

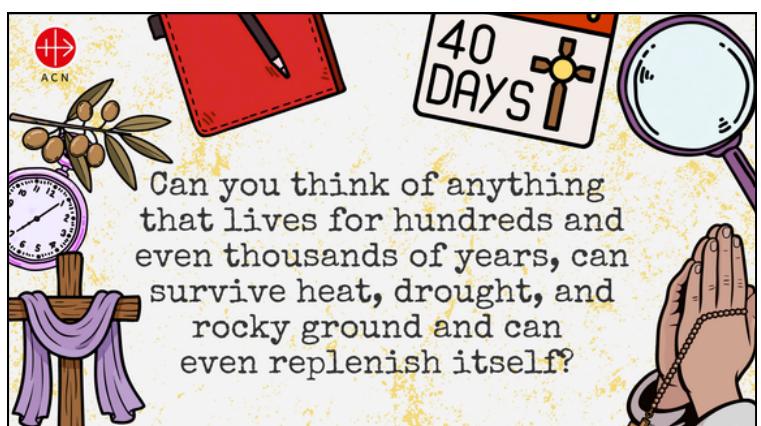
Aid to the Church in Need



Notes for Secondary Lent Assembly/Session

You will need:
Readers
Sound
Plans for follow-up
discussion in Member
groups or in
form classes

Aims:
To celebrate the religious symbolism of Olive Trees in the Holy Land and show how crafting religious objects enables communities to survive.
To explain how ACN is supporting artisans and their families due to loss of livelihood because of the war and to inspire fundraising.
To demonstrate the religious significance of the olive wood, its links to the cross, the bible and Lent and to encourage a commitment to Lent
prayer.



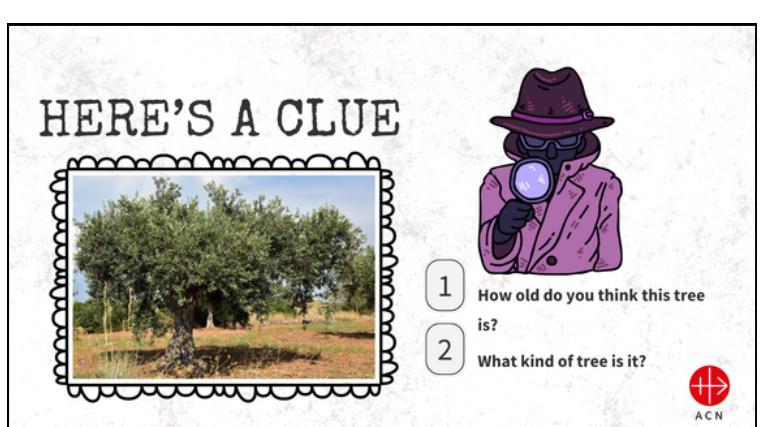
SLIDE 1:

On the screen as the students enter. Can you think of anything that lives for hundreds and even thousands of years, can survive heat, drought, and rocky ground and can even replenish itself? Take guesses. If they guess that it is a tree, ask what kind of tree. Here's a clue...



SLIDE 8:

But today many families there live with fear and uncertainty about the future. The war has meant that there are no tourists or pilgrims to buy their goods, so they are living in poverty, with no great prospects of change. This is where Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has stepped in to help people like the Haddads.



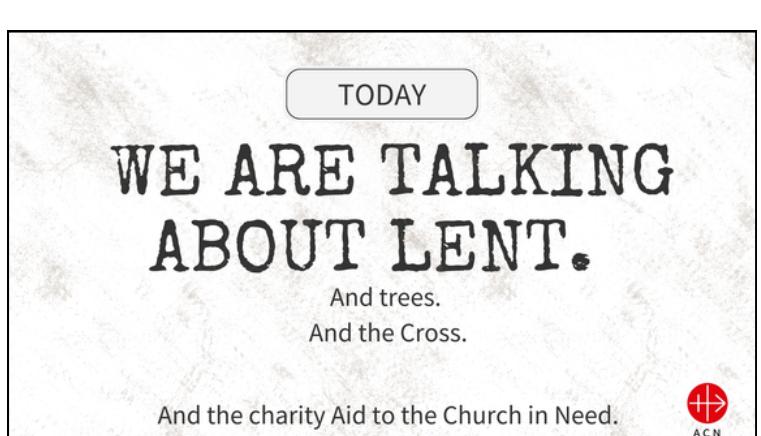
SLIDE 2:

How old do you think this tree is? What kind of tree is it? Take guesses.



