



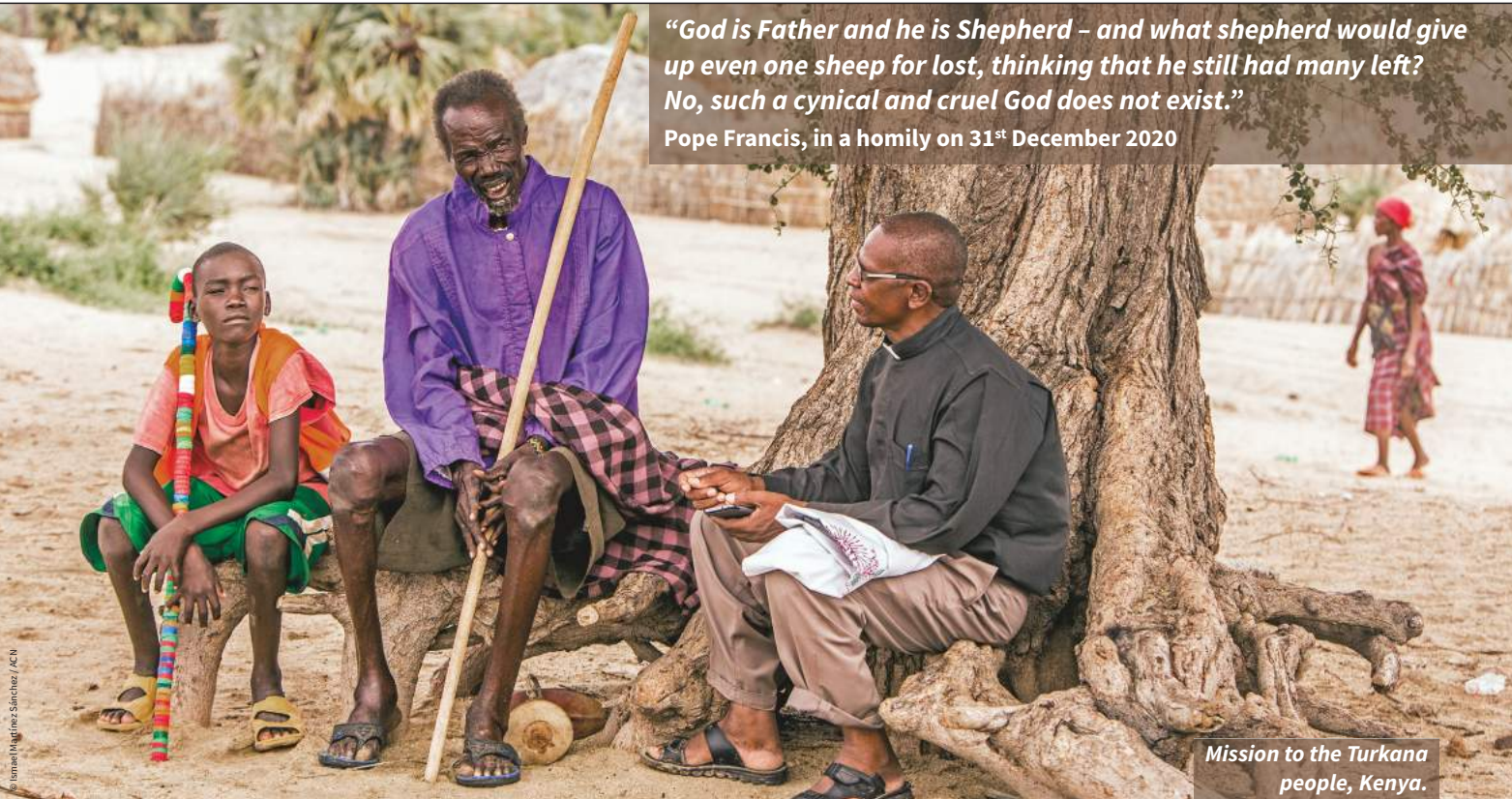
ACN

MIRROR

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No 1 • January 2022



“God is Father and he is Shepherd – and what shepherd would give up even one sheep for lost, thinking that he still had many left? No, such a cynical and cruel God does not exist.”

