

MIRROR



☎ 020 8642 8668
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No 6 • August 2018
Published eight times per year



“One could say, without exaggeration, that the family is the driving force of the world and of history. Our personality develops in the family, by growing up with our mum and dad, our brothers and sisters, by breathing in the warmth of the home.”
Pope Francis, plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family 25th October 2013

Dear Friends,

In recent months and years we have often reported on the persecuted Church in Iraq and Syria. The crisis there is immense, it is literally a matter of life and death – and of the survival of Christianity in its biblical homeland. But the need is also great in India, Pakistan, Latin America, Africa and China. In all these regions of the world, Christians’ material needs are an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel to all people so that they can recognise the true greatness of their dignity and vocation. And the poor, if we abandon them, are “doubly exposed to neglect and to all kinds of dangers to their integrity,” as Pope Francis tells us. It is our task to address this need in

the Church and support people in their life of faith.

But much is amiss in our wealthy nations too. The creeping loss of faith and of



“When we reject God’s Commandments and define ourselves, we remain trapped within ourselves.”

people’s relationship to God, the Creator of life, undermines their spiritual and cultural foundations. War and strife are always caused by spiritual confusion. With the refusal of a binding relationship (*re-ligio*) with God, the fundamental principles of our lives first blur and then evaporate. When we reject God’s Commandments and

define ourselves, we remain trapped within ourselves. The great debates over the defence of life, marriage and the family ultimately depend on this openness to God. So it is, generally speaking, not a matter of material, but of spiritual poverty. This is where each one of us is called to give our own personal testimony as to human nature and the plan of God for us all. The Church, especially through the popes of the last 50 years, has reminded us again and again of this wonder of our human nature. It is the garment of God’s love.

Radical gender ideology, abortion, “marriage equality,” euthanasia, “spare embryos” created by IVF – all these things are manipulations of nature. This kind of thinking destroys our human dignity, and lies at the heart of the culture of death. “Abortion is the greatest destroyer of peace,” said Mother Teresa. But education for peace begins in the family. Just a few weeks ago thousands of families came together at the World Meeting of Families in Ireland, in order to bear witness to the “Gospel of the family”. ACN wants this good news to be heard in every family around the world and so we are supporting hundreds of “family projects” worldwide. The civilisation of love needs our support – in Iraq, in Syria, around the world, and also in our own wealthy nations. It is vital to the existence of the family. If we do not strive to protect and defend our children and young people, marriage and the family, then the tide of evil will sweep away the foundations. In defending God, we defend humanity!

My grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

Fr Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant

Summer camps with Christ

“The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church,” said Pope Francis in a Twitter tweet. We might also say that the welfare of the children is decisive for the welfare of the family.

It is not only parents who look after children’s welfare. It is true, of course, as Saint John Paul II wrote in his Letter to Families in 1994, that parents are “the first and principal educators” of their children. But he added that they can also share this responsibility “with other individuals and institutions, such as the Church,” who will assist in this educational duty. This is what is happening in the summer camps run by

the Ordinariate for Armenian Catholics in Eastern Europe. This year 800 children aged between 9 and 18 will be taking part in the summer camps. Their parents know that their children will be spending their time here in a Christian atmosphere and at the same time learning about their rich spiritual inheritance as Armenian Catholics. In addition to daily Mass and catechism classes, the programme in-



Sport and games bring friendship – and we all need friends in life.



Getting to know Jesus and belonging to his Church – baptism in the camp.

cludes a great deal of sport, hiking and group games, as well as Armenian dancing, folklore and learning about the history and culture of the country.

The children and young people all come from poor families and would otherwise have no opportunity to take such a holiday. Quite a few of the young people are actually baptised during the summer camp; last year 25 of them received the sacrament. Others will prepare for their First Holy Communion with the help of the catechists and priests. It would be hard to do more for the welfare of these children. We are helping with £22,000. ●

Happy marriages, happy life

In the 50 years since Blessed Pope Paul VI wrote *Humanae Vitae*, this prophetic encyclical has lost none of its relevance.

In the wealthy countries of Europe and America this encyclical is often ignored or even maligned, but in the poor countries of Africa and Asia it is highly esteemed. In the war-torn and crisis-ridden **Democratic Republic of the Congo** the Archdiocese of Bukavu is organising a congress for priests, religious Sisters and catechists from six dioceses in order to study the wisdom of its teachings for the present time. How many

people know, for example, that this encyclical praises marriage as “a love which is total – that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything” and in its consideration of the regulation of the birth of children it “defends the dignity of husband and wife”. Research in this area encouraged by Pope Paul VI and his successors, especially Saint John Paul II, is a natural part of pastoral care for families. Ranged against this there is a perverse form of ethics, which is all about the selfishness of the individual and the profits of big industry. The aim of the con-



Marriage and family is not just a matter of sentiment. Knowledge is important too.

gress is to examine the encyclical anew and organise the pastoral care of families accordingly. In promoting the natural law, the congress also promotes human happiness. We are supporting its work with £13,200. ●

Iraq



Homecoming in Qaraqosh

Fr George Jahola shows us round his church. “*Allahu akbar*” and “Daesh [ISIS] will return” are still sprayed in Arabic on the walls. “Do you see the graffiti? It was left behind by the Daesh terrorists in order to frighten our people.” Outside, the bell tower still lies in ruins. “It was blown up by Daesh. We’re going to leave it like that as a reminder of the greatest disaster that ever struck our town of Qaraqosh.”

