

# Aid to the Church in Need

## Assembly plan for Scotland

### LEARNING INTENTIONS

- To understand that Christian persecution is one of the most serious human rights issues of our day
- To become aware of Aid to the Church in Need and its role in the Church
- To reflect on how we can impact the world around us positively by our own Christian witness

### SUCCESS CRITERIA

- Students can explain that Christian persecution is one of the most serious human rights issues of our day
- Students can explain what Aid to the Church in Need is and how the organisation serves the Church
- Students can describe how they can make a difference by their own Christian witness

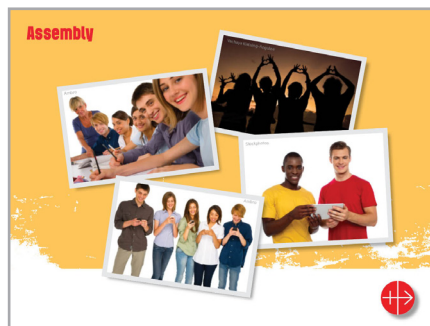
### LINKS TO R.E. CURRICULUM

Key Elements of The Church & Life in Christ with particular reference to This is Our Faith: Reflection on Meaning, particularly social & moral practices & way of life. 3-10a (Signs of God); 3-14a (Hours of God); 3-20a, 3-21a, 3-23a, 3-24a (Reign of God)

### RESOURCES

- Powerpoint with images and quotes
- [www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org) for more information

## OVERVIEW AND TIMINGS



Slide 1

Children to enter hall while slide 1 is shown on powerpoint	intro
INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF 'HUMAN RIGHTS': Questioning/reflecting Explanation Discussion	11 mins
STORY: Maximillian Kolbe's story Questioning	8 mins
AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED: Fr Werenfried van Straaten's story What does Aid to the Church in Need do? Reflection	5 mins
QUESTIONS	5 mins
REFLECTION	finish

### Introduction

Timing:  
Questioning/reflecting 5 mins  
Explanation 3 minutes  
Discussion 3 minutes

Slides: 1 - 3

## INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

### Questioning/Reflecting (5 mins)

#### Show Slide 1

PAIRED DISCUSSION: How would you describe the images you can see? What would you say is usual or unusual about the pictures? (people going about everyday life freely is the ideal answer – doing what they want to do and being themselves in society – their human rights are allowed and they are able to fulfil their rights and obligations within society. Question for students to reflect on:

What do you think are basic human rights that we are entitled to?

Do you think we should do anything when other people's human rights are violated?



Slide 2

### Show Slide 2

PAIRED DISCUSSION: Now, think about the images that are being shown – how would you now describe what you can see? Again, is there anything particularly usual or unusual? (people being treated badly or violated for going about their daily business and being themselves – their human rights are denied)

Does anyone have any ideas on what this assembly is about?

### QUESTION FOR STUDENTS TO REFLECT ON:

What do you think are the basic human rights that we are entitled to?

Do you think we should do anything when other people's human rights are violated?

### Explanation (3 mins)

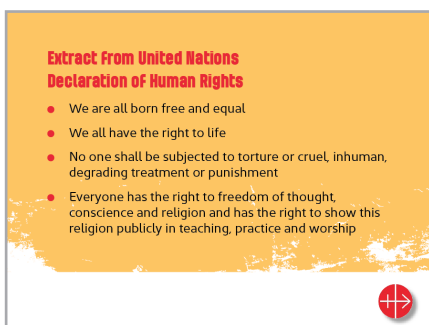
Many of you will have heard of the phrase 'human rights' – many of you will also have learnt about World War II and know something of the awful way people were treated during this War – some for their religion and beliefs, some for their nationality, some for their ethnic background.

In 1948, after the Second World War, a universal declaration of human rights was written for all human beings – regardless of beliefs, nationality, background.

This declaration includes, among other statements that:

### Show Slide 3

- We are all born free and equal
- We all have the right to life
- No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and has the right to show their religion publicly in teaching, practice and worship



Slide 3

Looking back on history, we can see that people's rights have clearly been violated because of their religion – especially in the case of Nazi Germany and the persecution of the Jews and other groups, including Catholics.

## Discussion (3 mins)

Do you think this is still an issue today or is it just an issue from the past?

Do you think Christians like you and I are persecuted and treated poorly just because of our religion?

Does this matter?

