whom a pure and selfless love

overcomes all fear. This love flows into their human frailty, bringing strength and making their fidelity in a time of fear unshakeable.

How moving it is then, in this sense, to see Mary, the Mother, the New Eve, the First of the People of the Redeemed, who through the suffering of her Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart wonderfully unites herself with the New Adam in the work of our liberation and the renewal of the world. Mary takes us all to herself, like children whom she wishes to shield from every

danger. She is the perfect pattern of motherhood, including the spiritual motherhood of consecrated souls who have dedicated themselves to contemplation and to the works of mercy. Mary stood beneath the Cross. Let us turn to her, asking her to help us during this Lenten season to seek forgiveness, and also to forgive in our turn.

My grateful blessing on you all

*Cardinal Mauro Piacenza,
President of ACN*



Sharing the little they have



Comforting the elderly and lonely – merciful love at 13,000 feet.

They are living on the “upper margins” of society – at an altitude of 13,000 feet among the poor and underprivileged. Here in the cold air of the Andes the Sisters of Merciful Jesus bring the warmth of faith, and with it love and hope.

The financial support we are being asked for by their bishop, Bishop Krzysztof Bialasik of the diocese of Oruro, in **Bolivia**, is not much, yet they still share it

with the families, however little, and even if it is barely enough for themselves. For they share everything, above all with the children. For as Sister Victoria Edyta explains, “These are children who have never experienced any joy in their lives, nor any tenderness, least of all any selfless love. Their family life is deeply shattered; everywhere there is an absence of hope.” The Sisters take these children on little outings, give them blankets and bread and tell them about Jesus, Mary and Joseph and their simple home in Nazareth. Their merciful tenderness helps ease the children’s hunger for love and gives them fresh hope.

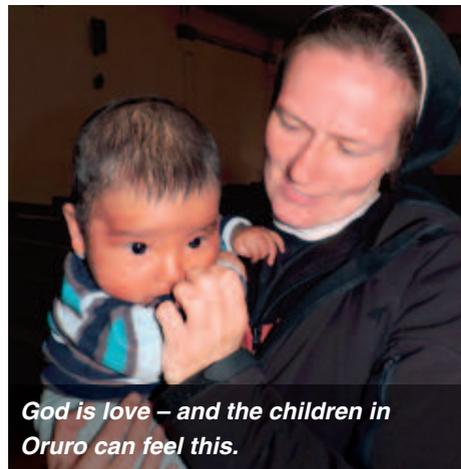
Life on these margins is harsh and full of privations. It is not only running water and electricity they lack. The challenges, both spiritual and physical, are hard. Yet they still share everything. For the love that drives them is a wellspring that does not dry up. We have promised them our support – €50 a month for each of the Sisters. That is small money for such big hearts.

Going out to the margins involves a high degree of selflessness. For these margins will always exist (“You will have the poor with you always...” Mt 26:11), but not necessarily these selfless Sisters. Fortunately, though, the Spirit is also blowing in Cochabamba (in central

Bolivia) and here too such Sisters are to be found, caring for the Church of the poor.

In the last ten years a

new community of Salesian missionary Sisters has been formed, born of the desire to nurture young girls in the human virtues and a Christian spirit, though not specifically in view of a religious vocation. By now there are five Sisters with permanent vows, 34 with temporary vows and another 21 novices preparing for a life in the service of others. But for all their selfless love, the younger Sisters and novices still need a roof over their heads and a place to pray and study. The remarkable surge in vocations has made the building of a separate house essential. We have promised €40,000, for this is a form of support that looks to the future and at the same time an appeal to selfless generosity on our own part.



God is love – and the children in Oruro can feel this.

Along with 22 other religious Sisters from eight different congregations, the Sisters fulfil the duties

The attraction of their selfless love...

of their mission, which their bishop summarises like this: “They make up, as far as possible, for the lack of priests – leading the pastoral work in the parishes, training lay catechists and preparing the people for the reception of the Sacraments. They visit the families of the poor, and the lonely and elderly. They organise meals for the homeless, retreat days for young people, women and men. They care for homeless migrants, for the lonely and abandoned. They go into the prisons, taking the message of salvation there too – and especially to the children living in the prisons with their mothers. In a word, they go out to the margins of society, just as Pope Francis says.”



The joy of self-giving – novices in Cochabamba.

