



Dear Friends,

Yesterday, a young man from France asked me, “Father, what can I do in order not to lose hope in the face of all that is happening in society and around the world?”

As we were talking, we quickly agreed that our sense of hope and Christian joy has to be rooted in faith and trust in the Kingdom of God and not in world developments. True hope can only spring from the knowledge that suffering, want, and even death – which we can neither ignore nor trivialise – do not have the last word or, to put it in another way, do not last forever.

History tells us that in every age we are confronted with sorrow, violence, suffering and even death and we always will be. And yet, in two ways, we find reason for hope in what the Prophet Isaiah foresaw and what St Peter confirms in so many words after the Resurrection of Jesus: “By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pt 2:24).

On one hand, this tells us that all darkness and evil is swallowed up in the

passion and death of Jesus – in other words it is truly “healed”. And so, it is not insurmountable for us as well.

And on the other hand, the fact that we are healed by his wounds directs us to a specific aspect of Christian hope, namely that suffering and death are not destructive and without meaning or value. As with Jesus himself, they can instead be

wounds will be healed in the very deepest depths of our souls.

In every age such faith gives rise, ever anew, to a confident trust, freedom and strength which render sin, suffering and Satan powerless. And we are thereby made able to perform those good works which embody the love of God – and bring this love to others.



“With the crucified Christ, suffering and death are transformed, in the deepest sense, into good and thereby totally redeemed.”

the highest expression of love – the expression of his loving self-sacrifice for the “beloved thou”. Suffering and death are transformed here, in the deepest sense, into good and thereby totally redeemed.

And so, we too are individually called to offer up our own experiences of suffering in life – that is to say our “wounds” and even our death – in and with the wounds of Jesus to the Eternal Father, in reparation and for the redemption of the world, just as Jesus Christ himself has done. Then everything we have to suffer acquires meaning and value and our

I am blessed, here at ACN, to have come to know so many people who truly live by this hope. People who by their lives and their work illustrate what is so beautifully expressed in St Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

With these thoughts, I send my greetings to you and extend to you my warmest blessings.



Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



First Holy Communion: these children have grown up in the shadow of the war.

HELPING to restore souls

For the past 15 years most people in Syria – and above all the Christians – have been walking a Way of the Cross. Many have now left the country. But Christianity still lives on – thanks not least to your help.

Azza Al-Bittar (42) lives together with her husband and her son in Homs, where the war began in 2011. She tells us: “My faith was born and grew in a wounded country. I lived through the civil war, with all its devastation and instability. Then the pandemic struck, raising a great question mark over our life and death. And in 2023, as though we had not already suffered enough, the earthquake shook the ground beneath our feet.” But then she

adds: “I have also known liberation and resurrection. God has revealed himself, even in the darkest moments. Each day I brought my sufferings before God and repeated inwardly the words of the Psalm: ‘Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you!’”

For Azza, faith was never just an idea or a mere tradition. “For me it is a living relationship that is tested in adversity. I would often ask God, ‘Why is all this happening?’ Each time I heard in my heart an echo of his words: ‘In the world you will have trouble but have courage; I have overcome the world.’”

Although she herself is often tired and exhausted, she nonetheless supports the young people, helps with catechesis and cares for children with disabilities. “War brings division to people, but Christ teaches us to love. And so I decided to cling to my inner peace, even when it was difficult,” she says with conviction.

Through this experience Azza has learned something important. “Christian joy is not the absence of suffering, but the presence of God in the midst of suffering. Faith in God does not always change the circumstances, but it changes the person. This hope in Christ can carry us through war,



“Jesus, I trust in You!”

sickness, earthquakes and fear and do so even with an inner peace, quiet joy and unshakeable trust that God is still at work in the Middle East and in every human heart that believes in him.”

The Jesuits in Homs, to whom Azza owes her profound faith and inner healing, are currently setting up a centre in this city deeply wounded by war. This centre will be a place of inner renewal, reconciliation and peace. All who come here will find help to gain new confidence, with all their heart, mind and spirit. As a place of hope, it will act as a counterweight to both the despair in so many human hearts and to the profound divisions within society.

It will cost £388,000 to complete this centre. Please help us to help them rebuild these broken lives and souls! Every penny counts.



Painting the Good News.



HOSPITALS for souls

“Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43)

That was the promise of Jesus to the good thief, hanging beside him on the cross. Today it is often the prison chaplains who witness similar miracles of conversion in the hearts of former criminals, when they encounter Jesus.

“Special hospitals for souls” is how one priest, who worked for many years as a prison chaplain, once described prisons. Many of the prisoners are broken, spiritually, psychologically and morally, and simply don’t know how to escape the vicious cycle they are trapped in. And so, the priest must exercise a great deal of patience, tact and empathy in order to gain the trust of those involved.