## Story

Timing:

Maximilian Kolbe's story 5 mins

Questioning 3 minutes

Slide: 4

## Maximilian Kolbe's Story (5 mins)

### Show Slide 4

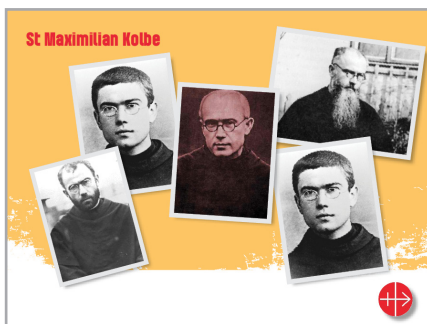
Individuals and communities in all different times and places have stood up for other people's rights even when it involves being unpopular and even being mistreated. Let me tell you a story:

In 1894, the Kolbe family welcomed a new son, Raymund. He grew up with his parents and one surviving brother, Francis. On reaching adulthood, the two brothers joined the Franciscans and became priests. Raymund took the name Maximilian when he was ordained a priest and this is how he is best known – as Maximilian Kolbe. You may now recognize the name as he is one of the most famous Catholic men of the last 100 years.

Why? Well, Maximilian Kolbe was a man full of courage who spent his whole adult life thinking about the needs of others and taking daily steps of faith. These steps of faith included illegally crossing a country border to train as a priest and founding and building a monastery in Japan in a location that everyone advised him against.

Maximilian was alive at the start of World War II and as the war progressed, he recognised that Polish refugees needed a secret place of shelter from the Nazis. He hid nearly 3000 Polish refugees including 2000 Jews in the monastery he founded as he believed that all people have the right to live freely and to practise their religion without persecution or torture.

Unfortunately, the German Gestapo discovered that he was hiding all these people and they swiftly closed down the monastery and imprisoned Kolbe in Auschwitz concentration camp on 17th February 1941.



Slide 4

During this time the Nazis were rounding up Jewish people, gypsies, people with mental illness, political activists along with many other groups from society and taking them off to concentration camps such as Auschwitz. Here they made them work, starved them, tortured them and eventually killed them.

Even during his time in the camp, Kolbe was constantly putting the needs of others first – at night he seldom would lie down to rest. He moved from bunk to bunk, saying: ‘I am a Catholic priest. Can I do anything for you?’

Father Kolbe pleaded with his fellow prisoners to forgive their persecutors and to overcome evil with good. When he was beaten by the guards, he never cried out. Instead, he prayed for his tormentors.

All of this was leading to the event that Maximilian Kolbe is most famous for – one day in the camp, in July 1941, a man from Kolbe’s barracks vanished and the Nazi camp commander picked 10 men from the same barracks to be starved to death in Block 13 which was notorious for torture.

One of the selected men, a Jewish Polish soldier nicknamed Franek, cried out, “My poor wife! My poor children! What will they do?” Kolbe offered himself instead. “I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children.”

He was duly sent to Block 13 to starve with 9 other men. During the time in the cell Kolbe led the men in songs and prayer. After three weeks of dehydration and starvation, only Kolbe and three others were still alive. Each time the guards checked on him he was standing or kneeling in the middle of the cell and looking calmly at those who entered. Eventually, as the last man still conscious in the cell, he was killed with an injection of carbolic acid. He died on 14th August 1941.

Maximilian Kolbe truly took to heart the Gospel message “I tell you truly, whatever you did for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:40). He stood up for Christ, for the weak, the persecuted, the innocent and for the inherent human rights that we all have.

## Questioning (3 mins)

What would you stand up for? Why?

What would you speak up against? Why?

### Aid to the Church in Need

Timing: 5 mins

Slides: 5 - 7



Slide 5

### Show Slide 5

Imagine being frightened to listen to your favourite music in case someone attacks you because it offends them? Or your house being burnt down while you were at Sunday Mass with your family because you have dared to go to Church? Or not being able to attend school purely due to your gender?

This may sound far-fetched but it might surprise you to know that persecution is not just a historical issue – just as Kolbe took a stand for people who were persecuted for what they believed, people today are still being persecuted and denied the basic human right of being able to practise what they believe freely and there are people willing to take a stand for them.

### Fr Werenfried van Straaten's story

### Show Slide 6

Let me tell you another story. (If possible, invite a student to read the following story about the founder of Aid to the Church in Need)

As you can imagine, many people were horrified by what they saw and witnessed during the Second World War and one immediate effect of such a long and tragic conflict was that there were hundreds of thousands of people left without homes, jobs and money.

One man, a Dutch priest named Fr Werenfried van Straaten, living in Belgium cared very much about these people and at the request of Pope Pius XII, he decided to do what he could after the war - he started to collect food and clothes for people. He asked for help and the Flemish farmers he appealed to had little money but plenty of bacon in their kitchens. He was overwhelmed by people's generosity and the food offerings earned him the name 'The Bacon Priest' because of the large quantities he was given!



