

“Let us welcome this time of trial as an opportunity to prepare for our collective future, a future for all, without discarding anyone. Because without an all-embracing vision, there will be no future for anyone.”

Pope Francis,
Second Sunday of Easter,
19th April 2020



*Loving care from Sister Cécire in Rwanda:
a love which reaches out to everyone.*

Dear Friends,

Ever since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic we have been plunged into a real worldwide crisis. There is still no vaccine available, and we will, doubtless, continue to suffer the economic and social consequences of this crisis for a long time. But humankind has an astonishing capacity to cope with the most difficult situations – as long as we do so with the conviction that it all has a meaning. For if everything was ultimately meaningless, why would anyone care if the weak, the sick and the elderly happened to die of some virus, somewhere or other on our small planet? But what meaning can we offer in the face of this virus and the massive death toll resulting from it?

Real meaning does shine through, if only in the tremendous solidarity and determination with which people are generally observing the public safeguarding measures, caring for the frail and elderly, supporting our health-care workers and keeping in contact with family and friends. Yet the longer the emergency situation lasts and we are exposed to its effects, the deeper we must search to find the real underlying meaning. Times of crisis reveal the true face of humanity, which is

charity, love of neighbour. Charity, or the lack of it, makes people saints or scoundrels.

Our charity, *Aid to the Church in Need*, also arose during an international emergency situation. After the Second World War, which claimed over 50 million lives and left many countries utterly ruined economically, Father Werenfried found the courage to call people



“Times of crisis reveal the true face of humanity.”

to heroic charity – towards their neighbours and former enemies. He dared to demand great sacrifices of them, in the conviction that “people are better than we think”. He spoke of the “sufferings of Christ”, who took upon himself our sicknesses and suffering and who still continues to suffer his redeeming Passion in the poor, the persecuted and the refugees. In his famous Christmas 1947 article “No room at the Inn”, which marked the birth of ACN, Father Werenfried warned us against hardness of heart:

“Can you imagine what it was like during the war...? How the friendly office worker and the small shopkeeper suddenly turned into wild

beasts? How every kind of decency and courteous feelings disappeared, and people fought recklessly, each for himself alone? Every man for himself! ... Many of us are warm and comfortable; our lives are going well ... and despite the post-war shortages of food and everything else, despite the soaring prices, we actually do not lack much. But do we ever stop to think that it is Christ who is weeping in all those whom he has called ‘the least of his little ones’ and beneath whose misery his divine and human countenance is concealed?”

Dear Friends, despite everything, and with the same faith that characterised the beginnings of our charity, we dare to turn to you once again and ask your help for all those who were already suffering, even before the coronavirus struck. The pandemic has made their situation even worse. Let us also find a little room for them in our hearts!

With my grateful thanks and my blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



They are our priests too

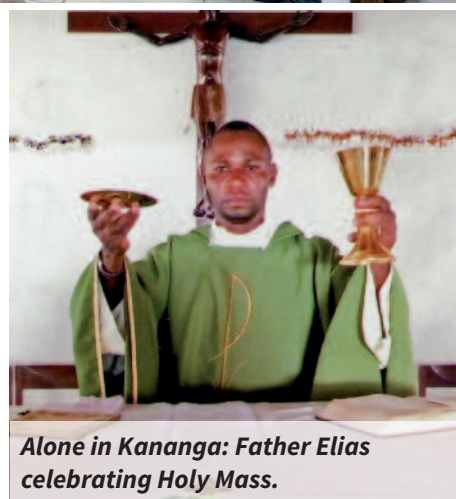


**A new experience:
Social distancing
during Holy Mass
online in Ukraine.**

“The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.” So begins the encyclical of Pope Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. The Second Vatican Council describes the Eucharist as the “Source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* 11). All the rest derives its meaning from it. And not surprisingly, for it has to do with God himself.