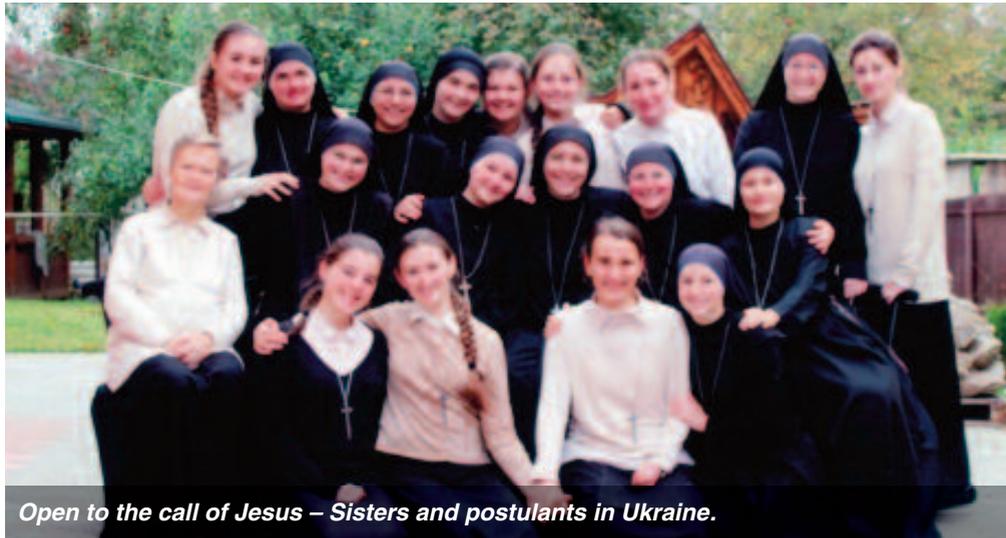


Called by God to serve

When priests and religious no longer weep, something is wrong. We need to weep for our infidelity, to weep for the all the pain in our world, to weep for all those people who are cast aside, to weep for the elderly who are abandoned, for children who are killed, for the things we don't understand. We need to weep when people ask us: "Why?". None of us has all the answers to all those questions "Why?". [...] And I don't have an answer.

This is what Pope Francis told the religious during his Africa trip. They were words addressed to the religious orders throughout the world. And in fact he does suggest a provisional answer: "I just look to Jesus on the Cross." God weeps also, and many religious Sisters are striving to dry His tears in silent prayer before their crucified Lord, or in praying and singing together in their chapel – assuming they have one. Where not, then perhaps we should say, "not yet".

In **Albania**, where the consequences of communism are still visible today, we are helping the Carmelite Sisters to build the choir enclosure within their convent chapel (€15,000). As for the discalced Carmelite Sisters in Florida, **Uruguay**, the wind and rain have reduced their old convent



Open to the call of Jesus – Sisters and postulants in Ukraine.

roof to tatters. We are giving them €40,100 so that they will not have to pray in the rain. In Ludza, in **Latvia**, the little convent of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus, with its couple of rooms and small chapel, has now become too small for the six Sisters and novices living there. Especially given that there are more young women knocking on the door and waiting. And on top of this there are requests from outside for "time out" in the convent and for various ongoing formation courses. Renovating the existing house is no longer an option. We have promised €50,000 for a new convent that will meet their still modest requirements. And

again, the six contemplative "Handmaids of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara" in Burshtyn, **Ukraine** would not be able to make ends meet without your help. One-third of their day is devoted to communal prayer, on top of which there are specific prayer times within the enclosure when they pray, study and read the Bible. They too have more young women knocking at the door, wanting to follow God's call. And as we all know, being called by God means "allowing ourselves to be chosen by God, in order to serve, not to be served" (Pope Francis). It is this work of service that helps to dry tears. ●

Building in total trust in God's providence

The seclusion in the hermitage lasts from Sunday evening to Saturday noon – five and a half days of intensive prayer.

The "Hermits of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus" in the diocese of Merida, in **Venezuela**, entrust themselves totally to divine providence – that is to say they rely on charity and on whatever they can earn from their own handiwork. They restore icons and religious images. Their apostolate is one of prayer for others. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is for them the expression and the very centre of the love of God for man. They meditate upon this Heart while they work, and place themselves totally in God's hands. They ask no specific price for their work; this is

entirely up to the discretion of those for whom they do it. Thus they live a life of poverty and devotion to God, which is the very foundation of their contemplative life. At present they are praying for donations, so that their convent can be built, together with its attached hermit cells, and so that they can take in the young women who are waiting to join them. In fact the foundations of the convent are already laid – but time is short, and in Venezuela building materials are hard to come by.

It was through providence that their needs were brought to our attention. We have already promised €10,000. Venezuela needs the prayers of these hermits. For prayer, as

Pope Francis says, is "the most powerful weapon of Christians". ●



Firm foundations: built on prayer; now the building work begins.



