

MIRROR



Aid to the Church in Need

70 years
of ACN



**Fortresses for God,
Strongholds of
prayer, are still
being built today.**

"The culture of mercy is shaped in assiduous prayer, in docility to the working of the Holy Spirit, in knowing the lives of the saints and in being close to the poor."

Pope Francis,

Apostolic letter *Misericordia et misera*

Dear Friends,

Information, prayer and action are the three pillars of ACN's mission. Prayer is at the very heart of our mission, as through prayer information becomes Evangelisation and action becomes a Work of God. Some of the earliest projects of our charity ACN, under its founder, Father Werenfried van Straaten, were the "Fortresses for God", monasteries and religious houses built along the line of the old Iron Curtain, whose task was to prepare and facilitate, through prayer, the work of helping the Church in communist Eastern Europe.

The prayer battle must precede every other battle for justice and peace. Only by winning the battle of prayer can we win all the other battles in the world, including those in our own personal lives. Often we hear it said: "All we can do now is pray." It is so true! Particularly when, instead of despairing at the situation in our lives and in the world, we summon the courage to pray. But this way of speaking does not do justice to God. For in reality prayer should be not the "ultima ratio" – the last resort – but the "prima ratio", the very first thing we do.



Only by winning the battle of prayer can we win all the other battles too.

comes in to play, transforming the complex interplay of destructive forces. But God does not simply want us to beg him to intervene; rather he wants to give us, through prayer, the dignity of sharing in his divine work.

Prayer does not always come easily – in fact it can be very hard work. But the more we pray, the more we find joy in prayer. St Teresa of Avila teaches us that prayer can be "a simple uplifting of the soul to God, to frequent converse with Him, to an intimate friendship with the One who loves

me infinitely". Those who pray in this way will begin to change in their very being, and in all they do. I cannot pray sincerely for peace and yet do nothing to bring about peace. I cannot pray for the hungry or those who eke out their lives in misery and do nothing to help. "Would it not be folly", wrote the founder of ACN, "to ask God for graces and yet be unwilling to co-operate with those graces?"

Dear friends, today, with your help, we are still helping to build many fortresses for God around the world, many strongholds of prayer. In the contemplative communities especially, the religious Sisters and brothers raise up their hands tirelessly

to heaven in prayer like Moses at Rephidim and fight the good fight in prayer for us. May we likewise make space for God in our lives – as he is waiting, 24 hours a day, to hear from us.

My grateful blessing on you all

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Praying, sewing, ironing, planting, and praying again: the Poor Clares in Brestovsko have a full day.

Sent from Heaven

It is not simply a matter of “praying from time to time, when I feel like it. No, Jesus says that we ought ‘always to pray and not lose heart’.”

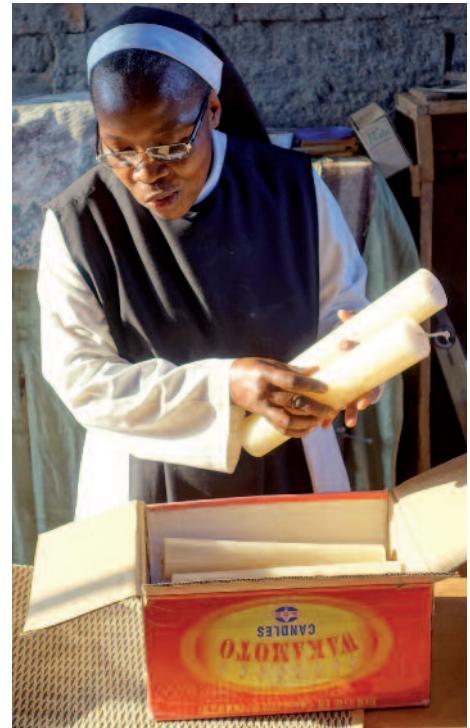
For the 21 Trappist nuns in the convent of Our Lady in Murhesa, **Democratic Republic of the Congo** these words of Pope Francis about praying at all times describe the programme of their daily lives. Prayer is the most important thing. Here, in the region of Bukavu, they have seen so much suffering, destitution, robbery and murder – indeed many people have experienced it firsthand. But they know, as Pope Benedict XVI says, that “Our prayers reach the heart of God. We may be sure that there is no such thing as superfluous, unnecessary prayer; not one prayer is lost.” That is why they never give up hope. And now that the fighting is dying down, they want to start anew and, as Sister Hortense writes, “take up our little industries

