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*That not a single sheep  
may be lost – whether in  
Africa or elsewhere.*

***“Africa offers the world a beauty  
and natural richness which  
inspire praise of the Creator.  
This patrimony of Africa and of  
all mankind is constantly  
exposed to the risk of  
destruction caused by human  
selfishness of every type.”***

**Pope Francis, in the UN offices in Nairobi,  
26 November 2015**

*Dear Friends,*

True fasting demands not only that we subject our bodies by self-denial, in order to celebrate Easter with a pure heart, but also that we share our bread with the hungry (cf. Isaiah 58:7). Our fasting is only real when we share our food with those whose daily bread is taken from them by the greediness of the world.

In Africa 200 million people go hungry (17% of the entire population) and 600 million (50%) live below the breadline – that is the terrifying reality. But despite its vast deserts, Africa is blessed with fertile soil and a climate that allows year-round harvesting in many regions. The continent also has immeasurable mineral riches, not to mention vast religious and cultural riches. Africa could be a veritable paradise on earth. The African people have a joyful attitude to life. But the nations of Africa have fallen prey to epidemics, bad administration and corruption – while the so-called “advanced nations” are trying to impose a “culture of death” on them through “health programmes” that contain the poison of abortion and radical gender ideology.



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to escape the tyranny of modern colonialism and slavery.

Africa’s mineral resources are being unscrupulously exploited today – as they were in the past – yet there is barely a flicker of interest in the media. Who is interested in the millions killed in brutal wars, which are dismissed as ethnic infighting? Who talks about the greed of the arms dealers? In the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone more than 6 million people have already been killed. Who cares about the millions of refugees who

for decades have been forced to flee from the “diamond wars” or Islamist terror? Africa is like the man beaten by robbers and left half dead by the roadside – the continent needs not only our balm on her wounds but also the voice of Christ, telling her of the dignity of the children of God. Perhaps Africa’s vocation, as Pope Benedict put it, is to be the “spiritual lungs” of a world that has lost its hope and no longer believes in the fruitfulness of love and the joy of life?

Dear friends, we can do something about this. The projects highlighted in our Lenten campaign show that Africa is rich in spiritual resources. May our fasting and sacrifices help her to conserve these treasures and also satisfy her hunger for justice.

campaign show that Africa is rich in spiritual resources. May our fasting and sacrifices help her to conserve these treasures and also satisfy her hunger for justice.

I wish you a blessed Lent and a joyful Easter,

*P. Martin M. Barta*

Father Martin Maria Barta  
Ecclesiastical Assistant



# Bringing the peace of Fatima to Nigeria

**A few years ago the number of Christians persecuted for their faith was around 100 million; today it is more than double that number. Among the worst places are Nigeria and Sudan. And in both countries the violence is carried out by radical Islamists.**

Nigeria, with its 180 million inhabitants, is the most populous nation in Africa - but it has also seen the highest number of deaths. Last year more Christians were martyred there than anywhere else. They were murdered just because they were Christians. Their churches were attacked and set on fire in the middle of religious services, and there were indiscriminate bombings in

crowded markets, murders and abductions on an almost daily basis. Almost 3 million Nigerians have been uprooted and made refugees in their own country. And yet the Christians are not giving up. On the contrary, they continue to seek peace with their Muslim neighbours. And there are many Muslims too who have always lived and worked peacefully alongside the Christians.



**They need the security of the convent walls: the Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima.**

Most of the 25 million Catholics in the country live in the south. In the new diocese of Pankshin in the north there are around 170,000 Catholics – about 15% of the population. In his pastoral work Bishop Michael Gokum relies heavily on the Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima, a Nigerian congregation with 65 sisters. Their mission includes running the large school here and praying, like the shepherd children of Fatima, for peace. 100 years ago this year, while the First World War was still raging, Our Lady appeared to Jacinta, Lucia and Francisco and



**The power of the Rosary: Father Werenfried in Fatima, praying for peace.**

promised them that the soldiers would soon be returning home. But added that they must first continue to pray the Rosary daily.