It is also the crux of the priesthood. Without the consecrated hands of the priest there is no Eucharist, without the Eucharist no Church. The coronavirus epidemic has isolated our priests and put the Church, put us all, to the

test. All alone, or with just one or two assistants, they celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In most of the developed world we can still follow services via live streaming, but in many of the poorest countries most of the Catholic faithful can only associate themselves in spirit with the priest. In Africa the faithful customarily bring more than just their open hearts and spontaneous joy when they gather around the Table of the Lord; often they bring fish, eggs, even live chickens for their priest. That is what the priest normally has to live on – as is the case in the dioceses of Inongo and Kananga in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. And where there are no gifts, they must rely on the widow’s mite. But since the coronavirus struck that has all finished – no chickens, no fish, no eggs, no Offertory collection. Bishop Donatien and Bishop Marcel have turned to us for Mass stipends for the 85 priests in Inongo and the 168 in Kananga, so that “their” priests, about whom they are greatly concerned, will be able to survive. But they are our priests too, as they pray for us, present our intentions before God and continue, for our sakes, “the



**Alone in Kananga: Father Elias
celebrating Holy Mass.**

work of redemption on earth” as Saint Jean-Marie Vianney, the Curé of Ars and patron saint of priests, describes it.

In **Venezuela**, in **India** and **Ukraine**, as well, the virus and its consequences has made the already difficult situation of many priests into one of dire poverty. Before the virus, they supported people, with counsel, medicines and food; now they often don’t know where their next meal is coming from. But they draw strength from the sacrament of their ordination – and from their confident hope that we understand the importance of their universal saving mission for the whole Church and will hasten to support them – and with them the Church – with your Mass offerings. ●



**Venezuela: Social
distancing, even for the
indigenous peoples.
But God is still close.**



“Sisters of the smile”

The coronavirus epidemic has plunged millions of people into hunger and despondency. Everywhere, the Church is stretched to the limit, particularly in the poorest countries of the southern hemisphere. For many people her service of love is crucial to their very survival. Your support for Sisters helps make the love of God visible.

The prelature of Humahuaca in **Argentina** is an area of deep poverty. There are 10 religious Sisters here from four different communities, all battling on different pastoral and humanitarian fronts. Your support for their life and apostolate (£4,000) can be seen and felt in the homes they run for the elderly, for women and orphans – both in the towns and in the countryside, in the boarding schools for girls, and their youth apostolate. The Claretian Sisters are active in many places. Your support gives them fresh courage. Their trust in God is infectious according to Hector, a catechist in the parish of the Presentation of Our Lady. He applies the words of their founder Saint Anthony Maria Claret to them: “Lord, let us burn with love and with this fire of love light up our way.”

Your support nurtures these flames of love. For Nancy, a catechist, they are “the Sisters of the smile”. The joy and resolute faith of these Sisters gives them the courage, despite the circumstances, to keep on looking for solutions. With their selfless kindness they are



The many faces of love: Sister Graciana visiting in the Peruvian Andes.

giving courage to others – and an example of love.

In the diocese of Tacna y Moqueguá, **Peru**, there are 36 religious Sisters from 11 different communities; in **Venezuela** there are 48 in the diocese of La Guaira alone, not to mention thousands of others in Latin America and Africa who, thanks to your generous support, are able to continue working, quietly and uncomplainingly. Their joyful hearts, filled with love, are tackling the needs of these times. In the poor they see Christ, and in their smiling faces the poor see the face of God. ●



Loving reassurance: a hug from Sister Claudia in Argentina.

Daughters of the Resurrection

Persevering, with the Psalms and Rosary

“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.”

Every day the Daughters of the Resurrection in Kigali, **Rwanda** pray these words from Psalm 119 (120). “We trust in God, the Lord of the world”, writes their Superior, Mother Marie Rose. The Psalms, daily adoration from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. and the Rosary, straight afterwards, “help us to persevere”, she tells us.

So far there have been no cases of coronavirus in their communities in Rwanda. But with the general lockdown, all the little daily income they once earned, from working in the drop-in clinic or the kindergarten, has dried up, and their meagre reserves, which they shared with the poor, are now exhausted. All around them they hear of robberies, killings, fear and panic. In their distress the Sisters have turned to us for help. There are 57 of them. We have promised £22,000. ●



At the neonatal clinic: life continues despite the coronavirus.