again”. This means rabbit farming, candle-making, beekeeping, knitting and soapmaking. They already have much of the equipment for these activities, but what they don’t have is storerooms and workshops. Doors and windows are expensive, so are the foundations and steel reinforcement which cost far more than they could ever afford. So we are helping with **€42,600**. Then the younger Sisters will be able to set to work to support their community. But they also need medicines for the elderly Sisters – not to mention educational resources for the younger ones. We are also helping (**€20,500**) with their general upkeep, and this aid is also “heaven sent” according to Sister Hortense. They see it as an answer to their prayers. Though we might say that the Sisters themselves are an answer to prayer, sent by Providence.

The Poor Clares in Brestovsko, **Bosnia Herzegovina** make use of every available minute in order to support their community, what with digging, hoeing, planting, needlework and baking unleavened bread for the Mass. The Sisters work very hard, help their many visitors – but above all they pray. For them the words of Pope Francis are a daily reality: “Faith is not a theory, not a philosophy, not simply an idea; it is an encounter.



An oasis of peace in times of war: the Trappist nuns and their novices in Our Lady's convent, Murhesa, DR Congo.



Light for the world: packing candles in the Trappist convent.

An encounter with Jesus.” They seek to encounter the Lord every day despite the difficulties of their situation – in a country still suffering the consequences of war. This is why they have been unable to finish the second part of their convent. The basic structure is complete, but the rooms are empty and the bathrooms still unfinished. They need these rooms as there are many young women wanting to join the congregation. They could live with the simple, basic furnishings – a table, chair, cupboard, bed, crucifix – but not without heating. They plan to install a small solar heating system which will also help keep costs down in the future. “We humbly ask your help”, writes Sister Hijacinta. We have promised them **€20,000**. For to us too faith should be an encounter with Jesus and not a mere theory.



Nothing is wasted

"The works of mercy are hand-crafted", Pope Francis writes. Nowhere is this clearer than in the service given by religious Sisters around the world to their fellow men. They are the embodiment of God's creative mercy, the face and hands of Mother Church.

The handiwork of mercy carried out by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary in **Pakistan** helps many girls and young women. Socially speaking, women have practically no rights in a society dominated by men and corruption – particularly if they are non-Muslims. Christian girls and women are frequently molested sexually or even raped. In court they rarely find justice and it often happens that after being raped or forced into "marriage" with a Muslim man, they are rejected or abandoned even by their own family. One way to counteract this discrimination is through education, and this is what the Sisters provide. They take in the poorest girls, including orphans and street children, aged 4 to 16 and offer them a new home in their Sacred Heart convent in Lahore. But now they are also in need of help, as their meagre resources are almost entirely exhausted, by the cost of medication for the ten frail and elderly Sisters of the congregation among other things. And they also have to find the means to renovate their small bathrooms, as there are leaks everywhere and the pipework throughout their 80-year-old



Pakistan: Safe under the Sisters' wing, in Lahore.

building is rusting through. Of course, the medication for the elderly Sisters – aged between 75 and 95 – has to take priority, as they cannot afford both. So we have promised **€10,000** for essential repairs.