Teaching – a Work of Mercy

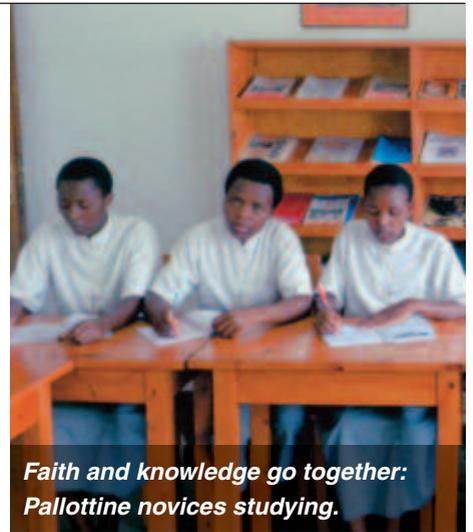
They are surely the ‘wise virgins’ of the Gospel. The Ursuline Sisters seek to “light our lamps from the love of Christ and so bring light to the lives of those around us”. They do this especially through teaching and education.

So we read on the website of this congregation, which is now almost 500 years old. For the past 60 years it has also been present and active in **India**. Now the diocese of Meerut in the underdeveloped state of Uttar Pradesh is asking the Sisters to per-



*Instructing the ignorant:
an Ursuline Sister teaching.*

form similar works of mercy there through their teaching and educational work. “Instructing the ignorant” – this, according to Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium*, is indeed one of the most important of the spiritual works of mercy. Such education is an essential part of our Faith, and the two together lead inevitably to greater social justice and welfare. The Sisters will be more than welcome in Meerut, where 70% of the men and 80% of the women are illiterate; many of them would love to be able to read the Sacred Scriptures. But where and how are the Sisters to live? Bishop Francis Kalist has promised to provide them with a small convent, but he is still short of **€25,000**. That is not much to ask to create the conditions for entire generations of children to benefit from this spiritual work of mercy. Who will help us to bring about this work?



*Faith and knowledge go together:
Pallottine novices studying.*

In **Rwanda** the Pallottine Sisters are already teaching in the kindergartens. And they go out and bring in the children off the streets, children who no longer go to school because they have no homes anymore or cannot afford to pay even the modest school fees. In doing this they have already saved many children from going off the rails. But it is the religious education that they see as their great challenge. In all nine dioceses of Rwanda they go, in twos or threes, into the schools in order to awaken the children’s interest in the Faith and the Sacraments, and they have been “very astonished” at just what fertile soil the seed of the Good News has fallen into. One of the fruits has been the new vocations. The number of their novices is growing. But all this work, and the many other works of mercy they perform, would not be possible without your generous help. We are supporting them with **€14,000**.

Showing God’s love for the little children

In the prelature of Ayaviri, in Peru, one child in every five is chronically undernourished, while four out of five adults cannot read or write.

The average monthly income here for a family of five children is around €45, while life expectancy is seven years less than in other regions of Peru. Despite this, the Faith is growing in the prelature of Ayaviri. More and more people, including many young people, are coming to the Masses in the 32 parishes, and the number of vocations is also growing. These are the little children to whom God reveals what he hides from so many of the wise and pru-

dent (Lk 10:21). Here, in the prelature of the little children, live the four Sisters of the enclosed congregation of the Holy Trinity Sisters. Their prayer is like a spiritual wellspring, helping to render the prelature so fertile. They have another four younger sisters still undergoing their formation. They aim to support themselves through their “liturgical workshop”, in which they make vestments and other liturgical furnishings. One of the Sisters does all the embroidery – all by hand. With the help of an embroidery machine things would be much quicker and the Sisters would be able to meet the growing demands upon them resulting from these new

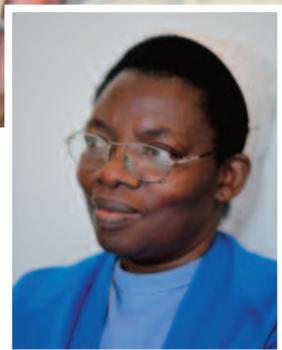


*In the “liturgical workshop”:
embroidering for the glory of God.*

vocations. The prelature itself is unable to help them purchase such a machine, since it is too poor. We have promised them **€9,200** – for the beauty of the Faith in Ayaviri.



From the heart of Africa: first-year novices.



Sister Pétronelle, the Mother Superior of the congregation.

Bearers of hope in the midst of suffering

“Africa is a martyr. It is a martyr of exploitation over the course of history. I love Africa, because it has so often been a victim of other powers.”

The suffering of Africa is not the only reason why Pope Francis loves Africa. The vitality of the African people fills him with enthusiasm. Both these things – martyrdom and vitality – are present and indeed incarnate, so to speak, in the Daughters of the Resurrection. During the Rwandan genocide of 1994 many of them were murdered, while others were expelled, their convents looted and burned. In January 1998 six Sisters of their congregation were hacked to death with

machetes, while a seventh survived with severe injuries. In August of the same year rebel fighters in Kasika, in the eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo** murdered three more Sisters, along with a priest and over 70 parishioners. In August 2009, in the same region, the rebels murdered three Sisters, a priest and 20 parishioners. Again and again the Sisters were forced to flee, but each time they

came back – “in order to be with our people”, says Mother Pétronelle, their Superior.

