



**“It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering.”**

Pope Francis,  
*Fratelli Tutti*, 186



**There is healing in the Cross – even for the wounds inflicted by religious extremism in Africa.**

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## *Dear Friends,*

As I write to you, I am thinking of the crucified one, whom we focus on during this holy season of Lent, as we prepare for the feast of the Resurrection. My thoughts also turn to the apostles' state of mind when Christ was nailed to the cross. For them the death of their Lord represented the total and irrevocable defeat of their Master's teachings, deeds and reputation – and total defeat for themselves as well. They had placed all their hopes in him, left their homes, their work, their social circle, friends and family behind and committed their entire lives to him. They had left everything – and lost everything!

The Church, thanks to the wisdom bestowed upon it at Pentecost, soon came to understand that everything that had happened in Jerusalem at this darkest hour of history was in fact part of the victorious plan of God: “for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand

and thy plan had predestined to take place.” (Acts 4:27-28 RSV (CE)). Once more today we are witnessing the plans of the new Herods and new Pilates to do violence to Jesus again, in his Church. This is happening through laws which directly or indirectly attempt to stifle the voice of the divine Master and the missionary character of Christian life in the very countries where the Gospel was first preached. They are seeking to



***Let us not lose courage, despite all these difficulties... the Risen Lord is the very one who died on the cross.***

eradicate the very roots of Christian civilisation. And to achieve this they even make use of international bodies, infiltrate strategic positions and mislead not a few people, who are perhaps more ignorant than evil, but who do not understand their strategies and allow themselves to be deceived – bewitched by the seemingly positive and fascinating talk of building a “better world”.

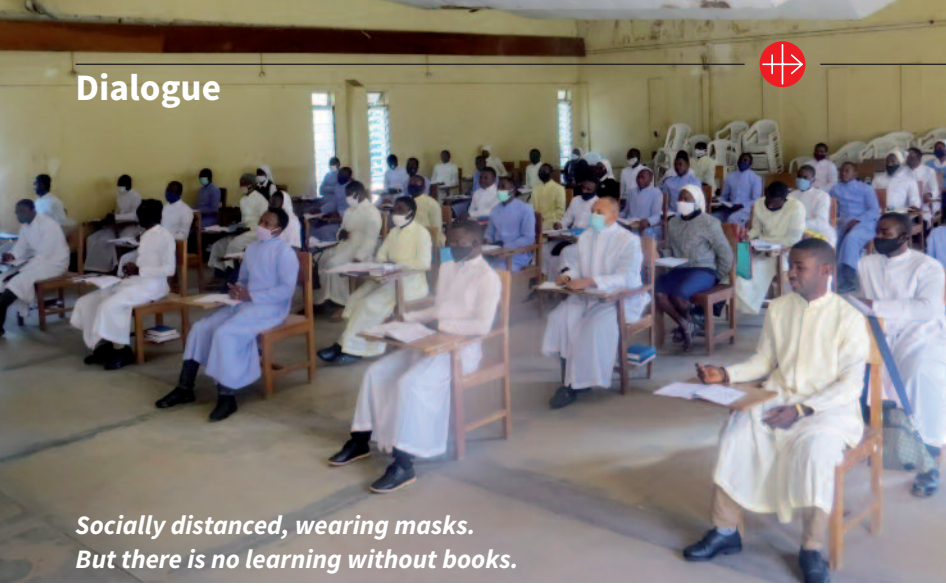
But let us not lose courage, despite all these difficulties. Let us remind ourselves that the

Risen Lord is the very one who died on the cross. In the face of all these challenges let us stand steadfast, lift up our gaze and live out our baptism – in other words, let us view all the situations and events of this world through his eyes, even if all the power of the media rage against us. For to see through his eyes is not a matter of opinion but of Truth itself – whether in regard to life, the family, the Church, the stewardship of the goods of the earth, active charity for the poor and suffering, or indeed the very capacity to love all others. Let us embrace this Lenten season as an opportunity to adapt our behaviour as closely as possible to the ideal that he himself puts before us in his Gospel.