As their vocation combines prayer and education, they need a convent with excellent security, close to the school, with a chapel. We have promised **€45,000** for this. As Father Werenfried said in Fatima, “We know that Mary can crush the serpent’s head underfoot. That is why we have consecrated our entire charity to Our Lady of Fatima, who has shown us the way to liberate the persecuted Church.” It is a way of conversion, penance, praying the Rosary – and sacrifice. Our Lady desired peace, so may there be peace for the sisters, the schoolchildren and the people of Nigeria. Let us help them. ●

## Easter hope for Sudan

**Christians aren't safe anywhere - there is civil war in South Sudan, oppression under Khartoum in the north.**

Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako, the emeritus Archbishop of Khartoum greets us in his Easter message “as we accompany Our Lord Jesus in his Passion for the redemption of mankind”. The seemingly polite formula in fact reflects a harsh reality, as it is not only at Easter time that the Christians in Sudan accompany Jesus in his sufferings,

but every day of their lives. Sharia law has been imposed on the country. When priests arrive for retreat days and formation courses in Khartoum many of them are exhausted and sick, especially those from the Nuba mountains, where Christians are hunted by the Islamists like wild beasts. These priests need rest, peace and quiet. The encounter with the Lord during the retreat gives them new strength. Solidarity with their brother priests also revives their courage. But the retreat house itself is in need of repairs, and existing work has stalled. Their slender



**A place of safety and mutual trust. Celebrating Holy Mass in the retreat centre in Khartoum.**

resources have been eaten up by inflation. They need our support – and not just for the **€30,000** shortfall. They need solidarity to show them that the Easter hope is real. ●



Plenty of space, too little money: the site of the new chapel.

## Benin: Making soil and soul fertile to bear fruit

**One third of the funds we give to Africa go into construction: parish houses, seminaries, convents and chapels. These are safeguards against suffering, spaces suffused with the love of God.**

This sort of space is needed by the young parish of Saint Anne in the diocese of Natitingou, in Benin. The parish includes 20 villages; the largest of them, Dakou, is where the chapel will be built. Some 15 years ago the tiny Catholic community of Dakou built a small mud chapel, but it collapsed a few years later. For many of the pagan animist peoples of this mission territory, that was a bad omen. The Christian God does not endure, they thought. But the Catholics of the parish have remained steadfast and faithful to Christ and one another. They continue to gather in another building, which also serves as the village school. Now the younger



Eager to work in the vineyard: the helpers of the rural missionaries.

people want to make a new start and, faced by brand new mosques and their gleaming facades, they plan to build their own, if modest, house for God. The only problem is they have nothing but the work of their hands. With these they will gather sand and stone. But the bricks and mortar, the cement, windows and doors, paint, plaster and benches all cost money. “We will be so grateful for anything you can do, that God may be known and loved here”, writes Father Hippolyte Bakoma, the parish priest. We have promised him the €9,200 they still need.

Father Hippolyte belongs to the congregation of the “Frères Missionnaires des Campagnes” (Rural Missionary Brothers), who work in evangelisation and development education in rural areas. They work to stop the burning of the forests, while teaching good husbandry and forest management (including the use of agricultural implements and machinery), bookkeeping and fair trade. And they themselves are setting an example in agriculture, while at the same time sowing the seed of faith. They form prayer groups, teach the faith, and celebrate Holy Mass. The aim is to sow seeds of fruitfulness not only in the soil but also in the human soul. ●

## New evangelisation: the family apostolate in Zambia

**“Marriage is the most beautiful thing that God has created.” As he created man and woman in his own image (Gen. 1:27), says Pope Francis.**

Years before Pope St John Paul II made similar statements about the dignity of husband and wife at the 1994 Africa Synod. Anyone who does not understand this dignity should ask about the state of their own marriage, or of the married couples around him. Do they all live like Christians? Do they all understand their vocation as married couples? Do they realise their potential for happiness, or the beauty of their vocation? What is motherhood? What is fatherhood? What about the dignity of women? These and other similar questions are being addressed by the 86 married couples taking part in the ongoing formation courses on the “Fullness of marriage and family life” in six of the dioceses of Zambia.