No other congregation is quite so African in its manner of suffering, helping and giving hope. The Sisters embody the resurrection of Africa in love. They are showing the African people that their homeland does have a future. And they set an example with their hard work in the fields. They also help AIDS patients, work in the hospitals and bush clinics, instruct young mothers in hygiene and healthy nutrition, teach them sewing, and care for the little ones in their kindergartens. In their soup kitchens they feed over 5,000 people daily,

Often forced to flee, they always came back.

saving more than a few of them from starvation. They care for sick and elderly priests, give religious instruction and organise prayer groups. And they themselves pray a great deal – for how else could they be such a source of mercy to others?

Christine, Antoinette, Marie-Josée, Immaculée, Bellancile, Marie-Claire and Léonie –

those are the names of the newest novices. Soon they will join the over 200 already professed Sisters of the congregation in four countries (Rwanda, Cameroon, DR Congo and Brazil). Many of them do not have any prior education. With the Daughters they learn a trade and practical skills. They come from the villages, and once a year they spend a few weeks with their families, so that they do not forget the deep roots of their African culture and can at the same time, through their activities, infuse this culture with a Christian spirit.

This year the congregation will be celebrating its golden jubilee. The idea of establishing an authentically African religious community came from a Flemish missionary Sister, Mother Hadewych, while Father Werenfried, the founder of ACN, helped them from the beginning and is remembered to this day by the Daughters as their “Papa Founder”. Without this constant support and help from ACN Africa would be deprived today of the presence of these more than 200 joy-filled bearers of hope.



Supporting the sisters

The diocese of Lodwar in northern Kenya is one of the largest and at the same time poorest in the country. It is here that the enclosed Augustinian Sisters have their apostolate. There are five of them, all from Mexico, who have been serving the Church here in Lodwar for some years now. They just about manage to support themselves by baking hosts and by sewing and embroidering liturgical vestments and furnishings. Thanks to your generosity they now have a new host baking machine, which will help to secure their life and ministry. It also leaves them more time for prayer – not least for us all! “With all our hearts we thank the benefactors of ACN”, they write. You can count on their prayer, which is in turn their contribution to our spiritual well-being.



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

Dear Friends,

At the end of last year ACN officially opened its first national office in Asia, in South Korea. This means that our Foundation now has 21 national offices worldwide, actively fundraising on behalf of Christians in need throughout the world and helping to spread the message of Christian love. With this new “bridgehead” in Asia we are truly seizing the moment. For in the coming decades the Church will grow above all in Asia and Africa.

With the formal opening of our Korean office, in the presence of our President, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, and of Cardinal Yeom Soo-jung of South Korea, we are following in the footsteps of Pope Francis. A year and a half earlier, during his visit to South Korea, he made it clear that Asia will be one of the priorities of his pontificate. This is a country that was evangelised by home-grown Korean laity. A number of them gave their lives as martyrs, and the Pope has beatified them. May this courageous witness of the first Christians of South Korea be an example to us, not of dying, but of the profound faith that animates this country, and the joyful faith that it can communicate to its fellow Christians. So our “family” continues to grow – not least thanks to your faithful generosity.

Need, love and thanks – your letters

For a good cause

I had often thought of giving something for children in Iraq. Unfortunately, however, I was too selfish to part with my own hard-earned money. But I quickly repented and went to confession. The kindly priest told me about ACN and left the rest to me. And so I decided, from that day on, whenever I bought myself any item of clothing, to put aside five Euros for this donation. Now I’m sure I’ve used this money in a good cause.

A young woman in Germany

Thank God for ACN!

I must tell you of the consolation I experienced through the Holy Mass celebrated in thanksgiving for the gift of my life and for my personal intentions. You speak of rewards?... The generosity you attributed to me is already the reward of God. What a consoling thought that is... Thank God for ACN!

A benefactress in Portugal

All good things come in threes

We are enclosing a donation of 300 Euros that was raised by our three sons – one for his First Communion, one for his Confirmation and one on his profession of faith. They would like this gift to benefit Iraqi and Syrian refugees.

A benefactor family in France

New strength and courage, thanks to your help

I have no words to express our gratitude to you! Your help will undoubtedly give us new strength and courage in the many apostolic challenges and sacrifices that are required of us in order to build this sanctuary of Divine Mercy. We have already been praying for you, and this prayer will only intensify in the Holy Eucharist and in our Rosary during this month of Our Lady.

A priest in Argentina

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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