With these resolutions I wish you a fruitful journey towards Easter, under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is always by our side as our loving and provident Mother. And be assured of my daily prayers for you all.

*Mauro Card. Piacenza*

Cardinal Mauro Piacenza,  
President of Aid to the Church in Need



*Socially distanced, wearing masks.  
But there is no learning without books.*



*Learning how others  
think and feel.  
Studies in the IFIC.*

# Knowledge – the foundation of peace

**Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that “Faith is a foretaste of the knowledge that will make us blessed in the life to come.” And this insight must be joined with Saint Augustine’s observation that: “What you wish to ignite in others must first burn within you.”**

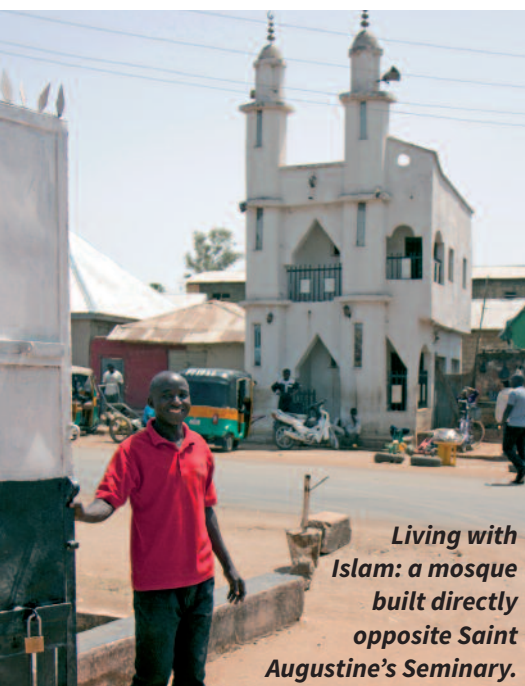
In Saint Augustine’s Seminary in Jos, in [Nigeria’s](#) Middle Belt, Oduh John Peter describes how he finally resolved his doubts. He

was faced with the choice between becoming either a pharmacist or a priest. So he applied for both courses of study, telling himself that whichever was the first to offer him a place would be a sign from God. The diocese was the first to phone him. As soon as he put on his seminarian’s soutane, he says “I felt like an angel”. He experienced a burning love for God and wanted “to be as close to him as possible”. Then there were his studies. The books about the Faith were wellsprings of deeper knowledge, and they also kept him firmly grounded in the truth, as they do the other 342 seminarians. Knowledge is also a source of strength, so the seminary library is a kind of “spiritual gym”.

But in order for it to remain so, the library needs to be constantly renewed and updated. Among the most recent examples of this renewal are noted classics of the interior life, testimonies of modern saints like Mother Teresa and Pope Saint John Paul II, books on the Theology of the Body and also and increasingly, works on comparative religious

studies and topics such as “Culture and Inculturation”. And the students in Jos particularly need to familiarise themselves with all aspects of Islam. All this will help their ministry when they are priests and pastors proclaiming the truth. Given the huge number of students and the sheer size of the study groups, all these books are needed, and 10 copies are needed at a time. Even with heavy discounting, this still adds up to a very considerable financial outlay. We have promised the seminary **£22,800**.

Another way of kindling the flame of charity among the peoples of West Africa is that taken by the Institute for Islamic-Christian Formation (IFIC) in Bamako, [Mali](#). For some years now, radical forms of Islam (Wahhabist and jihadist) have been spreading in the region, seeking to set hitherto moderate Muslims against their Christian and animist neighbours. The IFIC aims to keep priests, pastors, religious and lay Christians up to date with the latest developments in dialogue with Islam and the traditional African animist religions. The close-on 150 participants on the one-year courses (half of them priests), come from almost every nation of West Africa. And there is very limited space to accommodate them all. A lecture hall with an attached accommodation block for the students and professors would be a real boost for the IFIC’s work promoting peace, and would give new impetus to the ongoing dialogue. The land for this university complex has already been secured, but they do not have the resources to start building. We have promised **£169,800** towards the cost. Knowledge helps lay the foundations of peace – both temporal and spiritual – and, as Pope Francis has said, “a renewal of preaching can offer believers... new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 11).