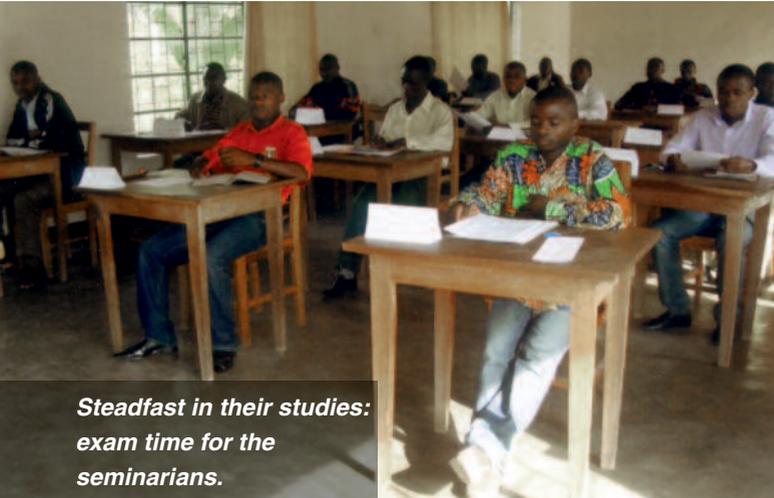


**Married life – an image of the love of God, and that’s what they need to teach the family apostolate.**

The teaching materials are in Bemba, one of the country’s most spoken local languages. All the participants will return home to pass on the knowledge they have acquired to others in their own and neighbouring parishes. They will become messengers of the family apostolate, heralds of married love and family harmony. They are the beginning of a movement to promote everything that is beautiful and true, for family life in God – a movement made possible by your generosity (€15,000). ●



# The brave seminarians of Bukavu



*Steadfast in their studies: exam time for the seminarians.*



*A time for everything: after prayer, work in the garden.*

**The essential characteristic of courage, its “actus principalior”, is steadfastness, endurance in the face of adversity, holding fast to the truth even, if necessary, to death. This is the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas.**

There are no lack of adverse circumstances in the eastern **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. For over 20 years now roving bands of armed militants have been disrupting the structures of society, creating a state of civil war. Again and again the attempts by the major seminary in Bukavu to stand on its own feet and support itself without outside help have been frustrated or brought to nothing by the violence and looting. But they remain steadfast. The seminarians – 72 of them at present – their six permanent professors and the four religious Sisters have all kept going: studying, teaching and looking after the every-day



*They love the priesthood and the consecrated life: Bukavu’s seminarians.*

needs of the seminary. They all know that here, unseen and unnoticed, the future life of the country is germinating, despite the insecurity all around them. They know too that this life is possible only thanks to your generosity. As, once again, you have made up the shortfall in their modest budget – **€21,600** this year. This is mostly for food and the support of the seminary professors. What the students have learned cannot be looted.

Your aid has borne wonderful fruit. One seminarian, Kasereka Kikandu, 24, recalls, “My first years in another seminary were years of fear. We constantly heard of massacres and lootings. Then I came here. I’m amazed at the courage and the joyful manner of the teachers. They urge us to pray for the dead and for their killers. The biggest surprise of all for me was to learn that there are Christians who are helping us without even knowing us, simply because we are their brothers in the faith. This gives us courage, it gives us hope. We hold them in our hearts and our thoughts.” And to you, these “friends and brothers of ACN” he adds, “I have nothing but my constant

prayers to give you. But they come right from my heart.” Bitaha Murhula Franck has been in Bukavu for just a year. He is brimming with joy. “I love the priesthood and the consecrated life”, he says. He too is moved by the selfless solidarity of your help. “You have awakened the joy of the missionary life in me, and I tell myself: Bitaha, you still have a long way to go before you feel this impulse of mercy in the face of other peoples’ need.”

Taking to heart the need of others and being willing to help is a mercy that bears fruit. Throughout Africa the need is great. Last year you helped almost 4,700 seminarians in Africa, twice as many as just two years before. This suggests that the number of vocations in Africa is rising. The 72 seminarians in Bukavu will no doubt be conscious that Jesus himself sent out 72 disciples (see Luke 10:1ff). This was also a symbolic number, indicative of the whole world, since at that time there was thought to be only 72 different peoples. Today there are more than that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone. To them, thanks to your help, the seminarians of Bukavu will soon be proclaiming the Gospel, with courage and endurance – and perhaps also to other nations, beyond the borders of Africa.



# “They are immensely grateful to us”

To find out about the work of ACN is supporting in Africa, we spoke to Christine du Coudray Wiehe, who heads the Africa Section of our pontifical charity.

## *How important is Africa to ACN?*

For 13 years now the Church in Africa has been a top priority for our pontifical foundation, at least in terms of the volume of funding for the projects. When I first started here 25 years ago, the priority was still the persecuted Church behind the Iron Curtain, but after the fall of the Berlin Wall Africa increasingly began to claim our attention, particularly after the first continental synod, the Synod for Africa, which was called by Saint John Paul II in 1994. With the words “Christ is calling Africa”, the Pope drew our attention to a young Church, dynamic and rich in priestly and religious vocations, but poor in infrastructure and opportunities for formation, and additionally threatened by an aggressive Islam and a West-inspired “culture of death”, that is destructive especially towards the traditional family. So this is precisely the area to which our aid is directed.

