



MILK: Youngsters urgently need milk and ACN has promised to provide it

## The milk of your own kindness

**This little girl and her mother are among thousands who have turned to ACN desperate for milk.**

Although security in many parts of Syria has improved, the economic crisis is so serious that soaring costs and lack of supplies mean milk is too expensive for most families.

For young children – especially babies – this is catastrophic.

ACN has responded with the ‘Drop of Milk’ programme.

Up and running in Aleppo and Damascus, ACN has just approved plans to roll out the scheme in and around Homs and Hama.

**So much more milk is urgently needed. Please help.**

One young family we met in Damascus told us: “Without your help, life would be almost impossible.” ☕

## Working for a future for Christians

**WHEN extremists seized Maaloula near Damascus – home to ancient shrines – the damage they left behind meant many believed it was game over for the revival of a Church community who speak the Aramaic language of Christ.**

And yet, with your help, the community is coming back to life.

Key to this is a small clothes factory, an essential income generation project for returnee families.

Sister Annie Demerjian, a mainstay of Syria’s Christian community, has helped set up the factory with ACN’s help and now more than 20 women work there.

The women proudly show off the fruits of their labours – T-shirts, shirts, underwear and bags.

One of them, Takla al Safadi, 26, says: **“Maaloula is where we belong. It is our history; our ancestors left us this inheritance.**

**“We don’t want to leave but how can we stay if we don’t find work – so thank you for all you are doing to help us.” ☕**



THREAD OF HOPE: Sr Annie Demerjian with Takla al Safadi, 26, at the ACN-funded factory which provides work for women returning to the ancient town of Maaloula

## ACN’s Lifeline to Syria Since 2010...

**738**

ACN projects have been completed

**80%**

of ACN aid has provided emergency help

**127**

reconstruction projects (homes, churches, etc.)

**15%**

of ACN emergency help is milk aid

**50,000**

young people supported



HELP IN ACTION: Youngsters in Marmarita, in the Valley of the Christians, near Homs, receive gifts funded by ACN

**87,000**

Masses said through Mass stipends (30 every day)



CROSS OF HOPE: St George's Greek Orthodox Church, Homs Old City, as seen through the remains of nearby St George's School

## New ACN Syria Projects:

**DAMASCUS:** Help for 200 sick people

**HOMS:** Milk for babies, toddlers and children

**LATTAKIA:** Repair of St Antony's Church, Bakto

**VALLEY OF THE CHRISTIANS (HOMS):** Shelter for displaced families

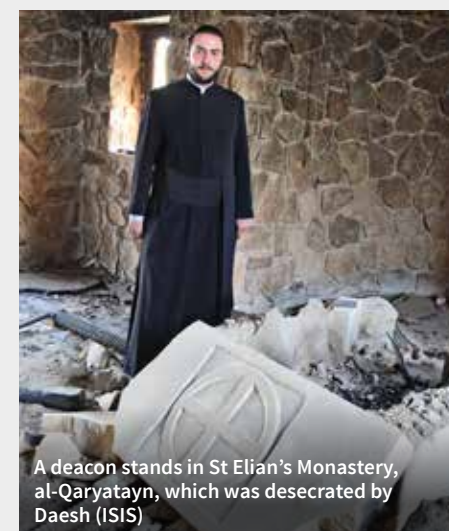
**ALEPPO:** Programme for trauma victims aged between three and 15

**HAMA, HOMS and YABROUD:** Mass stipends for Melkite priests

**HOMS DISTRICT:** Rebuilding of 1,280 homes

## Christianity in Syria: A heritage worth preserving

- People from Syria were, according to Church tradition, present at the first Pentecost
- The first time Jesus’ followers were called Christians was in Syria
- Syria is mentioned about 300 times in the Bible
- St Paul converted to Christianity in Syria



A deacon stands in St Eljan's Monastery, al-Qaryatayn, which was desecrated by Daesh (ISIS)

## SYRIA

www.acnuk.org/syria

6-PAGE SPECIAL REPORT



## Give them this day their daily bread

Back from Syria, ACN's **John Pontifex** shows how you are offering help and hope

Rebuilding St George's Church and School in Homs Old City

**“Only thanks to you can we continue our mission here. We are passionate about helping the children but, without your compassion, we would be lost. You are always in our prayers.”**

The words of Sister Samia, who cares for nearly 80 children with learning difficulties in Homs city (see story inside) – one of countless messages of thanks we received on your behalf during our trip to Syria.

In this report, we mark the completion of 738 projects undertaken by ACN since the beginning of the war in 2011 – food (especially milk), medicine, education,

shelter and pastoral support.

But sadly the needs go on – nearly two-thirds of Syria’s 18.2 million population lack the basics to survive on their own.

Please continue to give the faithful in Syria their daily bread by supporting a fresh crop of urgent ACN projects, providing a roof over their heads, rebuilding desecrated churches, providing milk for babies and toddlers, and support for children’s education.

