

You are their lifeline



A group of youngsters with roses in the destroyed district of Al-Jdaydeh, Aleppo. © ismaelmartinezsanchez/ACN



Sr Annie Demerjian

OFFERING a lifeline to Syria is more important than ever – with the economy in freefall and ever-increasing numbers of people plunged into desperate poverty.

From Qara city, north of Damascus, came a heart-rending report about a mother with a disabled daughter called Maria and how they had run out of money to heat their home.

Maria's mother said: "To keep my girl warm, we have been burning clothes that we no longer use."

Almost two in every three people in Syria are displaced¹, many of them struggling to get enough food.

And, with an infrastructure shattered by nine years of war, the country is totally at the mercy of the coronavirus.

ACN completed 125 projects last year and now we are redoubling efforts to get emergency and pastoral help out to where it is needed most:

- Food baskets and sanitary items for 1,400 families in Lattakia;
- Soup for the needy in Damascus;
- Christian education, including catechesis, in Homs.

Sister Annie Demerjian, who is helping hundreds of vulnerable families in Aleppo and Damascus, said: **"To all our ACN benefactors we say sincerely: 'Thank you for your enormous generosity.'"**

Assuring you of her prayers at this difficult time, she added: **"May God continue to keep you and your families safe and well."** 🙏



Medical supplies are urgently needed in Syria

Offering hope and healing

WHEN, day after day, people knocked on the door of their bishop desperate for medical help, who could he turn to?

More than half of Syria's hospitals and other health facilities are closed or only partly functioning.

There is a no free health service and, with unemployment and inflation skyrocketing, people in urgent need of medicine simply cannot afford it.

Determined to act, Maronite Catholic Bishop Chbeir of Lattakia asked ACN for assistance and in response the charity agreed a four-month programme funding medical care for people in and around Tartous and Lattakia in eastern Syria:

- * 108 surgical operations
- * 1,400 prescriptions
- * 60 other medical treatments
- * 5 Medical (administrative) staff

During a recent fact-finding and project assessment trip to Syria, ACN staff met people visiting Bishop Chbeir's house to receive vouchers funding medicine, surgery and other medical appointments.

Rahinda Mehbany had come to collect a voucher for medicine to treat her heart condition.

She and her family were displaced to Tartous after their home in Homs was destroyed. Rahinda's husband was immobilised by a stroke caused by the death of their 22-year-old son, who was killed by a sniper.

Rahinda said: **"I am so grateful to ACN. What would I do if it weren't for you?"**

Bishop Chbeir said: **"This is a vital project. The survival of many sick people from all over the area rely on the help we can provide on my doorstep."** ✚



Smiles of delight: Youngsters at the Mustard Seed Centre in Homs Old City

Great hopes from small beginnings

mainstay for the 90 children and teenagers with severe learning difficulties who attend the centre.

At the height of Syria's conflict, the youngsters were forced to move to different premises but now the young people are back in the original buildings, and their curriculum has been expanded, enabling them to learn new skills, make new friends and reach their potential.

Last year, ACN funded renovations to the playground which, during the Daesh (ISIS) occupation of Homs, had been ripped up while the militants used the centre as a command headquarters.

Now, Sister Samia, director of Mustard Seed, is asking ACN to fund basic costs such as staffing, heating and lighting and transport to help ferry the young people to and from the centre.

Sister Samia said: **"I am so grateful to you at ACN for staying with us, through all these difficult years."**

"The work we do at the Mustard Seed is not just a job – we are giving the young people meaning and hope for the future, enabling them to be accepted in society and not shunned." ✚

FROM the smallest of seeds comes the greatest hope for some of Syria's most vulnerable young people.

One in three schools in Syria were either damaged or completely destroyed – but one that stayed up and running was the Mustard Seed in Homs Old City.

You, the friends and benefactors of ACN, have been a

Renewing the ancient stones of faith

WHEN Aleppo's majestic Maronite cathedral was gutted by bombs and extremist mobs, the pride of the city's Christian community was in danger of being lost forever.

On an ACN project assessment visit to the cathedral in January 2017 just after the Battle of Aleppo, we found a massive hole in the roof, smashed masonry and defaced sacred images.

Bringing back to life this vital symbol of the Christian presence was thought impossible... until ACN offered to help.

A first tranche of aid enabled masons, engineers and carpenters to set to work and – determined to keep up momentum – they continued even when the money ran out.

Now the Maronite Catholic community have turned to ACN again and we have promised more aid to finish the job.