## *Which kind of projects are your priority?*

The Church on this continent has long survived, thanks in good measure to the



**Keeping informed: Christine du Coudray talking to one of our project partners.**



material help of the missionaries, but for a variety of reasons this aid is no longer possible. In keeping with our mission and our pastoral outlook, more than anything else we focus on the formation of candidates for the priesthood, on supporting seminarians and providing scholarships, and also on the ongoing formation of priests, retreats and spiritual exercises, the support of religious Sisters. We also help with bicycles, motorcycles and cars for pastoral work, Bibles in the local languages, radio stations and religious programming, and for the construction of churches and chapels, convents and parish centres etc. Needless to say, we receive a huge number of requests for aid and have to be selective, according to the actual situation and need. For a time the priority was the former Marxist regimes such as Angola, Madagascar and Mozambique, at other times it has been the countries suffering civil war, such as Liberia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or again the countries threatened by radical Islam, such as Nigeria, Mali and today even Kenya and Tanzania.

## *How is this aid received by the Christians in Africa?*

They are immensely grateful to us, and to all our benefactors. It is so important to

them to experience our solidarity, the sense of unity in Christ, the assurance that they are not alone in their need. During the second Africa Synod we organised a North-South meeting between the bishops of Europe and Africa. A hundred bishops took part and shared their problems and priorities. It was a worldwide first.

## *How important is the family in your aid for Africa?*

Over the years we have often been approached by local family organisations of all shapes and sizes and in every corner of the continent. We not only help individually, but also via the overarching African Family Life Federation, thereby encouraging them all to work together. This is enormously important in an age of globalisation and massive anti-family campaigns such as the promotion of gender ideology. The Holy Father has repeatedly warned us about this ideology; many governments and organisations in the West have fallen for it and are now pressurising the African nations. Hence it is all the more necessary to defend and promote the true values of human nature and the expertise in this understanding that the Church has accumulated over the course of 2000 years as a rock and refuge for the family.

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## Catechism for the children

The diocese of Dapaong in northern Togo is sometimes described as the gateway to the Sahara. It is one of the poorest dioceses in Togo – which is one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. Four out of five people here have to get by on less than half a Euro a day. Lack of money means lack of schooling, as it is not always possible to teach outdoors. Spanish missionary Father Joan Sole Ribas (pictured) asked for help to build a classroom for his parish and when we said yes, he wrote back spontaneously: “I cannot find words to thank you. It was like Christmas; a gift for the whole parish. I’m very moved, since we have prayed so much for this project. God’s grace is unfathomable. May you be filled with his blessing, so that Christ may remain always with you.” Now over a hundred children can be given religious instruction every day. It is a joy for them, and for Father Joan as well.



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

*Dear friends,*

*Africa is one of the main focuses of our aid for the Church in need. One quarter of all your donations go to Africa – over 22 million Euros. This aid is much more than merely help for the poor and needy; it is a real investment in the future. On the one hand, the Church is growing on this continent like nowhere else; on the other, this young and dynamic Church needs the help of her brothers and sisters outside Africa in order to withstand an expansive and oppressive Islam. And in the long term this helps us as well, as the missionary outreach is not simply a one-way street.*

*There is no comparison between our aid and that given by many governments and NGOs, which often comes with pressure to comply with their anti-life policies on the family and human life. We help people to live in fidelity to the teaching of Christ. The common bond we share with the Church in Africa is the “Civilisation of Love” – which is stronger than the “culture of death” and degradation, as it is a source of true hope. For this reason also, thank you for your generosity!*

## Need, love and thanks – your letters

### Inspired by Werenfried’s words

*When Father Werenfried preached in our cathedral after the war on one of his begging campaigns, my father was so impressed that he emptied the entire contents of his wallet into the collection basket and was about to pull the wedding ring off his finger as well. But then he had second thoughts and decided not to, as he realised my mother would not be best pleased. Instead, he went straight home and immediately wrote out a cheque.*

**A benefactress in Belgium**

### Prayer and practical support

*I’m always impressed by your Mirror and I want to support you, both with my prayers and my financial help for the poor and persecuted Church. May Our*

*Lord and Our Blessed Lady be with you always.*

**A benefactress in Canada**

### Solid support

*Thank you for sending me some of your publications. They provide me with solid support for my work with children and families. They are really valuable in these confused and troubled times.*

**A benefactor in Germany**

### Our hands and feet

*ACN is the representative of all those people of goodwill who would love to be able to help in person, but unfortunately cannot do so. Your work is like our hands and feet.*

**A benefactress in Brazil**

## How to make your contribution to the Church in Need:

1. Go to our Head Office website: [www.acn-intl.org](http://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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