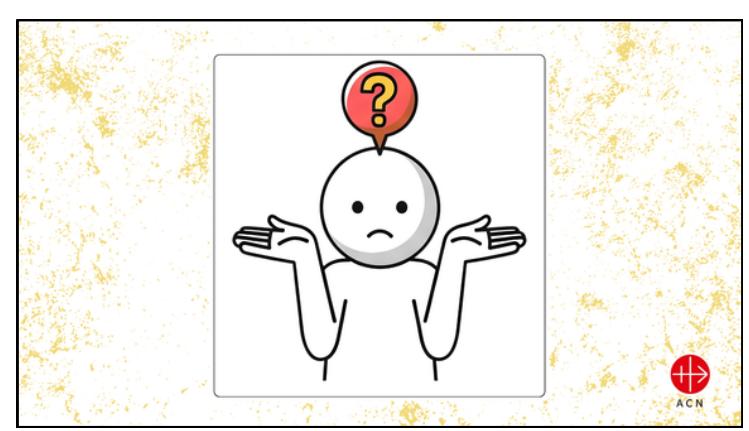
SLIDE 9:

Two students should read the Haddad story on page 2. The family is fictional, but based on the real situations as reported to ACN by project partners and witnessed by ACN staff on visits to the projects.



SLIDE 3:

So today we are talking about Lent. And trees. And Aid to the Church in Need. As we go through this presentation, please pay attention to the details that you notice, facts that surprise you and ideas that you have. These will be discussed in your form classes.



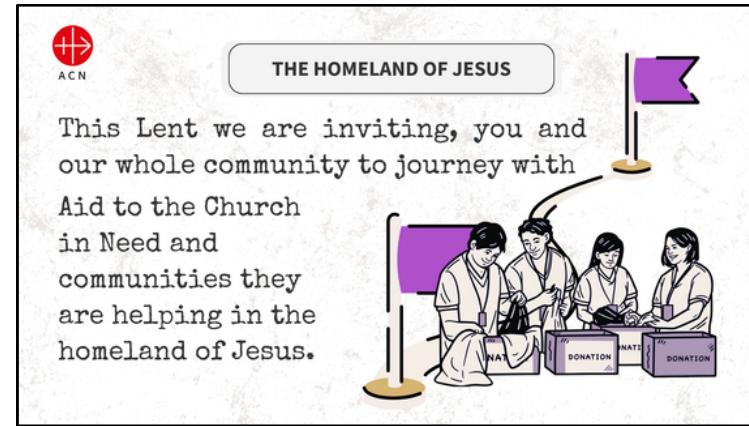
SLIDE 10:

Which brings us to Lent. We might be tempted to think, "What has this got to do with me?" but during Lent we are called to ask not so much about what we can do for ourselves, but what we can do for others. How can we bring faith, peace and love to this world?



SLIDE 4:

This is an olive tree and it is one of the oldest in the world and you will find it in the village of Al Walaja on the outskirts of Bethlehem in Jesus' homeland. It is around 5,000 years old. For families in the Holy Land, olive trees are not just symbols...



SLIDE 11:

Just as an olive tree grows slowly and patiently, Lent isn't about quick fixes. It's about trusting that every time we act unselfishly, God uses our efforts for the whole of the world. This Lent we are inviting you to journey with Aid to the Church in Need and the communities they are helping in the homeland of Jesus.



SLIDE 5:

...and the olive tree is much more than just a plant. It's a powerful symbol of faith, peace and hope.



SLIDE 12: (read by multiple students)

Prayer, fasting and raising funds in solidarity with suffering believers brings actual change.

