



Taking advantage of the peace, ACN helps repair the catechetical centre in Kafar Bohom, Syria.

“We are the living stones of God’s building, profoundly united to Christ who is the keystone and also the one that sustains us... With us when we are together is also the Holy Spirit, who helps us to grow as Church. We are not alone, for we are the People of God: this is the Church!”

Pope Francis, General audience, 26th June 2013

Dear Friends,

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...” (1 Pet 2:5). These words are addressed to us by the first Pope, whom Jesus renamed *Petros*, Peter, the rock. What is the essence of the Church? It is not merely the buildings where we come together to worship God, even if some of them are very beautiful, nor are its institutions its reason for being. No, God’s grace, which he in his goodness bestows upon us, is the framework that underpins the Church – and its foundation stone is Jesus himself. It is upon him that the Holy Spirit establishes his saving work, starting with the Apostles and then by calling individual souls and furnishing them with a variety of gifts. These gifts are not given as personal possessions, but are there to serve the whole Church community and build up the Kingdom of God. St Paul, the Apostle to the Nations, describes very clearly this charismatic structure that lies at the base of the Church: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Cor 12:4ff).



God’s grace...is the framework that underpins the Church.

Every charism carries within itself the mission of building up the Church – these in turn need some form of organisation to serve the community effectively. But the ecclesiastical organisation and its institutions are not an ends in themselves. Above all, the Church’s visible structure exists to perform its fundamental charism of charity, or neighbourly love – which is rooted in the love of God. From the very beginning, the Church shared all things in common, according to each one’s needs (see Acts 2:44-45). This

reflects the very nature of the Church and it also reflects the charism of ACN – giving in love, and helping all who lack the basic necessities for a dignified life as children of God.

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas est* Pope Benedict XVI explains this fundamental principle of fraternal charity within the Church: “The Church is God’s family in the world. In this family no one ought to go

without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas* (*agape*) extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter ‘by chance’ (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to

the Galatians is emphatic: ‘So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith’ (6:10).’

Dear friends, thank you for helping, through ACN, to build

up the universal Church. Thank you for your each and every act of charity, filled with the love of God, a love beyond justice, which people have always needed and will always need.

My grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

*Fr Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant*

Undeterred by the earthquake

The 50 Missionary Sisters of the Poor Clares of the Most Blessed Sacrament are a powerful driving force of mission in the Diocese of Cuernavaca in Mexico. For years they drew new strength for their missions through prayer, secure within the walls of their Mother House.

They work in kindergartens, schools, hospitals, first-aid posts and leprosy clinics. They teach the catechism to children, young people and adults. They support the spiritual movements, visit the elderly and lonely in their homes and inmates in the prisons. They organise liturgical worship in the villages and prepare people for Confirmation and First Holy Communion. They visit student hostels and go out to places of acute poverty: the railway stations and market places. For the poor and abandoned they are angels of light, sisters, mothers, the living face of love and mercy.

Their mother house was once a place of peace and serenity. But then, on 19th September 2017 at 1 p.m., an earthquake struck Cuernavaca, causing many buildings to collapse. The mother house was also shaken, and large cracks appeared in the walls; instead of offering protection, it was now a danger to life. Part of the building complex had to be demolished, including the retreat house. Many activities have had to be abandoned, including retreat days, catechism



Before the earthquake: but today the chapel needs renovation.

classes, counselling and childcare sessions. The sick and elderly Sisters had to be moved elsewhere. Since that day, much of the Sisters' energies have had to be invested in the renovation work and fundraising – interrupting their vital work of evangelisation in Cuernavaca.

Urge que Cristo reine – “Make haste, that Christ may reign”, is the motto of the congregation, which is also present in many other countries, including challenging ones like Indonesia and Sierra Leone. But love urges them on. So many souls are waiting for the Sisters. But they need to rebuild these walls, which once offered protection and a place to recover new strength in silence and seclusion, for their wide-ranging task of evangelisation. The plans for the renovation work have been drawn up, and work has already begun. We share their sense of urgency, and are giving **£44,000** to raise new walls for the mother house of the Poor Clares in Cuernavaca. ●



After the earthquake: parts of the convent had to be demolished for safety.



Urged on by love: work has already begun on the new house.

Padre Pio helps from heaven

Their parish was scheduled to have been closed – as there were not enough worshippers and there was no money for a new chapel.

But the little flock fought back. The faithful kept faith and prayed to Padre Pio, the patron saint of their parish in Zaporyzhzhya, **Ukraine**. They wanted to be able to go to Confession, attend Holy Mass, hold exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. And their pastors were won over. In 2008 the missionaries of La Salette returned and stayed on. But they still had no chapel – so they converted a room in a house to serve as a temporary chapel – far too small and far too cramped. Then they bought an old house, a former bakery. It had to be extensively rebuilt, as a ruin is not a fitting house of God. Now the ruin has become a building site. But the parish continues to grow. Moreover, this year is the 50th anniversary of Padre Pio's death, so the new structure, in which Holy Mass is already being celebrated, needs to become a proper, beautiful chapel by then. Impressed by this small miracle of perseverance, we have promised further help amounting to **£26,400**. ●



Blessed from above: Holy Mass in the chapel of Padre Pio – it is already full and soon it will be beautiful.