Many other elderly Sisters, in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa, are frail and tired after giving their lives in the service of mercy. But there is no such thing as retirement or pensions for those engaged in this handiwork of mercy. Uncomplaining, they bear their final years with joyful serenity. "Mercy gives rise to joy, because our hearts are opened to the hope of a new life" (Pope Francis). All their lives they have opened other people's hearts to hope; now they themselves continue to hope, pray and work in the mother houses of their congre-

gations – whether in Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil or in Cameroon, Rwanda and Nigeria. They continue to serve, but now in a different way. Their younger Sisters take over the work – catechesis, youth apostolate, serving the liturgy, caring for the sick and elderly, teaching in the schools, caring for orphans and handicapped, parish bookkeeping, running rural clinics and providing basic medication – to say nothing of the consolation they so often bring by their mere presence. None of these services of love would be possible without the financial support we provide – thanks to the generosity of you, our benefactors. Sometimes it is just enough to survive on. And when they have a little more than that, they pass it on to the poor. Nothing is wasted in this beautiful service of love. ●



Democratic Republic of the Congo:
Checking for signs of malnutrition –
"And he placed a child in their midst..."



Peru:
Taking Holy communion to the elderly –
"Where two are gathered in my name..."



Argentina:
Countryside catechesis –
"Let the little children come to me..."



Turning a curse into a blessing

Photo: Magdalena Wolnik/ACN

Nias, off the coast of Sumatra in northwest Indonesia, is in every sense of the word a ‘Christian island’ in the most populous Muslim nation on earth. Of the total population of around 750,000 souls, some 550,000 are Protestants and 150,000 Catholics. One Catholic foundation on the island is the convent of Saint Clare in Gunungsitoli.

The convent lies at the foot of the “Gunung Suci”, the “Holy Mountain”. For years it was popularly known as the “accursed mountain”, because for centuries local people were preyed on by headhunters or dragged off into slavery. The first two Catholic missionaries arrived here from France in 1832, but died shortly afterwards. In the Second World War the Dutch colonial administration was expelled by the Japanese. To this day a Japanese military bunker remains high

up on the hilltop in what are now the convent grounds – many people were executed in the bunker. Now the Poor Clare Sisters have erected a large cross on top of it and built a Lourdes grotto beside it. Each day lots of people come to kneel here and pray, while others ask the Sisters for their prayers. The curse has become a blessing.

The 31 Sisters of the congregation live in strict enclosure. Their life is far from easy, with constant power cuts and periods of political instability. To support themselves they run a small candlemaking business, bake unleavened bread for Mass, sew liturgical vestments and furnishings, and run a smallholding. The island was struck by a tsunami in 2004 and an earthquake in 2005, but the cruellest blow of all for the Sisters was a fire in the candlemaking workshop, which engulfed the shop and storeroom, shortly before Christmas 2015. Jenky, a young helper, ran out of the building, his whole body on fire. Sister Claudia rescued him and brought him to safety, before herself collapsing. She survived, but her help came too late for Jenky, who died three days later.



Sister Claudia – still scarred by the fire, one year afterwards.



On top of the holy mountain, the cross surmounts the bunker. Today many Christians come to pray at Our Lady’s grotto in the convent garden.

All the Christmas candles and all the wax stored for the Easter candles flowed down the street like a blazing stream of lava. The workshop itself was destroyed, along with all the expensive candle moulds and the adjoining building. But the Sisters did not give up, remembering the prayer of their founder, Saint Clare. In one of her meditations she said: “I ask one thing only of your holy love – perseverance till the end and the perfect fulfilment of your will.” We have given **€20,000** for the rebuilding of the candlemaking workshop. So now the Sisters can continue to give witness and bring light and blessings to Nias.



Cloistered nuns – led by God's hand

"I promise consecrated chastity, poverty and obedience to God, our Lord, to the most Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel, and to the prioress and her successors."

With these simple words the Carmelite Sisters of the convent of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Tambacan make their profession of vows. But what led up to this moment was a careful process of discernment, often involving long nights spent in prayer. Here on the island of Luzon in the northern Philippines, in a remote and desolate region, Sister Lorelei Marie Libo-on has at last found her "Tanging Yaman", the "true treasure" of her life. Like most of the Sisters here, she sensed her vocation to "serve the Church through prayer and sacrifice" at an early age. The nuns pray for the whole world but "we pray in particular for priests, religious and all missionaries."