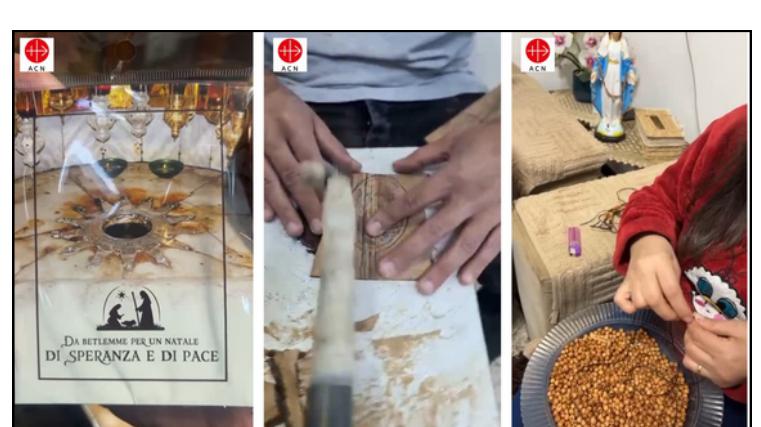
ACN has helped with

- emergency aid - distributing food
- help to pay rent
- medical care expenses for the poorest families
- enabling families to stay on their land and care for their olive groves. This boosts the economy and helps everyone
- support to churches and schools who then support everyone else
- scholarships for its young adults to take vocational training programmes, acquire new skills and improve their job opportunities
- funding Church-run shelters for the elderly.



SLIDE 6:

Bethlehem has been a centre of olive-wood carving since at least the 4th century. People come on pilgrimage to see the places where Jesus walked and they seek souvenirs that connect them to him. Here you can see the 'holding cross'.



SLIDE 7:

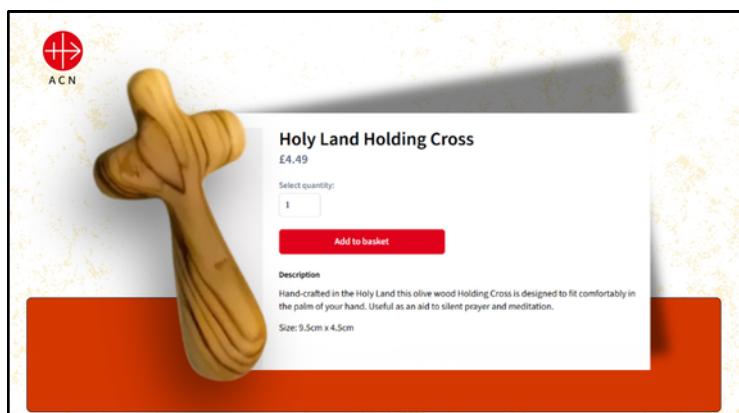
Families in Bethlehem have passed this craft from parent to child for centuries and they provide food and an income.



SLIDE 13:

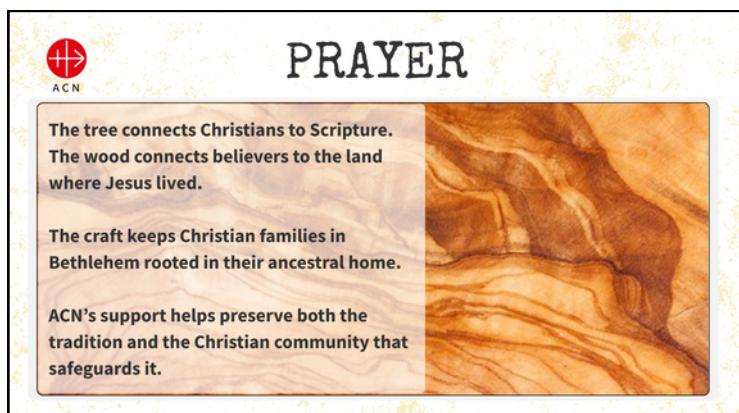
Can you help ACN continue this work? Here are some fundraising ideas for Lent.

Aid to the Church in Need



SLIDE 14:

ACN sells Holy Land Holding Crosses made in Bethlehem. They are designed to rest comfortably in the palm. Perhaps form classes could raise money to buy one each from ACN (they are £4.49).



SLIDE 15:

As you pray, you are holding a cross from the olive trees that have grown for centuries in the same soil where key biblical events unfolded.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Let us be still and remind ourselves that we are in the presence of God. The swirling patterns and warm tones symbolize the intricate intertwining of human life with God's presence.



SLIDE 16:

In the Bible Noah's dove returns with an olive branch (Genesis 8:11) which symbolises peace. Let us pray for peace (pause). Jesus prayed among olive trees in Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. The garden is home to several small olive groves and the name means 'oil press.' May we allow Jesus to change our hearts this Lent. Amen.