Slide 6

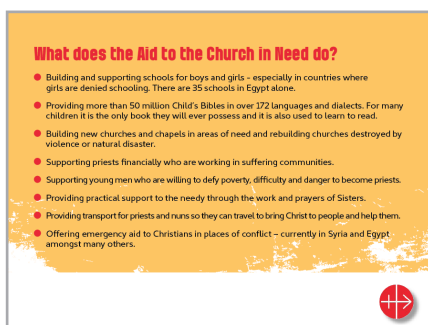


At the same time, Fr Werenfried recognised that people's spiritual needs weren't being met and he set out to support people – he bought a truck and would travel and say Mass from the truck for people who weren't able to get to church because the buildings had been destroyed. As the months and years went by, Fr Werenfried's support for Christians grew and developed – especially in countries where people were prevented from living out their faith – he would arrange for priests to be available for Mass, for people to receive bibles, for Churches to be built where possible. He would speak for people whose human rights weren't being respected such as refugees, the unborn and suffering Christians. As he said at the end of World War II "For me," he wrote, "the most pressing problem was making room for love again in Europe." The need for this has never stopped and so it became a charity known as 'Aid to the Church in Need' which still exists today and is still an international charity bringing Christ's love to the world. Fittingly, the name Werenfried means "warrior for peace".

### What does Aid to the Church in Need do?

Unbelievably, there are more Christians than ever who are persecuted in our world today. Did you know that 80% of all religious persecution that happens in the world is directed at Christians? Aid to the Church in Need supports them in many ways including:

#### Show Slide 7



Slide 7

- Building and supporting schools for boys and girls – especially in countries where girls are denied schooling. There are 35 schools in Egypt alone
- Providing more than 50 million Child's Bibles in over 172 languages and dialects. For many children it is the only book they will ever possess and it is also used to learn to read
- Building new churches and chapels in areas of need and rebuilding churches destroyed by violence or natural disaster
- Supporting priests financially who are working in suffering communities

- Supporting young men who are willing to defy poverty, difficulty and danger to become priests
- Providing practical support to the needy through the work and prayers of Sisters
- Providing transport for priests and nuns so they can travel to bring Christ to people and help them
- Offering emergency aid to Christians in places of conflict – currently in Syria and Egypt among many others

### **Reflection**

Maximilian Kolbe is now proclaimed a Saint because of his actions and the way he lived his life and the work of Fr Werenfried still continues today as there is a great need among Christian communities around the world. These men saw the needs of others and did what they could to help and support them. They used their talents and energy to make a difference and stand up for truth because of their faith in Jesus.

One person's actions have the power to change so much – don't ever doubt the power that you have which you can choose to use for good or ill. With Christ's help, you can all make a difference.

Jesus says 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" Matthew 5:44

This is part of who we are called to be as Christians – to love others even when they treat us badly and to support those in need. How can you make a difference and contribute to the work of Aid to the Church in Need?



### Questions

Timing: 5 mins

Slide: 8



Slide 8

Split the students into two groups. Choose a student to represent each group. Ask the question:

How could you support the work of Aid to the Church in Need?

Explain to the children that the two groups are collecting ideas for ways they can help the mission of Aid to the Church in Need. The two children at the front will pick children with their hands up and will take note of the ideas given.

First give the children 30 seconds to discuss with the person next to them.

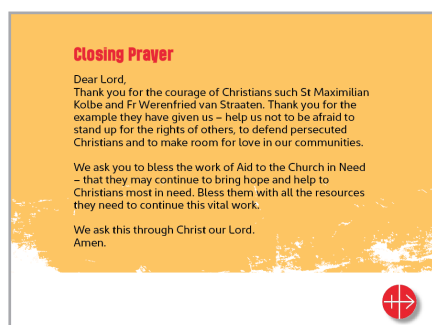
(ideas: donate money, fundraisers – own clothes day, cake sales etc.)

Here are some ideas you may not have thought of: writing letters to politicians, writing messages of solidarity to the persecuted and praying for those who suffer.

**Show Slide 8**

### Reflection

Slide: 8



Slide 9

**Show Slide 9**

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the courage of Christians such as St Maximilian Kolbe and Fr Werenfried van Straaten. Thank you for the example they have given us – help us not to be afraid to stand up for the rights of others, to defend persecuted Christians and to make room for love in our communities.

We ask you to bless the work of Aid to the Church in Need – that they may continue to bring hope and help to Christians most in need. Bless them with all the resources they need to continue this vital work.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

**Please let us know if you have used this resource  
and how useful it was.**

Email: [learn@acnuk.org](mailto:learn@acnuk.org)

Thank you.



[www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org)

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Aid to the Church in Need is a Pontifical Foundation of the  
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**theatre**

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