*Living with  
Islam: a mosque  
built directly  
opposite Saint  
Augustine’s Seminary.*





Let the little children come to me... With the Sisters the little ones find peace and security.



A refuge from despair: refugee camp in Pemba.

© I Johan Viljoen

# Traumatised and despairing

**The Annunciation and Mary's fiat marked the beginning of salvation. But for Saint Joseph her pregnancy seemed a disaster at first. Then God revealed his plans to him in a dream. Joseph obeyed and thus played a "central role in the history of salvation", as Pope Francis writes in his letter *Patris Corde* proclaiming the Year of Saint Joseph. Saint Joseph reminds us that "those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation."**

Like Saint Joseph, the Sisters of the Annunciation in the diocese of Pemba, **Mozambique**, are seemingly hidden and in the shadows. Yet they are among the first to heal the wounds of the soul, and treat the traumas that they and the clergy repeatedly encounter in their pastoral work among the people – many of whom only just managed to escape with their lives after their towns and villages were attacked by extremists. The loss of loved ones killed by Islamist terrorism, possessions lost through displace-

ment or natural disasters, and the destruction of their lives and dreams have inflicted the spiritual wounds that the Sisters tend to.

How does one help victims without homes and without hope? 600,000 people have been displaced – over 20% of the total population of Cabo Delgado province in the far north of Mozambique. Many of them are no more than 20 years of age. How does one address the loss of their homes, or the loss of the life they knew? How can you rescue

them from utter despair and the danger of falling back into former superstitions?

Sister Aparecida and Bishop Luiz Fernando Lisboa know all too well that these refugees need spiritual and psychological counselling. But this requires skills which the Sisters, priests and lay pastoral workers must first learn themselves. And so they are being introduced, in intensive four-day courses, to the basics of psychological and social counselling, learning how to comfort the traumatised and give new hope to wounded souls. The pandemic is forcing them to learn in smaller groups. And so – in six groups of 50 at a time – these priests, religious and laity are being trained in this new form of pastoral outreach. It is an outreach designed to guide people back to some kind of everyday normality, thereby overcoming their trauma. We have promised **£16,900** towards the cost of these courses, (mostly for travel, board and lodging, teaching and study materials). They will help to mend broken hearts and heal the wounds of so many souls.

# Confession – balm for the soul

**In *Patris Corde* Pope Francis writes about Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation:**

"Tenderness is the best way to touch the frailty within us... Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser (cf. Rev [Apoc] 12:10). That is why it is so important to encounter God's mercy, especially in the

Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience his truth and tenderness... We know that God's truth does not condemn, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us... It comes out to meet us,



Restored and forgiven: Absolution brings peace and joy.

© Immanuel Mariner/Sindrey/ACN

restores our dignity, sets us back on our feet... Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses."



## Support for Sisters



*In good hands: Sister Hélène with the little ones in the Kindergarten.*



*Together, and finding joy in their work: a sewing course with Sister Nilima.*

# Selfless, healing love

**“The Sisters are the face of God’s love in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.”**

Bishop Martin Happe of the diocese of Nouakchott in **Mauritania** knows what he’s talking about. He is thinking of Sister Lucile Habimana and Sister Celina Jozefa Natanek, who work in the centre for crippled and handicapped children; of Sisters Anita Martis and Isabel Marco, who go into the prisons and help the prisoners regain their sense of dignity; of Sisters Hilda Graber and Maria Lopez, who are helping expectant mothers and new young mothers to cope with the difficulties of pregnancy and of caring for their newborn babies. He is thinking of Sister Suzanne Marie Pépine and Sister Georgette Nana in the drop-in clinic, providing first-aid