**As one church leader said: “Nearly 80 percent of our people suffer extreme poverty. Who can we turn to but you?” ☕**



A girl prays in a church in Homs Old City

0345 646 0110

@acn\_uk

@acnuk

www.acnuk.org/syria

Aid to the Church in Need  
ACN www.acnuk.org

12-14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA  
Aid to the Church in Need is a Pontifical Foundation of the Catholic Church and a registered charity in England and Wales (1097984) and Scotland (SC040748)

Reports and photographs (unless otherwise stated) by John Pontifex © Aid to the Church in Need (July 2019)  
Printed by Cliffe Enterprises, Eastbourne BN22 8UY

Helping the suffering Church today  
www.acnuk.org

Aid to the Church in Need  
ACN UNITED KINGDOM



HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: Razan, 21, outside the home ACN repaired for her and her family in Homs Old City

## Homes raised up from the ashes

**Razan, aged 21, greets us with a big smile.**

“Welcome to our home,” she says. We are visiting Homs’ Wadi al Sayeh district – formerly on the frontline of the conflict.

Not a single building is free of bullet holes, smashed windows and derelict roofs... except for

Razan’s home and a few like it.

So determined were she and her family to return that they begged ACN to take advantage of the improved security to rebuild their home.

Everything including the kitchen sink has been replaced.

We meet Razan’s father, Fawzi, and grandmother, Fawzia, aged 94.

Fawzia takes me by the hand and says: “After the bombs fell, we had to leave and every day for more than six years I prayed for our return.

**“I honestly believed that at my age I would never be able to go back home. And yet here I am. Thank you, thank you.”**

Courage clearly runs in the family.

Razan explains how – astonishingly – she kept up her university pharmacy studies throughout the war.

She said: “I love Homs. I can’t go far away for long without feeling homesick. I didn’t mind where we were during our displacement but, despite all the challenges, it is far better being back.”

**Many more Christian families want**

**to go back home and ACN has agreed a plan with Church leaders in Homs to rebuild 300 homes – with a further 980 envisaged in a second phase.**

ACN’s Syria projects leader Father Halemba said: “This home rebuilding programme is one of the most critical steps forward in the recovery of the Christian community in Homs.”

## Looking after the most vulnerable

**THANKS to you, young people in Homs city – many with severe learning difficulties – have been able to continue receiving help and support, even at the height of the conflict.**

Nearly 80 youngsters, many with Down’s syndrome, attend the Seneve centre in Homs city where they learn skills such as basic numeracy and literacy and enjoy singing and dance.

When Homs came under heavy bombardment and the centre was seized by extremists, the founder and

manager Sister Samia relocated the young people to other buildings.

Since the defeat of Daesh (ISIS), ACN has helped the centre get back on its feet by providing a generator.

Ongoing costs – especially funding teachers, some of whom provide one-on-one support – put enormous pressure on the centre.

Showing us round, Sister Samia said: **“Only thanks to you can we continue our mission here.**

**“We are passionate about helping the children but without your compassion we would be lost.”**

Sr Samia from Homs with a little girl you are helping

Fawzia, 94, back in her home

## Fr George:

## Faith undaunted by fundamentalism

EYEBALL TO EYEBALL WITH EXTREMISTS: Father George narrowly escaped with his life

**The young extremist cocked his gun and told the priest not to move.**

Father George looked the teenager in the eye and said: “Don’t you recognise me?”

Only the week before, Father George, a parish priest in the Valley of the Christians near Homs, had risked his life negotiating with militants for the lad’s release.

Unmoved, the extremist frogmarched the priest into a car and drove off at speed into the darkness.

Keeping his cool, after a time Father George asked the lad if he could stop the car so he could use the toilet.

Seizing his chance, Father George fled – but rather than running to safety, he returned to the village and by morning was incarcerated by the militant group now occupying the area.

Recounting his close shave with death, Father George told me he had gone back to secure the release of up to 12 parishioners, fearing they would be killed unless he interceded on their behalf.

In the weeks that followed, painstaking negotiations resulted in freedom for the parishioners and eventually Father George escaped too.

**For years, Father George believed he would never go back.**

**And yet here we were back in the village. Not only had Fr George been reinstated as parish priest but his church was restored, as were the villagers’ homes – a project completed by ACN.**

Father George said: “If I learned anything from all this it is firstly that God exists and secondly that the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church.”

## The stones the extremists rejected

**Standing alongside them in their ancient church, I was about to witness a moment the villagers had dreamed about for years on end.**

They had lived in painful exile from Al Husn village in the idyllic Valley of the Christians, near Homs, after the region was seized by gun-toting Islamist militants.

But, **with the Islamists forced out, ACN had rebuilt more than 50 homes torched by the retreating extremists.**

And here we were in Al Husn’s St George’s Church – itself rebuilt with

ACN help – with all the families thanking God for their re-settlement back in their village.

Each family was given a tablet of stone inscribed with ‘Jesus is my rock’ to mark the occasion.

Presenting the tablets, ACN Middle East projects co-ordinator Father Andrzej Halemba told the families: **“Always remember that you are never alone, that God is always with you and that the friends and benefactors of ACN are always praying and supporting you.”**



SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING: Parishioners in the Valley of the Christians, near Homs, thank God for ACN’s help to rebuild their homes



REBUILDING BRICK BY BRICK: Ayoub Mamari (far right) and his wife, Maria, celebrate their home-coming with ACN’s Middle East projects co-ordinator Father Andrzej Halemba (far left), and ACN’s John Pontifex