

# In the midst of persecution, faith flourishes



Seminarians in the Philippines shown with Archbishop Martin Jumoad of Ozamis (centre, purple chasuble), seminary tutors and ACN staff.

**The Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan has seen a rapid increase in vocations to the priesthood.**  
Mary Help of Christians Theological

Seminary is currently undergoing a huge extension. Construction of the original seminary began in 2012 and it was consecrated the following year. Just 13

seminarians entered when it opened its doors in June 2013. Today there are 40 young men seeking to follow Our Lord and minister to his flock. ✚

# PHILIPPINES

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



## Reaching out in Faith

Beyond Conflict and Despair

St Mary's Cathedral, Marawi showing the damage caused by Maute, an Islamist organisation allied to Daesh (ISIS).

## ACN projects in the Philippines include:



Jonathan Luciano, national director of ACN (Philippines), at the building site of the new Carmel of St Joseph in Lingayen-Dagupan Archdiocese, which the charity is also helping to construct.

- **Bishop de la Peña's initiatives:**
  - Rehabilitation centre for hostage survivors of the Marawi siege.
  - Vehicles for Youth for Peace.
- Ongoing emergency aid for displaced persons in Marawi.
- Help rebuilding the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Jolo.
- Extending Mary Help of Christians Theological Seminary.
- Providing equipment for Carmelite Sisters to begin baking Mass wafers.

**AT LEAST 20 people died and more than 100 were injured in the Philippines when bombers struck during morning Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo.**

Islamist groups claimed responsibility for the January 2019 attack – and may have been responsible for an attack on a mosque in the same city a fortnight later. Jolo Cathedral's Father Romeo Saniel told ACN: **"No words can describe the sorrow and pain that we feel these days."**

At the time, the Church was still helping survivors of the five-month siege of Marawi by Islamist extremists, during which St Mary's Cathedral was destroyed. Jihadists posted footage of themselves ransacking the cathedral.

By the time government troops took back control of Marawi, 27,000 families

had been displaced – including more than 8,000 children.

Despite St Mary's Cathedral being devastated, Bishop Edwin de la Peña of Marawi has deferred rebuilding it to focus on rebuilding shattered lives instead.

In Marawi ACN is helping the Church to:

- Support those forced from their homes
- Provide counselling for the traumatised
- Build bridges between Christians and Muslims.

Inside you will also read about other ways the charity is helping, including support for Sisters and seminarians – and helping rebuild Jolo Cathedral.

**Your support means that ACN can go some way to answering Pope Francis' prayer to "convert the hearts of the violent, and grant the inhabitants of that region a peaceful coexistence."** ✚



Bishop de la Peña with a damaged crucifix



# And so the healing begins...

**“What are the worst things that a person could experience as a hostage of a terrorist? How can one narrate a series of nightmares?”**

Lerma\* is still wondering if she is ‘healing’, having been held by Daesh (ISIS)-linked Maute extremists in 2017, during the siege of Marawi.

She was forced to witness horrific violence including the prolonged sexual assault of a young woman. “That one almost broke my heart into pieces, if that is possible.”

She described **“praying fervently the Rosary in softest whispers so that the ISIS guards a few metres away couldn’t hear you.”**

Such physical and psychological violence leaves scars that will take years to heal.

So Bishop de la Peña set up the Hapitanan Rehabilitation Centre, which is caring for casualties of the 2017 siege – including 175 Christian hostage survivors.

Counselling services include group and individual therapy sessions for women and girls who have been raped, for men who have fallen victim to violence, and for children who need to be reintegrated into daily life following the terrible experiences they have suffered.

**Thanks to your love, ACN has been able to back the bishop’s initiative to heal the deep wounds left by extremism.** ☩

\*Not her real name.



ACN staff meeting displaced families.

## Providing spiritual sustenance for a hungry flock

**With a desire to provide more than two million Catholic faithful with the spiritual sustenance of the Eucharist, Carmelite nuns on Luzon Island have embarked on a project to bake unleavened wafers for the Mass.**

They hope to provide them “for every Eucharistic celebration in the 109 parishes in our diocese, with 223 priests ministering to the more than two million Catholics.” ACN was able to provide the equipment that will also enable the 16 Sisters to support themselves financially – including three Sisters who are elderly and in need of special care. ☩



Nuns on Luzon Island will join Sisters around the world, like this one shown in Uruguay, that ACN has helped towards self-sufficiency by providing unleavened wafer baking machinery.



Young Muslims and Christians are working together to help those made homeless by Maute and forge a peaceful future.

## Building bridges in friendship and faith

**The Youth for Peace project has been building bridges between the Christian and Muslim communities since government forces re-took Marawi in October 2017.**

The project currently has 174 volunteers – including from Christian families displaced by the violence and Muslim students from Mindanao State University. The youth work together,

offering practical assistance to those in the refugee camps.

The project encourages resilience among those volunteers from displaced families, who have been victims of violent extremism and who can then share their stories and coping strategies with members of their own families and communities.

According to Bishop de la Peña, it was also important to train teenage Muslims to become “peace catalysts”,

keeping them away from the “persuasive tentacles of extremism”.

The young people themselves have said that by working together – Christians and Muslims alike – they have come to understand each other’s beliefs, while being strengthened at the same time in their own faith.

ACN has provided two vehicles, a van and a transporter for the project. Further aid is planned. ☩

## The bricks have fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones...

**(Isaiah 9:10)**

Work to rebuild the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo following the Islamist terrorist attacks of January this year – which killed 20 people and wounded more than 100 – is now underway with the help of ACN. ☩



Jonathan Luciano, national director of ACN (Philippines), during a survey of the damage at Jolo Cathedral.