Pope Francis, in a homily on 31st December 2020

Mission to the Turkana people, Kenya.

Dear Friends,

2022 is a jubilee year for ACN. Our charity, which was founded in 1947, is celebrating its 75th anniversary. What was conceived in 1947 as a “short-term aid campaign for the priests and faithful expelled from the (Communist) East” has grown into an international pastoral charity. Today it is a pontifical foundation of the Catholic Church delivering spiritual and material support and help to the persecuted and suffering Church all over the world. A jubilee year like this is an opportunity for us to thank God for the millions of miracles of loving charity we have experienced, and at the same time ask him to rekindle that “first love” (Rev 2:4) which moved so many people in postwar Europe to such great acts of sacrifice and reconciliation.

The world that emerged from the Second World War was wayward, confused and adrift. Today it is again following folly and has “fallen among thieves”. In such times of confusion we really need the guidance of the Good Shepherd, who alone can free us from the clutches of the evil one. Indeed, he is willing to lay down his life in order to do so. This is the example of

love that ACN likewise seeks to follow. Let us strive to imitate Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who knows every one of his sheep, seeks them out, guides, heals, nurtures and protects them. This pastoral concern is central to ACN. God cares in an entirely personal way for every single individual and wants no one to be lost – not even a single one of his sheep. He loves them and purchased them with his own Blood. And so we too, in all we do, must strive to live by his divine standard.



“Let us strive to imitate Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who knows every one of his sheep, seeks them out, guides, heals, nurtures and protects them.”

ACN shares in the universal pastoral mission of the Church, which is expressed in three ways: in the proclamation of the Word of God and witness of faith; the celebration of the sacraments and prayer; and the ministry of love and unity. This threefold mission of the Church is what Pope Benedict XVI wrote about in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*: “These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally

well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”

Only if we learn to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd in the Gospel, if we allow ourselves to be led by him to the sacraments and to come to know his Heart in prayer, that we can bear witness to his Kingdom and truly heal the world. Only the love of the Good Shepherd can protect us against the “wolves” and “thieves” who seek to scatter the sheep and rob them of their lives. In this way, we must all become good shepherds and make this most magnificent and important mission our own – so that “all Men may be saved” (1 Tim 2:4).

My grateful good wishes to you all for a blessed New Year,

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Lifeboats for souls

In the Gospels, Jesus often travels by boat; he even teaches the crowds from a boat. And today there are still many places in the world where boats remain indispensable to the Church's pastoral work.

Whenever Fr Joseph Opuwei sets out to visit the Catholic faithful in his parish, he puts on an orange lifejacket, settles down in his old wooden canoe and paddles off. His parish is situated in Nigeria's Niger Delta, which is crisscrossed by a network of watercourses, meaning many places can only be reached by boat.

This region of southern Nigeria is also very different in religious terms from the north, as there are comparatively few Muslims here. The majority of the population belong to traditional African tribal religions. But more and more people are opening up to the Good News, which is helping to liberate them from their ever-present fear of witchcraft and evil spirits.

The challenges in this deeply impoverished region are still immense. Clean drinking water, medical care and electricity are in desperately

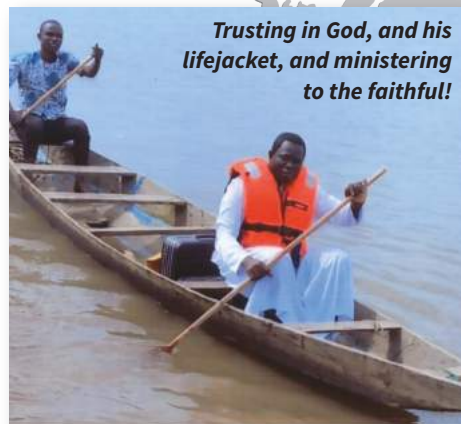
short supply. The great mass of the people gain nothing from the exploitation of the region's oil deposits; in fact quite the reverse: the extreme levels of pollution have resulted in a sharp increase in child mortality. So the people are placing their hopes in the Church instead.

