

Ecumenical Prayer Liturgy for ACN UK's
#RedWednesday Campaign



Introduction:

We dedicate this time of prayer to pray for the needs of persecuted Christians around the world – for their families, communities, and neighbourhoods. We pray for an end to militant extremists fomenting anti-Christian sentiments. We pray also for an end to the intimidation, discrimination, and imprisonment as well as the violence and persecution suffered by Christians because of their faith. We ask our Lord to fill them with His grace, to strengthen their faith and to comfort and protect them. We beg for peace and reconciliation to reign and for forgiveness for their persecutors, and for the conversion of their hearts.

We pause for a moment to recall all who are struggling at this time. *[Pause]*

Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen. *(St Augustine)*

Opening hymn of your choice

Opening Prayer:

God who is all good, be present here with us today. Give us the grace and understanding to listen and inspire us to bring your love to all who are around us. Give us courage to protect and pray for all those who are persecuted for their faith. **Amen**

Case Study from Nigeria:

Sarah, a 30 year old Catholic mother-of-two, ran from her village of Tsumin Mayo, near Zaria, when it came under fire from militants. Along with her boys, Destiny, five, and two-year-old Jeshua, she and the other women and children from Tsumin and neighbouring villages fled to relative safety in the town of Samaru. They left the men behind to do what they can to stop extremists seizing their homes, businesses and land. Many of the men are farmers and, despite the ever-present threat of violence, they continue to do everything they can to continue growing their crops and thereby generate at least some income for their families.

ACN's fact-finding and project-assessment team met Sarah one Sunday morning in Samaru town's St Mary's Church. She was among hundreds of IDPs who had gathered for prayer and to spend time with one another. Outside, Destiny, Jeshua and other IDP children were playing.

Sarah said she and her children were desperate to go back home. She explained that they were living in a very simple home, doing what they can to pay the rent.

She recalled the day they all had to flee. “It was a Sunday at around 4pm. We were at home. The militants came and killed 50 people. They just caught people in their houses. Everybody started running. You cannot imagine the pain we have been through. Thanks be to God, we are still alive.”

Sarah said she and the others were relying on the Church to keep them all safe. Often, they come together to St Mary’s Church, Samaru, for shelter from the heat and to encourage one another. She was among hundreds ACN met in the church, many from Tsumin Mayo and others from neighbouring villages.

Sarah told ACN they were all worried about the husbands, brothers and fathers whom they had left behind in the villages. She said: “They take it in turns to keep awake at night and act as watchmen. You never know when they will come under attack but we trust in God. I know God can do everything.”

Bishop Habila Daboh of Zaria said: “You at ACN have been a source of great help. Many people have died. When they farm, they get killed. Husbands face the fire. The families come here. Initially they lived in classrooms in the school. They have since found accommodation in the local area.

[Pause for reflection and prayer]

Case Study from Lebanon:

We now hear from the church in Lebanon.

Churches in Lebanon have opened their doors to those seeking refuge from the devastating impact of the ongoing attacks.

Although the airstrikes are targeting the Islamist militia Hezbollah, they are “affecting everyone”, according to Marielle Boutros, project coordinator at ACN in Lebanon.

She said: “People are now living in church halls, so they will need food, sanitary products, mattresses, blankets – and if it continues, we will need heating for winter, though of course, we hope it will not last that long.”

She highlighted that the conflict may lead to yet another wave of Christians leaving Lebanon – an exodus which has been ongoing for decades – further diminishing the Christian influence in the region.

ACN has supported more than 300 projects in the country – including emergency aid in response to the low-scale war in southern Lebanon since October 2023.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:14-17

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.^[1] And by him we cry, “*Abba*,^[2] Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

[Pause for private prayer]

Case Study from Nigeria:

Tobias Yahaya – a catechist based at Holy Family Catholic Cathedral, Sokoto, north-west Nigeria– told ACN how he was at home one night with his wife and four young children when extremists broke in and stabbed him in the chest.

When one of the militants lunged forward to strike him again, Tobias, a strong man in his mid-30s, grabbed him by the arm and raised the alarm.

In hospital, doctors told him the blade had missed vital organs by a few inches.