Sister Marilyn Facinabao has a favourite song: "Musmos ka pa lamang minahal na kita – You were still a very little child when I loved you... I was holding you by the hand when you made your first steps..." She always felt "called", but she



Still serving, regardless of age – an excursion into the convent garden.

had never seen a nun, so she always said, when asked, "I want to be a priest". But when she first met a religious Sister, she immediately realised "That's what I really want to be." She never forgot God's call in her heart, which gradually became louder. She felt his guiding hand.

In fact God has led every one of the Sisters by the hand to this Carmel in Tambacan. Their life is one of great abstinence but also one of great grace. There are many vocations, with 21 Sisters in training and twelve

who have made their full profession. Many other young women are knocking at the door of the Carmel. They too want to serve God here. But there is no more room, as under the Carmelite Rule, each Sister must live in a separate cell. So there are three aspirants still waiting for admission. They also need a special wing for elderly and sick Sisters to be completed, so some of the frail and elderly Sisters, who struggle with the stairs and need help from the younger ones to reach their cells, would be able to move there, freeing up space for the new entrants. But they don't have the money for this wing, or to build new cells, so we have promised **€20,000**.

Sister Maria Violeta Banawa recalls her own journey to the Carmel. "True love makes everything possible. I thought loving him was enough, but love is not only a matter of feelings. It means dedication, sacrifice and commitment. I lacked this in the beginning." Experience taught her how to truly love. She has committed her life to Jesus. "The chapter of losing, searching and finding has ended now. A new chapter begins", she concludes, thanking those who have helped her on her journey. ●



Solemn profession, joyful surrender – life in the Carmel.



Always open to others' needs

First they gave thanks to God in the chapel for the past academic year. The next day three seminarians were ordained to the priesthood and another to the diaconate. Father Roman, the rector of the seminary in Grodno, Belarus, then wrote to ACN, expressing his "immense gratitude" and describing how the 33 seminarians, whom you supported with €219,800, had complemented their studies with visits to retirement homes, orphanages and homes for handicapped children. And how one of the deacons had been "lent" to Brazil and another to Cameroon to tell the children there about Jesus. "Every day we pray for ACN", he writes. For them our help is a "living witness" showing that the priest in his work of service must always be open to the spiritual and material needs of others.



Johannes Freiherr Heereman,
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Our charity, ACN, is growing rapidly. In the last three years we have opened six new national offices. Partly perhaps because the needs are growing ever greater. "The time is out of joint" – Hamlet's words seems more and more apt today. But instead of responding with revenge and violence, we are striving to promote justice with love, to bring healing – thanks to your generosity. This generosity is evident not just in the increasing number of donations. Father Werenfried often used to say, when preaching with his famous "hat of millions", that he would gladly renounce the entire collection if just one young man or woman in the congregation would respond by giving his or her life to God. For God's call to the consecrated life as a priest or religious, or as a consecrated virgin cannot be measured in terms of money, gold or earthly treasures. And Father Werenfried also knew that you, by your generosity, are supplying the conditions in which such vocations can be discerned and embraced. That is why every euro you give to ACN is far more than just a contribution to the "funding of a project". Your donation is helping to put the times back "into joint" again, for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ. That may sound like an exaggeration – but it is the truth. Thank you!

Need, love and thanks – your letters

For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

I thank God for the opportunity to support your charity, which helps the heroic Christians of the Church in their suffering and persecution, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, as Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount. I hold them in my heart and imagine myself in their position. Would I have such courage?, I ask myself. I pray unceasingly for their liberation and their courage.

A benefactor in Portugal

Going where others don't tread

You go where others don't tread, and give where there is no-one else to give. A thousand blessings on your work.

A benefactor in Australia

The Bigger Picture

I look forward to the Mirror because it reminds me of my connection to the universal Church. The Mirror reminds me of the bigger picture! Most of the stories are of those in great need. ACN surely is one way God shows them His love...and one way He shows me an open door to serve Him when many seem closed.

A benefactor in Ohio, USA

Interesting insights

Your bulletins about the work of ACN give us an interesting insight into the extensive range of your work around the world. As Christians we rejoice at these impressive examples of living faith.

A benefactor in Germany

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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