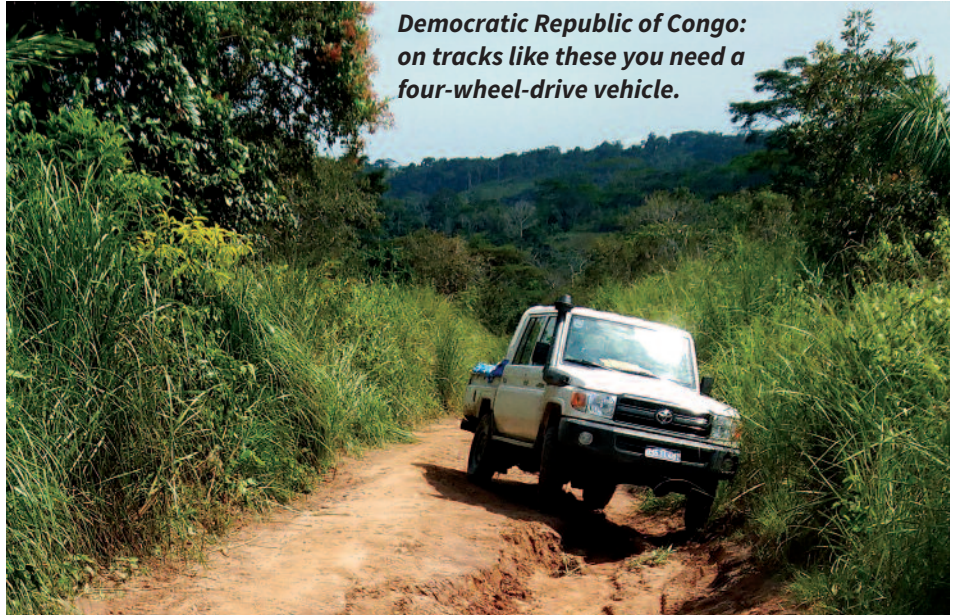


Keeping the Gospel wheels turning

Guatemala: without a jeep, Father Francisco will be forced to walk to reach the mountain villages.



Democratic Republic of Congo: on tracks like these you need a four-wheel-drive vehicle.



In the past ACN shipped cars and lorries from Europe around the world. Today we continue to fund cars, bicycles, motorbikes, buses and boats at the local level. But over the decades the goal has always been the same – to bring the Gospel tidings to all the people.

It may seem a bit strange to talk about transport during lock down, but it is important that the Church proclaims the message of God's love to all creation, as Our Lord told her to. We cannot underestimate the value of the Church's outreach in so many parts of the world. When lockdown restrictions are eased, and where it is safe to do so, there will be a fresh urgency to undertake such outreach to people cut off from the Sacraments and in need of support and encouragement. Indeed even during the crisis many priests and Sisters are heroically supporting the sick and the dying in far flung regions.

In **Guatemala** the work is far from easy. Fr Francisco Vázquez Gómez is responsible for Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Quiché diocese, with its 30,000+ faithful, many in remote, inaccessible mountain regions. The roads are difficult and muddy, and an all-terrain vehicle would be an immense help to him and to all these small communities. And there is another reason. Until the 1970s everybody in this region was Catholic. But during the terrible civil war, Catholics were persecuted, especially priests and catechists. The army saw them as allies of the rebels. Many had to choose between death and flight into neighbouring Mexico. Since then they have slowly returned – to a landscape now dominated by Protestant sects. Currently, Catholics make up no more than a good third of the population. Father Francisco needs to be able to visit them more often, to strengthen them with sound teaching and the Sacraments. He has asked us for help to purchase a pickup truck for **£18,300**.

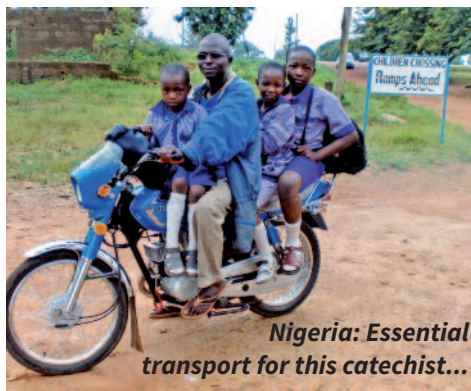
Similarly, in the North of **Nigeria** many of the roads are in a lamentable state. The apostolic vicariate of Kontagora is approximately the same area as Switzerland, and its 19 parishes contain over 1,000 small village communities, many in the remote bushland, inaccessible by car. Missionaries really need motorcycles, and this is what they have asked us for, to visit the scattered communities more often and bring the grace of the Sacraments to the more isolated villages as well. We have promised him **£4,600** for 10 motorbikes.

We are also helping **Ethiopia's** rapidly growing vicariate of Hosanna with 10 motorcycles. On Sundays the priests celebrate at least two Masses in different places. Hiring motorcycles is too expensive, so we are providing **£13,700**. These projects are investments for the future. Thanks to your love, when lockdown is lifted our project partners will be getting on their bikes to bring the joy of the Gospel to remote communities.

