

# Your bread is saving lives

Help in times of crisis: ACN project partner Sister Annie Demerjian (right) and fellow Sisters distribute ACN-funded winter coats to children from deprived families.

**A record 12.4 million Syrians – 60 percent of the population – are going hungry every day.**

Many are struggling to stay alive because of lack of food and the cold.

**At times when Syria has dropped out of the headlines, you, the friends of ACN, did not abandon the faithful – and you continued to help them.**

**Now, however, the crisis is at an all-time high.**

ACN Syria project partner Sister Annie Demerjian told us: “What we are facing today is worse than even the darkest days of the war. At least back then, we could find something to eat.

“Now, every day people ask themselves: ‘How will I pay to keep

my home warm?’, ‘How will I feed my children?’, ‘How can we find the money to keep the lights on?’”

**The UN reports that Syria’s economic hardship “continued to deteriorate sharply” last year and that people “increasingly resort to harmful coping mechanisms” – child labour, child marriage and the sale of basic household items.**

In response, ACN is offering:

- **FOOD** – Supermarket vouchers and food baskets including bread, rice and eggs
- **HEATING and RENT** – Subsidies for at-risk families
- **MEDICINE** – Especially for the elderly and the sick

- **SCHOOLING** – Nursery, school and university scholarships

Sister Annie told us: **“People are crying in their hearts. When they receive the help you kindly provide, they always stop to thank God. You can see the relief and happiness in their eyes.”**

Mass stipends for poor and persecuted priests, catechesis and support for Sisters are essential – as is restoring churches desecrated by extremists – symbols of faith in a land where Christianity dates back to the Apostles.

There is so much to do but, with your love, your compassion and your faith, your bread is saving lives. ✝



# Syria – a country in crisis



Total devastation: A man struggles home with basic provisions through the ruins of central Aleppo.

Since we last updated you about Syria, the situation for the faithful has gone from bad to worse.

The UN now says 90 percent of the population are living below the poverty line.

Since 2018, the number of people going hungry every day has doubled to 12.4 million, of whom 1.3 million suffer what the UN calls “severe food insecurity”.

Food prices have increased by 200 percent in the last 18 months.

**In the past year alone, 4.5 million have been pushed into hunger as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, sanctions, infrastructure breakdown and economic collapse.**

ACN project partners supporting school children stated: “We know families who sometimes go the whole day without

getting a proper meal – they send their children to school with just a piece of bread and some water.”

Because of power cuts and extreme difficulty paying for electricity, people in towns and cities have as little as one hour a day of heating and lighting – and in the villages, they can go for days without any at all.

**Reporting back from a recent fact-**

**finding trip to Syria, ACN Head of Projects Regina Lynch said: “A friend of one of our project partners showed me pictures she had taken on her phone. They show a little girl inside a large bin rummaging, passing things to her mother.**

**“It breaks my heart to see such things. We must give help and support.”**



Young people are struggling to get access to basic medical supplies.

## ‘Dare I ask you to help us?’

**“I regret to inform you that very soon we will have used up the aid you so kindly gave us to provide medicine for the sick and money for rent.**

“As you know, the situation is far from improving, the number of illnesses is increasing, medicine and fuel are becoming more and more expensive – and salaries are non-existent.

“Dare I ask you to consider helping us?”

Thus began a letter we at ACN received from Sister Joseph Marie Chanaa (pictured).

**The Sister wrote to ask ACN’s continued help to provide rent for poor families and medicine for those with chronic illnesses:**

- 650+ families in need of £16.50 per month for rent
- 400 patients in need of £12.50 per month for medicine

The families supported by Sr Joseph Marie and her team are in Damascus, working among displaced and other needy families.

**When ACN quickly approved Sister Joseph Marie’s request, she responded: “I have only my THANK YOU, my prayer and the joy of the poor who receive a little hope and dignity, thanks to your generosity.**

“We entrust all these worries to St Joseph and ask him to watch over you and your families.”

## Great things from small seeds



Your faith in action: Thanks to you, Sister Samia’s Mustard Seed Centre for young people with special needs is able to reach out to more than 140 people in Homs.

**The Mustard Seed Centre in Homs has grown from the smallest of beginnings into one of the brightest and best projects in the whole of Syria.**

More than 140 young people with special needs aged between three and 30 benefit from the centre, based in Homs Old City.