Unfortunately, however, a number of sects are reaching the people more quickly. They seem to have plenty of money and powerful motorboats, enabling them to spread rapidly. But a motorboat is something that Father Joseph simply cannot afford. So he has turned to us. "I beg you fervently to help me to purchase a motorboat, so that my mission work can be more effective. My parishioners are poor peasant farmers and fishermen who cannot even provide for their own needs."

It is an appeal echoed by Fr Celtus Okonkwo, in the same region, who also needs a motorboat.

Will you help us to raise the necessary £12,200, so that we can help both priests – and so that the faithful will not have to wait so long to see them?

Similarly, on the island of Malaita in the southern Pacific, they urgently need a motorboat. Malaita belongs to the **Solomon Islands**, an island group in the southern Pacific around 450 miles (720 km) east of Papua New Guinea and 1,250 miles (2,000 km) northeast of Australia. Father Ian Sisiro has a real problem, because he has to travel by sea but his old boat is no longer seaworthy. It is becoming increasingly leaky, and the motor has all but given up the ghost. If he has no boat, then the faithful will be deprived of the Sacraments. **We have already promised Fr Ian the £7,400 he needs to purchase a new "lifeboat for souls"**. This will allow him to once more put out into the deep.



Trusting in God, and his lifejacket, and ministering to the faithful!





After the Second World War, Europe lay in ruins. Millions had died, millions more were refugees; innumerable devastated cities and ruined souls were the result. This was the world into which ACN was born. And right from the start it was not, first and foremost, about material needs, but above all about healing souls.

75 years of ACN

Man does not live by bread alone ...

Even from hatred and despair God can draw good fruits. And so it was that our founder, Father Werenfried van Straaten (1913 – 2003) was concerned to strengthen faith, promote reconciliation and restore love.

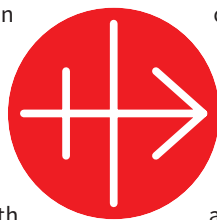
An important part of this was the role played by the “rucksack priests” whose task it was to minister to the German Catholics escaping from communist Eastern Europe and now living in vast scattered flocks in west Germany. Many priests who came with these people did not survive – refugees themselves, and already shattered by their experiences, they died, exhausted by the long journeys on foot. And so we began to provide them with motorcycles. At the same time they were given aid – food, clothing and medicines – so that in addition to preaching the love of God, they could also supply real, tangible proof of it. For one little refugee girl, a little doll and a bar of chocolate were such a powerful proof of God’s love that she later became a nun and went to India, where she in turn became a new mother to countless orphaned children.

To this day many priests still have to travel on foot, often in vast regions, to bring the

sacraments and the consolation of God to the faithful. Take for example the diocese of Ihosy in **Madagascar**, a remote, hilly region. Here Father Germain Rahasason ministers to 16 different communities. It can take up to eight hours on foot to get from one mountain village to the next. And the same is true of his brother priests. So, to mark our 75th anniversary, we would like to provide 10 of these “modern rucksack priests” with a motorcycle. **It will cost £29,000. Will you help us to give them this gift in our jubilee year?**

There are many, many charities willing to provide help for material needs, and that is important and necessary. But there is also a profound spiritual and psychological need that is often overlooked, which brings many other problems in its wake.

The Word of God, prayer and the Sacraments are food not only for this world but for eternal life. Our primary concern, for 75 years now, has been to provide this “nourishment” to the Catholic faithful throughout the world, including, or perhaps we should say especially, where the Church is persecuted or suffering. As “Man does not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4).



Refugees, after the Second World War...



...and today in the Central African Republic.



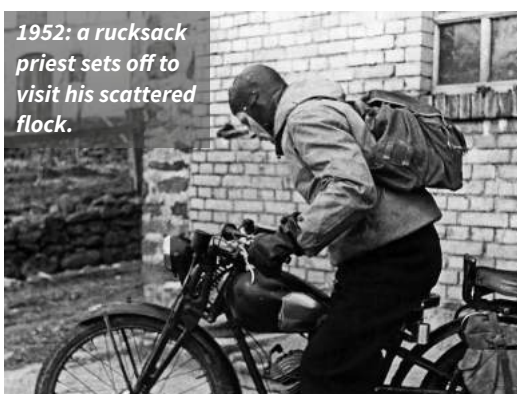
A little piece of chocolate or a biscuit – tangible signs of God’s love for these refugee children.