It later emerged in court that his attackers knew full well he was a catechist.

Despite everything – after three months – he was back serving as a catechist.

Tobias told ACN: “I have prayed about this with my wife and children and we are determined for me to continue as a catechist. Every time I hear a loud sound, it shakes me. Sometimes, when I put on my cassock, I am afraid, but I stand on my feet because of my faith. We have read how Jesus suffered for us. We will do whatever it takes to share our faith.”

ACN needs your help to support catechists.

The charity is helping 61 aspiring catechists from the Diocese of Katsina, in north-west Nigeria. Other projects include building a multi-purpose hall for aspiring female catechists in Jos, Plateau State and providing 20 motorbikes for catechists in Shendam diocese.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 10:26-33

²⁶ “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.^[a] ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

³² “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

[Pause for private prayer]

Red Wednesday Reflection – If time allows.

‘The cross stands while the world revolves’. This motto of the Carthusian Order has many layers of meaning. The saying helps make sense of the suffering and sometimes death of Christians for the faith.

‘The cross stands while the world revolves’. The cross stands because the cross has a permanent place in human lives. There has always been injustice, and violence against the good. Sometimes this happens with a particular intensity. In parts of the Middle East today, an unusual and widespread savagery has broken out. Human beings are capable of passionately and calmly devoting themselves to the destruction or uprooting of people who are, in reality, their brothers and sisters. That propensity for evil is part of our fallen human condition and is revealed in its full hideousness in the butchery of the cross.

A great writer once said that ‘Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world’. Christ is in agony in his suffering members. That agony does not simply pass. It exists very much in the present and will exist in the future. ‘The cross stands while the world revolves’.

It can be hard even to think about what some people endure. It can be painful merely to contemplate the fact that, humanly speaking, many people find no happy ending. Yet when many people die, they die with the words of Jesus on their lips. The martyrs on the beach in Egypt turned to the Father, in the Lord’s own prayer. The cross stands, because the injustice it represents has a permanent place in the world. But the cross also stands in another sense, because it is God’s own cross. It is the sign of a divine love that can never be extinguished. Whatever else may be taken away from us, there is always someone to whom we may turn and who will embrace us. It is Christ crucified.

On the cross it appeared that God had been vanquished. As so often, humanity and goodness appeared to have been crushed. Jesus was killed, and yet the cross endures. It stands because it is sustained by what does not change.

‘The cross stands while the world revolves’. The world may revolve. Fashions come and go and public opinion rushes from one event to another. Sometimes Christianity itself falls out of favour. The still point lies in the cross, the sign of a divine fidelity to human beings that can never be destroyed.

In faith and in prayer, something of the stillness of the cross may be learned. It may be imitated even by those who are spared the violence of the cross, in work for peace and reconciliation and in solidarity with those who suffer. ‘The cross stands while the world revolves’.

Bidding Prayers:

You might like to ask a member of each visiting church to offer an intercession on a specific theme; these might include refugees and displaced people, those who are punished for their beliefs, those who have lost friends and families because of religious persecution, those who are not free to express their faith, those who have died for their faith. Or, you could use the prayers provided.

On this Red Wednesday, we offer our prayers for the persecuted Church throughout the world. Confident that Jesus will save us, we pray for everyone who is persecuted because they believe in Him.

Lord, hear us – **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for all young Christians throughout the world who suffer for their faith. We pray especially for those who have been displaced from their homes.

Lord, hear us – **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for all who are kidnapped because of their faith, may they be freed from their captivity.

Lord, hear us – **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for all those suffering with mental or physical illnesses, especially those who are facing discrimination and oppression.

Lord, hear us – **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for world leaders, that they may be inspired by the Holy Spirit to work with cooperation, dialogue and mutual respect.

Lord, hear us – **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who have died, especially for those who have been martyred for their faith. May they rest in peace.

Lord, hear us – **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Concluding Prayer:

Loving God,

Thank you for this time of prayer and reflection. We remember our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer for believing in you. Give them strength, courage, and peace.

Help us to be a voice for the voiceless and a light in the darkness.

May we never take our freedom for granted, and may our faith always lead us to love and action.

Amen.

Closing hymn



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