Notes about the Holy Land

Aid to the Church in Need plays a critical humanitarian and pastoral role in the Holy Land, especially amid the ongoing war in Gaza and its wider regional impact. ACN's support focuses on Christian communities in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Israel, providing emergency relief and long-term resilience programmes.

In Gaza, where around 1,000 Christians remain, ACN helps the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (LPJ) supply essential items such as food, water, medicine, fuel, and hygiene kits to families sheltering in the Holy Family Catholic Parish and the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius, both of which host hundreds displaced by the conflict.

Across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where Christian livelihoods have collapsed due to the halt in tourism and widespread unemployment, ACN delivers food coupons, medical assistance, subsidies for rent and utilities, and support for students.

In Israel, ACN assists migrant Christian workers and asylum seekers through the Vicariate for Migrants and Asylum Seekers, providing accommodation, healthcare, and basic necessities.

Beyond emergency aid, ACN invests in job-creation, vocational training, and support for Church-run institutions to help stabilise Christian presence and prevent further emigration.

ACN promotes the messages of Church leaders (especially Cardinal Pizzaballa) who consistently call for forgiveness, to disarm revenge and for dialogue to overcome hatred. Local Church institutions, supported by ACN, accompany traumatised populations - especially children - in places like Bethlehem, where Sisters care for young people affected by war. Healing trauma is essential for preventing cycles of anger and future conflict.

ACN also echoes appeals from the Holy Father for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for justice, peace, and reconciliation to prevail. As well as active support, solidarity and prayer is essential.

Thank you for your support. We look forward to hearing about your Lent campaigns.

The Haddads' Story for Slide 9:

The Haddads live in a modest home on the outskirts of Bethlehem. There's Maryam, aged 15, her older brother Daniel, their mum, Sophia, dad Georges and their elderly grandfather Jamil.

Life has been incredibly hard for them. For years, Georges earned a living as an olive-wood carver, shaping crosses, Holy Family figurines, and Nativity sets — carrying on a craft his father and grandfather taught him. But when conflict intensified and pilgrims stopped visiting, his workshop stood silent. With no tourists, there were no sales. Money disappeared almost overnight. The family began sharing smaller meals, and Sophia quietly went without so the children could eat. Grandfather Jamil needed daily medication, but the family could no longer afford it.

Many teenagers live with constant anxiety because of violence and conflict and some of Maryam's friends need anti-anxiety medication. Daniel loves visiting friends, going to youth groups and getting involved in activities but due to the pop-up roadblocks and checkpoints this is now very difficult.

ACN began providing the Haddads with emergency food, medicine, and help covering their rent and electricity bills. Grandfather Jamil finally received the treatment he desperately needed. Georges was offered a place in an ACN-supported job-creation project, allowing him to rebuild his olive-wood business and provide for his family with dignity.

Aid to the Church in Need is committed to helping to keep that door open and has pledged a large donation to cover fees for over 800 Christian students in 13 schools in the Holy Land, in the belief that their education is an investment in the future of Christianity in the entire region.

For Maryam and Daniel, ACN's support changed everything. ACN helped pay their school fees, making sure they could stay in school and continue their education. Even though Christians are the smallest of the three major faith groups present in the Holy Land, the Catholic Church runs the largest network of schools in the region. These schools provide a concrete opportunity for people of different faiths to meet, to respect one another, to learn together and to build relationships that last a lifetime.

Where pressing needs are particularly dire, the local Church is supporting all families — of all faiths — helping build bridges of peace. So the Haddads survive, stay hopeful and remain rooted in the land where Jesus once walked.

RESPONSE - AFTER THE ASSEMBLY, PLEASE DISCUSS IN FORM CLASSES:

1. What struck you about the assembly?
2. What is ACN trying to do for the people of the Holy Land?
3. How can we help them?
4. What would we like to do concretely as a form/year group/school to fundraise?
5. Can we commit to prayer during Lent? What will this look like?

If you would like to receive **ACN's FREE downloadable Lent Calandar** with activities, prayers and further information based on our Lent Holy Land campaign, please contact marie.fahy@acnuk.org or your local Community Fundraiser or Youth Outreach Officer.

For school orders of Holding Crosses, fundraising, school visits and information about school memberships, please contact your local Community Fundraiser or Youth Outreach Officer or teresa.kehoe@acnuk.org

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