ACN Middle East projects coordinator Father Andrzej Halemba said: **"Bringing the cathedral back to life is an important symbol of how the Christian community are rising from the ashes of destruction and flowering afresh as a renewed sign of Christ's presence in this ancient city."**



The cathedral is one of 1,309 churches and chapels across Syria which have been desecrated or destroyed during the war but shortage of funds means ACN can only fund repairs to some of them. ✚

Food for the hungry



Repairing the damage of war: Aleppo's Maronite Cathedral was badly bombed but repair work is now underway – thanks to ACN



Break time: Children receiving refreshments

“It is very painful what we are passing through.”

These are the words of Sister Annie Demerjian, a leading ACN project partner in Syria.

She continues: **“The pain and suffering are there but we must not forget that the Resurrection is also there.”**

At a time of health emergency and the resulting economic crisis, Sister Annie and her team of youth volunteers in Aleppo are providing food baskets and sanitary items to 260 of the neediest families.

Without your generosity as friends and benefactors of ACN, none of this would be possible.

ACN funds are also paying the lighting and heating bills of the poorest 250 households in Aleppo and a further 100 families in Damascus, as well as rent costs.

With inflation soaring, ACN is also funding coupons for other families in Aleppo to use in supermarkets to buy basic food and other supplies.

Sister Annie said: **“You have helped us for so many years and you continue to do so. Thank you from all of us in Syria.”**

With reports that **one in three people in Syria are below the poverty line**, ACN is inundated with requests to help with people's basic needs. ☕

Making Marita's wish come true

MARITA'S dearest wish is to go to university. She has her heart set on becoming a teacher.



Marita, 17, dreams of being a teacher

The problem is funding.

Last year, she took part in a Maths Olympiad and came top of her class.

At 17, she lives with her family in Homs, where they went having escaped from Idlib, in north-west Syria.

Marita's mother, Selma, explains: **"The Muslim extremists in Idlib started knocking on the doors of Christians telling us to leave."**

"They fired guns into the air to make us scared so we left."

Housed in temporary accommodation funded by ACN, the family's hopes rest

on Marita getting a good job for which completing her studies is critical.

Latest reports say that **across Syria, 2.1 million children are out of school and a further 1.3 million are at risk of being in the same situation.**

In response, ACN is part funding an ecumenical project providing scholarships to 2,427 university students and a further 4,006 school pupils.

Marita's mother, Selma, says: **"Thank you from the bottom of my heart. If it weren't for you, we wouldn't be able to go on."** 🙏

A plea from Sr Marie-Claire



WHEN mortar bombs badly damaged a kindergarten in Aleppo run by Sr Marie-Claire Zakar, she knew she could turn to ACN for help.

But, with the nursery up and running again, we have now received a fresh

appeal every bit as urgent as the last one.

Sister Marie-Claire writes: **"Many of our parents now cannot work and so are no longer able to pay for schooling."**

"We lack fuel which is very

expensive and we have 14 staff.

"Our coffers are empty. In the name of the Sisters who work with me, I ask for your help so that we can continue our mission."

ACN has offered support – will you help us keep our promises of love? 🙏

ACN Aid for Syria



Holding onto hope: A mother and her son at the Syrian Orthodox Church in Homs Old City
© ismaelmartinezsanchez/ACN

Last year in Syria ACN:

- + supported **125** projects
- + offered pastoral aid to **55,000** people
- + provided more than **10,000** Mass stipends (about one every hour for 12 months)
- + allocated **70%** of its aid to emergency help

+ Emergency help +



8,450

children received gifts at Christmas



8,700

homes received electricity and heating subsidies



7,400

children received milk



5,050

received sanitary items (toothpaste, soap & washing powder)



4,200

received medical help



3,100

students received school bags and equipment



1,400

students received scholarships



1,350

received food baskets



1,050

received help with daily costs



500

received rent subsidy

(NB Some categories overlap: e.g. some of the children receiving milk also received Christmas gifts)

Requests for help just received:

- + Help for Al Farah School, Aleppo
- + Bus for Maloula Christian hilltop town, north of Damascus
- + Mass stipends for priests in Homs
- + Repairs to Convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Homs
- + Youth Summer camp run by Sr Annie Demerjian in Tartous province
- + Help for St George's Kindergarten, Damascus
- + Food baskets and sanitary items in Aleppo

Please help us fulfil our promises of love to the faithful in Syria

¹ACN Syria 'Facts' – data from UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and international news sources



ACN **www.acnuk.org**

Aid to the Church in Need

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 © 2020
With special thanks to Father Andrzej Halemba PhD, Kira von Bock Iwaniuk and Agnes Sebaux
© Aid to the Church in Need (May 2020)

Printed by Cliffe Enterprises, Eastbourne BN22 8UY