Helping them go home



Hundreds of displaced Christians in Syria and Iraq driven from their homes by persecution, terrorism and war are beginning to return thanks to your support.

In Homs, [Syria](#), work is underway on a long-awaited building repair project in an ancient city devastated by bomb damage. ACN is helping to fund the renovation of 97 homes in Homs. We have also been helping to rebuild churches where it is safe to do so. Structural engineers have been evaluating Homs's damaged houses, case by case. Hala Mashhour, a young volunteer architect

working on the scheme, said: "This project fills me with enthusiasm because I would love to see Homs with a new face and her former beauty restored." Her own family is still renting a small flat costing £37 (25,000 Syrian Pounds) per month. ACN has prioritised the poorest and neediest families, those who are struggling to pay for rented accommodation.

In [Iraq's](#) Nineveh Plains, where most Christians were driven out of their homes, 8,768 families have now returned. In Qaraqosh, which was Iraq's last Christian-majority city before Daesh (ISIS) seized it in 2014, more than 50 percent of the families have returned amounting to more than 25,650 Christians – and 1,825 houses have been restored out of 6,826 damaged.

We have also heled repair other vital Church-run projects, including an orphanage in Qaraqosh pictured above.

But while, thanks to your kind help, so many families have returned, there are still hundreds of displaced families dreaming of the day when they will be able to go back to their homes in Iraq. They have been living as internal refugees for four years now. Please keep them in your prayers. ●

ACN is helping repair the orphanage run by Dominican Sisters in Qaraqosh on Iraq's Nineveh Plains.



Archbishop Jeanbart surveys his bomb-damaged cathedral in Aleppo's Old City.



Homes under repair in Homs, Syria.



Dependable partners

In many parts of Africa Christians are living alongside a growing Islam. In **Nigeria's** Osogbo Diocese we are supporting essential workshops on Islam and inter-religious dialogue for priests, religious and lay leaders. Islam is even growing in the south of the continent. In **Zambia** the bishops' conference held a study day in order to develop a strategy to combat the Islamist expansion which has come with the growth of Islam. Although Muslims are still only a small minority, the bishops tell us that "in the Catholic areas, mosques are springing up everywhere like mushrooms". ACN supported the study day to help the Church face these challenges. "We are facing a huge pastoral challenge", the bishops' letter states, adding their "thanks to ACN for your ever dependable partnership". This partnership gives them the courage to address their challenges with hope and determination.



Thomas Heine-Geldern,
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Thanks to your consistent and sterling support, we have again been able to help a number of important building projects with our partners in some of the poorest dioceses around the world, and indeed in many cases have made them possible in the first place. Just as we were happy to announce the joyful news of our help to the religious orders and dioceses who requested our aid, so too we are delighted to be able to convey to you, our generous benefactors, the sincere and profound gratitude of your brothers and sisters in the Faith in those places. Again and again we are reminded of the prayers and sacrifices of our suffering and needy project partners, which spur us on and give us new strength to continue with our mission.

But in addition to the necessary physical infrastructure, it is equally important for the spread of the Faith to build with "living stones" which have knowledge of that Faith. Only those who not only accept the Faith as a gift from God but are also willing to deepen their knowledge of Faith, can take part in the necessary dialogue with other religions.

This dialogue takes place not only in the countries where we help but in every place where we are willing to bear witness for Christ and the Church.

Thomas Heine-Geldern

Need, love and thanks – your letters

The loving difference

I am very passionate about the loving difference ACN is making all over the world; in particular presently I am very passionate and have been helping, in my own way, the families who are returning to the Nineveh Plains in Iraq. The latest newsletter is absolutely wonderful with regards to all this. I will continue to assist these families as much as I can.

A benefactor in Australia

Holy Trinity – a constant companion

I really admire the courage, the love, the professionalism of all at ACN. I imagine that the mission of bringing Christ to so many, and meeting material and spiritual needs with so much love is really

challenging, and I'm sure that the Holy Trinity is the constant companion of everyone at ACN. I love your Work.

A benefactor in Brazil

For the Christians of the Middle East

Here is the price of my season ticket to the theatre, as my way of starting Lent with you. United in prayer.

A benefactor in France

Moved and impressed by ACN

We are deeply moved by the work of ACN. We admire the enormous range of your work and will continue our monthly support as long as God grants us the grace of life.

A married couple in Belgium

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Our address is Aid to the Church in Need, 12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA. Please use the Freepost envelope – it saves you money and helps us. If you give by standing order, or have sent a donation recently, please accept our sincere thanks. This Mirror is for your interest and information.

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