Lebanon: happy with her doll, and the company of Sister Antoinette!



And a rucksack priest in Madagascar today: travelling further and faster than on foot!



1952: a rucksack priest sets off to visit his scattered flock.



Prince meets survivors of persecution

From left to right: ACN's Fr Dominic Robinson, John Pontifex and Neville Kyrke-Smith; Mark Mansor and Frank Marooki; Kemi Badenoch MP; Coptic Orthodox Archbishop Angaelos of London; Fr Mark Odion; Fiona Bruce MP, Anglican Bishop Philip Mounstephen of Truro; Mervyn Thomas, Chair of the UK FoRB Forum.



Survivors of persecution met HRH The Prince of Wales at an Advent service for those who suffer for their Christian faith. ACN (UK) National Director Neville Kyrke-Smith introduced His Royal Highness to teenager Frank Marooki from Iraq and Fr Mark Odion from Nigeria. Frank was just eight when he lost his family when their boat capsized following their escape from Iraq's Nineveh Plains which had been seized by Daesh (ISIS). Fr Mark Odion lost his uncle, also a priest, during a violent attack on his church and presbytery. Neville also introduced HRH to key UK figures committed to supporting the suffering Church. Read more at acnuk.org/news/uk-hrh-the-prince-of-wales-meets-survivors-of-persecution

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Spiritual help the most important

I have resolved to donate more frequently, as I feel that your organisation assists not only materially but most importantly spiritually. I received your mailing on the Church in Africa and hope that this small amount can make a difference. It is humbling to read how, despite all the despair, violence and tragedy, people still have hope and faith.

A friend and benefactor in Australia

A simple solution

I have found a simple way of helping ACN. In our prayer group we collect empty food cans. Then at the end of the month we sell the cans we have collected – around 10 to 13 kg of them – and send the proceeds to ACN.

A friend and supporter in Brazil

My little “breadcrumb” of help

Your work is so necessary on behalf of those who have no voice and need faithful souls to devote themselves with all their hearts to such

a good cause and help them in their need. The tiny “breadcrumb” that I can give is so little in the face of so many people waiting to receive help... May God reward you and all those working in the service of the Church!

A friend and benefactor in Portugal

Inspiring greater love for our neighbour

I'd like to thank you for your work on behalf of the suffering people in Syria. In this way you are inspiring us to show greater love for our neighbours, and for God as well. May the Lord help to bring an end to the suffering of these brothers and sisters of ours. And please continue your wonderful work for the Church!

A friend and benefactor in Slovakia

My prayers and offerings

Thank you for all the help that you are giving people. I am grateful to be able to make my own little contribution of prayer and give you a small offering.

A friend and benefactor in Germany



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

Dear Friends,

As 2022 dawns, I send you my very best wishes for the New Year, and my sincere gratitude for the constant generosity and loyalty that you show to the suffering Church. I hope that in 2022 you will feel confident that we can overcome the pandemic that is still with us and learn to live with this disease. Let us see this New Year as an opportunity to practise charity, and take care of each other. We are not alone, but “faithfully and silently surrounded by the powers of good”, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote.

For 75 years now, ACN has been striving to fulfil its mission to support the persecuted and suffering Church. Even though we have achieved many things in recent decades, we are facing ever greater challenges. The persecution of Christians, which in many parts of the world is accepted by the public with a shrug of their shoulders – and the growing restrictions on religious freedom, now emerging in many liberal democracies, where we see freedom of conscience being routinely trampled on – should rouse us to action, but it should not dismay or discourage us.

Every one of us has an opportunity to stand up against these developments. If we grasp the opportunity with courage then this New Year will also be a blessed one.

This is my heartfelt wish for you all!

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

UK Mirror Editor: John Newton | Publisher: Aid to the Church in Need
Printed in the UK by Cliffe Enterprise, Eastbourne BN22 8UY
ISSN 0252-2535 *De licentia competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae*



Aid to the
Church in Need

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