Qaraqosh was once the biggest Christian town in Iraq, with a population of over 50,000 people – until that scorching hot day in August 2014, when all its inhabitants were forced to flee from the advancing forces of so-called “Islamic State”. In a matter of just a few hours, they and tens of thousands of other Christians from the surrounding towns and villages became homeless and dispossessed. Years of uncertainty followed, in refugee camps. Many people left Iraq altogether and headed for the West. Not until the end of 2016 was this town in northern Iraq finally liberated. “But now half of us are back living here. And we are hoping that still more will come. That is what we are working towards,” says Fr George. In practice, he is something like parish priest and mayor rolled into one, the leading figure in the reconstruction of the town. A reconstruction



Rebuilding work is well underway. We plan to restore over 2,700 homes, and we still lack the funds for many of them.

made possible by the continuing support of ACN. “Come, I’ll show you how we’re helping people.”

We travel through potholed streets and past badly damaged houses, till we come to the house of the Bassim family. A hammered metal cross hangs proudly over the entrance to the simple house of this Syriac Catholic family. Bazima and her daughter Marijam welcome us with tea and cakes. “We simply cannot tell you how happy we are to be able to live back in our own home once again,” the mother tells us. “We want to thank the benefactors of ACN for this, as our fate has touched them. May God grant them health and long life!” Their family is one of the more fortunate ones, however. Almost a

hundred homes in the town were totally destroyed, they tell us. And thousands of others are virtually uninhabitable. But even their own house still needs new doors and windows, and a coat of paint. And most of their furniture has either been stolen or decayed in the years since they left.

And despite their joy at being able to return to their own home, they still face major problems. 21-year-old Marijam, the daughter, is studying engineering. “I absolutely want to stay in my own country,” she says. “But that depends on whether I can find work here.” At the moment her father, who deals in car parts, manages to make a modest living for his family. But the economic situation is fragile. During their years as refugees, they have used up all their family savings. But their greatest fear is that the events of 2014 could happen again. “We don’t really feel safe. We are still fearful that Daesh might come back again,” the mother tells us. “May God protect us again in the future.” Fr George understands the needs of his parishioners. “Naturally, not everything is good. The problems in our country are enormous. But one thing is certain: if other Christians around the world had not helped us so generously, none of us would be here today.”

See www.acnuk.org/iraq



*Home to stay:
Bazima and her daughter Marijam
outside their family home.*



*A reminder of the horror:
Fr George next to the ruined
bell tower of his church.*



“Like our daily bread”

In the spring of 2017 torrential rain fell like a deluge on the Archdiocese of Piura in Peru. In a matter of hours it turned streams into roaring torrents and washed away or overwhelmed thousands of homes, animals, vehicles and small chapels. The catastrophic deluge was followed by a deluge of aid, but many people in this profoundly religious archdiocese are still lamenting, among other things, the loss of their Bibles. Archbishop José Antonio Eguren appealed to ACN for help and now 3,700 Bibles have been sent to Piura, to chapels, homes and schools, prompting a wave of gratitude: “We are so happy to be able to read about Jesus again,” “the Bible has a special place in our home,” “the words of Jesus are like our daily bread for us”. These and many other expressions of thanks from his people have been sent to us by the archbishop, who also writes, “May God bless you and your work in the service of evangelisation. In this way we will together help to bring about the longed-for civilisation of love.”



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

Dear Friends,

When it comes to the religious education of our own children, what particularly matters, in addition to teaching the basics, is the example we give by our lives, how we trust in God. This example is especially fruitful when it is lived by both parents. Children find it much easier to develop in their own relationship with God when they have witnessed both their mother and father really taking their faith seriously.

At any rate it seems to me a somewhat unreasonable burden on the mother when, not infrequently, in addition to the double burden of work and family, the task of the religious education of the children also falls on her. It is essential that this joint responsibility should be jointly borne. Again and again one sees how difficult, how almost impossible it is for Catholic mothers to keep their children open to the Faith beyond puberty, if the fathers do not also seek after God.

May the recent World Meeting of Families revivify religion and prayer within the family. Here too ACN has given generous support. I thank you with all my heart for your constant and generous willingness to provide help, through your prayers and donations.

Need, love and thanks – your letters

ACN – a place of encounter

ACN is a place of encounter between us and the Church in need. We love to be a part of your work. We are praying for the persecuted and the refugees and for Christian communities living in the face of violence and poverty. And we are also giving a proportion of our earnings. This is the way we can serve our brethren in the Faith. We know that it is not money that brings happiness and goodness, but our accompanying presence and the time and energy we commit to it. ACN is a meeting place where we can accompany others, where we can be the embrace of the mother and the caress of God, the greatest love of all, that says, “You are not alone, I am with you every day.” We have seen that we all need this love. We are all Church in need.

A family in Mexico

Giving something back

Please don't thank me for this donation, as it is not a good deed on my part, but my duty. In the past, when the Church in Slovakia suffered persecution, your many benefactors stood in solidarity with us. Now we are by your side, and I am grateful to ACN for giving us the opportunity to give something back. Every day in our parishes and families we pray for the Church in need.

A supporter in Slovakia

A little treat

I was going to spend this money on giving myself a little treat, now that the holidays are here, but then I thought again. The money would surely be far better used in renovating the chapel of Fr Camillo in Burma...

A benefactor in France

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.

Mirror Editors: Jürgen Liminski & John Newton | Publisher: Aid to the Church in Need
Printed in the UK by Cliffe Enterprise, Eastbourne BN22 8UY
ISSN 0252-2535 *De licentia competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae*



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Church in Need

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