Ethiopia: moving on to the next Sunday Mass.



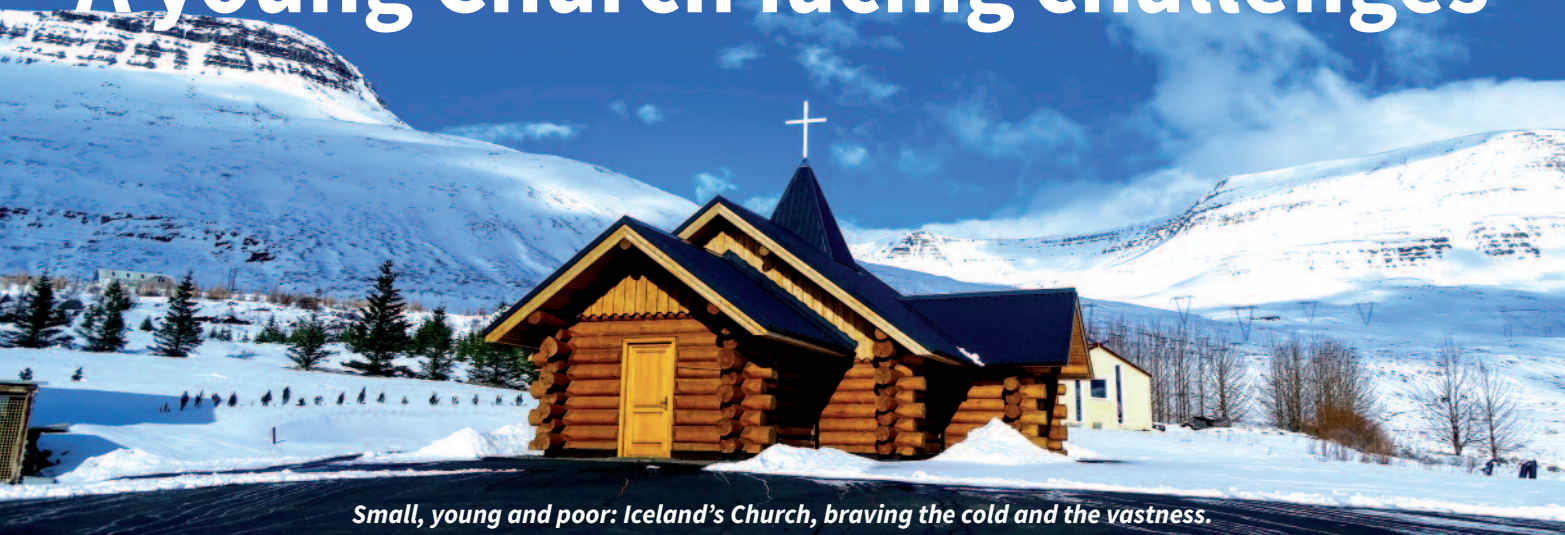
Nigeria: Essential transport for this catechist...



Nigeria: ...and for these Vincentian Sisters too!



A young Church facing challenges



Small, young and poor: Iceland's Church, braving the cold and the vastness.



The warmth of communion: Holy Mass in Saint Joseph's parish in Hafnarfjörður.



Visiting the Carmelite Sisters: the pilgrim shrine of Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, parents of the Little Flower.

“Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). A mission unlimited, but often confronted with problems. Saint Therese of Lisieux, Patroness of the Missions, had this wise counsel: “We must sow the good seed without concerning ourselves whether it will sprout or not.” This is precisely what the religious Sisters are doing in Iceland – a country and a diocese with its own special problems.

One of them is the language. Of the 14,500 Catholics in the country barely 2,000 are native Icelanders. The rest come from over 50 different countries. This makes preaching a homily in the church in Reykjavík somewhat challenging. Without pictures and Power-Point it is almost impossible. The second problem is the long distances, meaning long road journeys as Catholic families and parishes are often separated by several hundred kilometres. The six religious Sisters of the congregation of the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará cover between 40,000 and 50,000 km every year. The Church in Iceland is still young, and there are five or six baptisms for every funeral. The Sisters are engaged above all in catechetical work with children and young people, in caring for little

children and also for the sick and elderly in care homes and hospitals. So they can easily run up over a hundred kilometres a day.