and often ongoing care as well, and Sisters Hélène Marie Dioh and Coulette Boubane, caring for the little ones in the kindergartens and creches. And he could go on with his list, since there are 31 Sisters from eight different congregations, working selflessly night and day, lovingly serving in one of the poorest nations in the world – and one which for centuries now has been to all intents and purposes 100 percent Islamic. But, it is an Islam that at least tolerates the Sisters’ work – work that helps and even saves lives. This is a testimony of love that impresses many Mauritanian people and above all helps the women to recognise their

personal dignity as children of God. Who pays for this work? No one in Mauritania is able to do so. It is your loving help that enables the Sisters to continue giving their selfless service.

Bishop Martin has once again asked our support for their life and apostolate this year, and we have promised him **£27,400**, as it is love like this that brings healing and salvation. “The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, to the poor the gospel is preached...” This was Jesus’ reply in answer to John the Baptist’s question (Lk 7:22). This is the face of God’s love, and you can help the Sisters show this face to the people of Mauritania. •



## Rebuilding

# A place of encounter

**“These rebels are bandits, not fighting a religious war. For them religion is merely a pretext for exploitation.”**

Bishop Nestor-Désiré Nongo-Aziagbia, the chairman of the Central African bishops’ conference, is expressing what most people think, namely that what is happening in the **Central African Republic** is not a religious conflict. Over two-thirds of the mercenaries fighting for the rebel groups are from foreign countries and have their sights set on the country’s mineral wealth and easy profits. The Church has nothing for them to steal, nor does the diocese of Alindao.

But a tender plant is being nurtured here, that of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Most of the meetings were held in the bishop’s house, which was basically a large presbytery. But

this was largely destroyed and ransacked, when the church was attacked. Still, the dialogue must go on – as it has practical implications. The presbytery was also a place of encounter and support for all the people of the diocese, a symbol of fellowship, a sign of reassurance that the Church will not abandon anyone.

The bishop’s house is where most of the priests of Alindao are now sheltering, in hastily repaired quarters – tiny rooms, barely 10 feet square – too cramped for dialogue, with scarcely space to breathe in, too small to live in long-term. Rebuilding it will bring fresh hope to the priests and people of the



***The bishop’s burnt-out residence: now it will once more become a symbol of hope.***

diocese. We have promised **£77,600** towards the cost. •



# A wall to protect the seminarians



*It will have to be at least this height: seminarians in front of a section of the new wall.*

**“Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offence. O wash me more and more from my guilt and cleanse me from my sin!”**

One year ago the Requiem Mass for Michael Nnadi began with Psalm 50 (51). He had been abducted, along with three other seminarians, from the Good Shepherd Seminary in Kaduna, central-northern Nigeria. That was in January 2020, shortly after the seminarians had returned to the seminary after celebrating Christmas with their families. The “revolver men”, as the rector Father Habila Daboh described the armed gang, attacked in the night, breaking down the door of the dormitory and, on hearing the seminary guards arriving, seized the four seminarians as hostages and fled. Three of them were eventually set free, a few weeks later, but Michael was not. His lifeless body was discovered abandoned. So now the fervent prayers of his 268 brother



*They are rarely alone, even when out walking and within the seminary grounds.*

***His death was a turning point: seminarians carrying their brother Michael to his grave.***



seminarians are rising up to heaven on his behalf. His death was a turning point. Ever since then there has been an atmosphere of insecurity among the seminarians, and many are afraid. The extensive grounds of the seminary are enclosed by a fence some 2.8 km in length. But it is not difficult to penetrate, and the guards cannot be everywhere at once. And the Good Shepherd seminary is in northern Nigeria, where Christians are a minority and where the threat of Islamist terror lurks everywhere. And then there are the roving gangs of bandits, fired with racist hatred and religious fanaticism, who make the whole area unsafe.