Tangible acts of kindness are often what prompts reflection by those who initially wanted nothing to do with faith or re-



Young inmates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

ligion. “Why is this priest doing this for us?” they ask themselves when the chaplains press for the prisoners to be treated more humanely. For the conditions in many countries are appalling, with tiny, vermin-infested and overcrowded cells. Many prisoners die for lack of medical treatment; brutality and torture are common. That anyone should even care about their wellbeing is the first sign for these prisoners of love and respect shown for their human dignity. It is then that many begin to ask questions and talk to the priest about their lives.

The most important step, then, is to acknowledge their sins, feel remorse and resolve to start anew. Once they are able to open their hearts to God’s mercy, they are able to start on the road of inner healing and to a new life.

But support and accompaniment are also vital for the prisoners’ families, who are often left without their sole breadwinner

and face real material, social and spiritual poverty. And so, the chaplains are also there for them.

Thanks to your help we are able to support the prison ministry in various different countries. In **Egypt**, for example, the prisons are deliberately built way out in the desert, far from the population centres, so that a vehicle is an indispensable necessity for the chaplains.

And so, in the Diocese of Al Qusia, we are helping with £8,600 for a suitable vehicle.

Again and again, we are asked to help with the training of the prison chaplains, and also for Bibles and other religious texts, so that the prisoners can learn more about Jesus.

Will you help us, so God’s mercy can continue to work miracles of conversion in the hearts of former criminals?



Ecuador: Holy Mass in a prison.



Your voice matters: Sign our petition for religious freedom!

Last October, when presenting the Religious Freedom in the World Report, ACN also launched an international petition in defence of religious freedom, addressed to the United Nations, the European Council, and democratic world leaders. Faced with the dramatic reality documented in our Report, we felt compelled not only to inform, but also to act.

Religious freedom, enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protects the dignity of every person and lies at the heart of the Church's social teaching and pastoral mission.

Thanks to the generous commitment of so many people, tens of thousands of signatures have already been collected worldwide. But far more is needed before the campaign concludes in November 2026, to ensure our appeal is truly heard.

The petition, available in six languages, gives voice to those who cannot speak freely and stands beside persecuted Christians and people of all faiths. A simple gesture can become a powerful act of solidarity — transforming care into action and hope into change.

Sign our petition:

<https://acnuk.org/article-18-petition-religious-freedom-human-right-not-privilege>



Shagufta Kausar from Pakistan spent years in prison for her faith.



Regina Lynch
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Religious freedom lies at the very heart of human dignity. Where this fundamental right is respected, peace, justice and social harmony can flourish. Where it is denied, the human spirit is diminished and communities are deeply wounded. Defending religious freedom, therefore, is not merely a legal or political task, but a moral responsibility that concerns us all.

As Christians, faithful to the teaching of the Church, we are called to uphold this right for every person, without distinction. When Pope Leo XIV received us in audience last October, he reminded us that “religious freedom is not merely a legal right or a privilege granted by governments”, but a “foundational condition” and “rooted in the dignity of the human person”. Today, two thirds of humanity live in countries where this fundamental right is violated. Inspired by this call, I warmly invite you to sign our global petition in support of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where religious freedom is enshrined, as explained in the article alongside this column. Your voice and your prayers can help ensure that those who suffer for their faith are not left unheard.

Regina Lynch

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Praying for the persecuted

Whenever I get the Mirror, I am shaken to read about all the suffering in the world. I would love to be able to defeat all this cruel pain that is inflicted by such heartless people, and so I pray for all my persecuted brothers and sisters and for all of you who are supporting them and lovingly helping them. May the Lord strengthen you in your mission! I am praying for ACN and find comfort in your prayers also.

A friend and benefactress in Portugal

Committed to helping ACN

I was moved to become an ACN parish representative and fundraiser after I heard a talk about the plight of Christians in the Middle East. That ancient Christian heartland where our faith first blossomed had become a place where Christians lived in fear of persecution. ACN seemed

to be the only organisation that focused directly on this need in a coherent and practical way. We keep the parish and other local faith communities informed and updated about ACN efforts, emphasising that those who persecute don't usually bother about the religious details of whom they are persecuting. The message is always: all Christians are important, and everything helps.

A friend and supporter in England

Proud to be a part of it

I do love your Mirror! I love receiving it, and I love reading it! It makes me feel so much more involved in the lives of my many suffering brothers and sisters and enables me to pray more for them in their suffering. May God bless your work! I am proud to be a part of it!

A benefactress in Brazil



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN UNITED KINGDOM

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Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is a Catholic charity bringing spiritual and practical help to Christians – especially those who are persecuted for their beliefs. We carry out our mission of reconciliation and love through local Church partners: supporting priests, Sisters and catechists, building churches, providing transport, training seminarians, and providing religious literature and media – as well as supplying emergency aid for Christians struggling to survive or fleeing persecution. ACN also advocates on behalf of suffering Christians denied a voice. Through prayer, information and action we are keeping the Faith alive in a troubled world.

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