It is a similar situation for the six Carmelite Sisters of the Divine Heart of Jesus, who work in two other parishes in the north of the island. And they also have to cope with the third pastoral problem, namely the rampant secularisation in the country. Moral values are constantly under attack, above all in the area of marriage and the family. Weddings are rare; 64% of children are born out of wedlock – more than any other country in Europe. The island has some of the earliest and most extreme abortion laws in Europe and in the state schools there is virtually no religious education. Consequently, Christian formation and the spiritual life are among the priorities here. The Sisters put heart and soul into their ministry among the people, and their sheer joy and spirit of fun are infectious.

But without a car – and one that can cope with all kinds of terrain – the Sisters could not continue their work. The Catholic parishes in Iceland are young, and also poor. Both of these congregations have asked us to help with the cost of a strong second-hand vehicle. The one for the Matara Sisters – known as the Servidoras – will cost **£15,100**, the one for the Carmelites **£214,100**. We have said yes to both. For we cannot put limits on this message of love.



Pilgrimage in the land of the volcanoes: seeking new ideas for the pastoral ministry.



Brought together by the crisis

Capuchin Father Francis lives for Christ – and for the poor. Together with his confreres in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu he cares for those students who “have heard God’s call” and are ready to serve in the missions. He shares what he has with his students – which, for a mendicant Franciscan friar, is not much. That’s why he thanks you “from the bottom of his heart” for the Mass stipends we have sent for him and his 65 brother priests. They are especially thankful because the ordinary faithful in the parishes can give them practically nothing. Needless to say, the coronavirus has made getting funds all the harder – and, he insists, his prayers for your intentions in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass are all the more fervent as a result. So, while we should never seek out suffering, the example of the Capuchin Fathers in Tamil Nadu proves one thing: this crisis can bring us closer together in Christ.



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

Dear Friends,

This year of the pandemic, 2020, will be remembered for the rest of our lives. We will come to ask ourselves whether, during this time of trial, our faith and trust in God’s goodness have stood the test, and what we should draw from this wake-up call.

Many of us will have come to realise that spiritual accompaniment is something that is just as relevant to our society as medical care and the basic necessities of life.

In many of our project partners’ countries it has become clear that the infrastructure of the state simply cannot cope with the demands of the pandemic, meaning that many people have turned to the parishes and religious orders in their time of need. And yet now, at this time of catastrophic economic collapse, these religious Sisters, Brothers and priests find themselves without the most basic means even to support themselves. And so we at ACN see it as our most urgent mission to help these faithful daughters and sons of our Church with basic subsistence support and Mass stipends, so that they can continue to fulfil their mission.

I am confident that, despite your own entirely legitimate worries and concerns, we can still continue to count on your generous help.

Thomas Heine-Geldern

Need, love and thanks – your letters

A little gesture of thanks to ACN

The enclosed banknote was sent to us anonymously. We would like to pass it on to you for your work in Syria. In the past, Father Werenfried helped us to build our convent. So this is a little gesture of thanks to ACN.

A religious Sister in Germany

For my persecuted fellow Christians

Thank you for your kind words to me as a supporter. But that is not the reason why I am donating. I think it is a wonderful thing when people help one another – and especially other Christians, who belong to the most persecuted religion in the world today – as was the case in the past as well. Nor is there any reason for complacency in our country either, for here too Christians, and above all Catholics, are discriminated against, albeit in more subtle ways. Jesus told us that those who believe in him would be persecuted... May God bless your work!

A supporter in Slovakia

Love, the key to everything

“Love has explained everything to me” (Saint John Paul II). I think this phrase is exceedingly relevant to your wonderful organisation, which is a work of total love for all people, and I am proud to be able to help. Thank you for all your hard work!

A supporter in Brazil

Thanks for your prayers

Thank you so much for your kind wishes on my birthday. And above all for the prayers you have promised me on this day, for which I am always especially grateful.

A supporter in Austria

United with other suffering Christians

These are hard, devastating times we live in. We can’t attend Mass or receive Jesus in the Eucharist, as well as no Reconciliation. But this unites us in a way with all those Christians who have no access to these means. [...] May we learn to trust in God and that He will deliver us.

A supporter in Australia

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Our address: 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 direct debit or have sent a donation recently, please accept our sincere thanks. This Mirror is for your interest and information.

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