The original intention was to surround the whole complex with a high wall, but the cost was simply too high. Now the bishops have decided to return to the initial plan, as the security of the seminarians and their teachers is at stake. The rector, Father Habila Daboh is also worried that some of the seminarians, who are not yet firm in their trust in God, may be tempted to leave the seminary because of their fears. “We are already making sure that the seminarians actually see the guards at their posts before they retire to sleep”, he explains. This at least helps to reassure them. But a wall would bring long-term peace of mind.

ACN does not routinely provide fences or protective walls, but situations like the one in Kaduna are clearly exceptional. We have promised the **£39,200** required to build this almost 3 km long protective wall. Vocations not only need the sunshine of grace and the water of knowledge in order to flourish – but also a sense of security and protection from the storms of fanaticism, especially in their earlier years. For **£140** you can give them 10 metres of security wall and so help protect the future of Christianity in Nigeria. ●



## Putting a walking stick in my hands

“I am still very much alive and neither dead nor buried”, writes Father Octave. “Here is my photo, and here are my fingerprints.” With these same fingers and hands this 84-year-old priest and professor at the seminary in Beni, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, daily celebrates the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. And he remembers your intentions at the same time. And he adds a big thank you for your Mass Intentions. He has been a priest for 56 years now and, given his age, has difficulty moving about, he says. But this “gesture of priestly charity” will help him throughout the coming year to continue fulfilling his ministry. It is “as though you have put a walking stick in my hands”, he writes.



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

*Dear Friends,*

*In the face of the global pandemic and its consequences, this year's Lenten season is a particularly appropriate time to pause and take stock. To ask ourselves: Have we, both individually and as part of society, measured up any better than before to the standards set by Jesus Christ, or not?*

*Let us first of all focus on the situation in the countries where we live. Are we not confronted here too, with a growing intolerance towards the teaching of Christ? Are we not daily seeing attempts to pervert the human right to life into a right to abortion or to be helped to commit suicide? Do we not see the not-so-subtle discrimination against people who want to live out their Christian values in their professional lives?*

*Faced with this situation, should we not already be preparing for the questions that will be raised a few decades hence by our grandchildren and great-grandchildren: “How could this have happened? What did you do to prevent it?”*

*Let us use this time of preparation for Easter by raising our voices, wherever possible, against this rampant spirit of the age, or at the very least by praying to the Holy Spirit to guide us all on the right path.*

*With my greetings to you all,*

## Need, love and thanks – your letters

### **Thank you for your birthday greetings**

*My warmest thanks for your good wishes on my birthday! I was so pleased and will be happy to support you again in the future. May God bless you for all the good work you are doing!*

**A benefactress in Switzerland**

### **A small contribution to your mission**

*Enclosed is the confirmation of my bank transfer. May this small contribution be of help to you in your mission and may our good Lord continue to bless you in caring for those in need.*

**A benefactress in the Philippines**

### **Evil does not have the last word**

*May the risen Lord be our consolation in the face of the many sufferings afflicting mankind, including those caused by the coronavirus. Here in our enclosed convent we Franciscan Sisters offer our lives daily for all of suffering humanity, in the conviction that it is Christ who suffers in every sick or needy*

*person. We have also seen close up the suffering of so many people who long to pray before the most Blessed Sacrament, to participate in the Holy Eucharist and receive the Sacraments, but now see their churches closed. We too have been deprived of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and understand their pain. Yet the light of Jesus Christ always shines brightly in the face of suffering and death. He has already triumphed; evil does not have the last word; we have hope and wish to pass it on to everyone. We are not alone, for He always walks beside us and our prayer, however hidden, accompanies all men in their daily struggles.*

**Franciscan Sisters of the Third Order Regular, Mexico**

### **Food for the soul**

*Thank you for sending me the Mirror – so full of all the great project work that ACN does wherever there is need – it is lovely food for the soul!*

**A priest and friend of ACN, Ireland**

## 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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