Many have Down’s Syndrome, others are autistic.

Whatever the young people’s needs,

they are met by the centre’s caring staff.

Thanks to you, ACN is supporting this unique project – meeting the centre’s daily running costs – as well as providing winter coats for the young people.

The centre provides workshops for music, computers, colouring and painting, handicrafts and sports.

Those able to do so learn numeracy and literacy – development of imagination and speech.

Centre manager Sister Samia Dreij told us: **“We spent the year dealing with worries – cold, no electricity, no oil – but, despite all the challenges, we try to sow small seeds of hope in the hearts of our children, welcoming them into our centre, a place of trust and joy.**

**“The Lord has done great works with us and for us. These works have also been done by you who have reached out your hands to help us.”**

## Urgent help at a time of emergency

**More than 26,000 people in greatest need are receiving emergency food thanks to an ACN aid programme rushed through amid reports of increasing crisis across Syria.**

The aid includes **food vouchers and food baskets distributed by a team of volunteers across four deprived urban centres – Damascus, Hassake, Horan and Homs.**

The vouchers will enable families to obtain basic provisions from nearby supermarkets, but in places where logistics make this impossible the volunteers will provide cash payments or food baskets for the disabled and elderly.

The programme is being coordinated by the Sisters of Jesus and Mary led by Sister Annie Demerjian.

Highlighting rocketing price rises, fuel and water shortages and power cuts,

**Sister Annie said: “Today, Syrians devote their time to finding fuel to cook and heat their homes and standing in long queues for bread.”**

Submitting her aid application to ACN, **Sister Annie wrote: “We kindly ask you to lend a hand of help to our families at this difficult time – the worst period, worse than at any time since the war started in 2011.”**

Other newly approved emergency food projects include:

- ‘Sharing bread’ project for elderly people in Aleppo – run by the Blue Marist religious community
- Emergency milk for displaced children in Homs and Damascus
- Daily “meals on wheels” for 100 elderly people in Aleppo – a project run by the Latin Apostolic Vicariate



“I was hungry and you fed me” (Mt 25:35): ACN-funded food is prepared for delivery to at-risk families.



# Renewing the ancient stones

**On a cold winter's day, I remember standing in the bomb-damaged Syriac Catholic Cathedral in Aleppo – writes John Pontifex.**

This once glorious building had been badly scarred during the years-long siege of the city, at the height of Syria's civil war.

Now, years later, the cathedral has been rebuilt and restored – with help from Aid to the Church in Need.

Nothing could be a clearer sign of ACN's commitment to sustaining the presence of Christians in Syria than to renew these ancient stones of faith.

This is important for Christians tempted to lose heart after a large

proportion of faithful fled the country during long years of persecution and financial hardship.

Syriac Catholic Archbishop Antoine Chahda of Aleppo told ACN: "The restoration of the cathedral is a message to the Christians that our mouths must continue to praise God in this place despite all the difficulties.

"Our desire to stay is a mission.

**"On behalf of the parishioners and myself, we wholeheartedly thank each of you at ACN who have contributed with faith and generosity to this dream of renewing the cathedral."** ✝



Prayers ARE being answered: Thanks to you, churches in Aleppo vital for prayer and worship, are being repaired.

## Latest ACN emergency projects

ACN is committed to supporting these and other projects which have just been approved for funding:

- HASSAKE, HOMS, HORAN and DAMASCUS – Emergency food for poor families – project overseen by Sister Annie Demerjian
- ALEPPO – A generator and solar panels for the Syriac Home for the Elderly – serving 40 Christian men and women
- DAMASCUS – Tables, chairs, cupboards and other furniture for the 900 pupils and staff at the Madrasat Al Riaya School run by the Sisters of St Jeanne Antide
- ALEPPO – Six months of daily medicine, food (rice, coffee, tea, sugar, milk and eggs), heating and lighting for Christian families
- HOMS – Running costs for the Mustard Seed Centre for young people with special needs – run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- ALEPPO – Scholarships for 7,523 students (767 in kindergarten, 4,316 in school and 2,440 in university)
- MASKANAH, HOMS – Restoration of the damaged Lady Mary Church which serves 173 families ✝



A top priority for ACN is providing warm, nutritious food for Syrians displaced by extreme poverty, violence and other persecution.



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ACN [www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org)

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