

## AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED: Mobile Phone Challenge







ACN

### SLIDE 1:

Promotional video for the Mobile Phone Challenge. Please share.




### SLIDE 2:

Title slide: This is a 'challenge' because we all rely on our phones so much. Fasting is about giving up something that is important. There are many reasons why each of the world's religions advocates fasting: to sacrifice willingly something that makes our lives more comfortable and to offer that to God for the good of another person is an act of selfless love, so it has spiritual power for our own good and the good of the world. When we fast, we learn:

-  that we do not need exterior material things as much as we think we do
-  that when we clear our minds from the noise and distractions of the world we are better placed to hear God's voice
-  the value of self-sacrifice and to become less self-centred
-  to imitate Jesus in the desert. Jesus fasted before he began his mission - this shows us its value as a spiritual practice in growing in holiness and resisting evil.

### SLIDE 3:

The ACN Mobile Phone Challenge incorporates the three Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

-  FASTING - We fast from our mobile phones (except for emergencies).
-  ALMSGIVING - We raise money through asking our friends and family to sponsor us (this is also a sacrifice, because many of us find it difficult to ask our friends and family for sponsorship money, and organising the collection of the money can be difficult). The money we raise will go directly to those who need it at the ACN projects in Lebanon. These are explained on the slides and there are additional notes at the end of this document.
-  PRAYER - We ask that participants pray during the challenge, particularly when they miss their phones. There are two prayer services that can be used as a group at the end. Participants might also like to learn the Fatima Prayer and pray it during the fast day and beyond.

*1434 The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbour, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbour, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity which covers a multitude of sins. (Catechism of the Catholic Church [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P4B.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P4B.HTM) )*

### SLIDE 4:

You can decide how best to fast from your phone depending on your individual circumstances. Some participants will find it easier to fast in blocks of time (e.g. two hours a day for twelve days, etc), most however will complete the challenge in one 24-hour period. Some very brave souls may choose to 'give up' their mobile phone more than once during Lent or even every Friday.

**SLIDE 5:**

Why this challenge? What is it for? The following slides will answer these questions.

**SLIDE 6:**

Why this challenge?

We want to make our Lenten offering meaningful. If we check our phones even half as much as the studies suggest, we will be making a significant sacrifice by choosing not to use them for a day. We will also have more time to pray for those in need.

**SLIDE 7:**

This is the whole point of the challenge. When we sacrifice things for the sake of another we show love. *"A sacrifice to be real, must hurt, and must empty ourselves. Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love than in your weakness."*  
Saint Teresa of Calcutta

**SLIDE 8:**

Think about some of the ways in which this will be a sacrifice for you. How will you tell your friends and family in advance? Will you be able to get some of them involved too? Consider pairing up with a friend or family member on the day you decide to do the challenge (they should do it on another day - not the same day as you) to ensure that you are contactable in case of an emergency.

**SLIDE 9:**

Who is it for?

**SLIDE 10:**

Lebanon is the country that has taken in the highest number of refugees in the world in proportion to its own population. And the almost 1½ million refugees in the country also include many Christians. In the mainly Christian regions of the country, the local Catholic Church has been helping the poorest and most needy to find a place to live and obtain the basic necessities of life. An example of this is the Greek Melkite Catholic diocese of Zahle in the Bekaa Valley, close to the Syrian border. There are many Christian families here who have fled the war in neighbouring Syria and they are suffering terribly from the current crisis in Lebanon itself. ACN has no intention of abandoning them.

**SLIDE 11:**

A second map for perspective.

**SLIDE 12:**

One example of a project: St John the Merciful Table in Zahle is where Syrian refugees like those on the video clip go to receive material, spiritual and emotional support. St John the Merciful was a saint renowned for his great love of the poor. Wherever he saw any need, he sought with all his energies and means to alleviate it.

**SLIDE 13:**

A video which shows the port explosion in Lebanon on August 4th 2020. This shows the impact. It shows how the emergency food parcels funded by ACN helped those who needed it most. ACN has similar projects to continue to help people now. It might be helpful to ask the group to consider why the woman speaking about receiving a parcel was so moved by people 'from outside' thinking of her and her family.

**SLIDE 14**

### The Holy Rosary Hospital

Here you can see Sr Nicholas Akiki (of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary) during a visit at the Holy Rosary Hospital, which is less than 1km from the site of the explosion at the Port of Beirut in Lebanon (August 2020).

The hospital is located in the Gemmayzé district of Beirut, less than 500 meters from the port, and before the explosion it had 200 beds, as well as important and highly modern research equipment and operating rooms, distributed over 18 floors. The Sisters are used to difficult times and the experience during the last civil war is all too present in their minds. "Because of our location between areas of different religions, our hospital was the shelter for all patients without any discrimination. The Sisters gave all their time and affection towards the healing of their patients, even in the most difficult times when there was no bread or food available for months."

ACN is helping to repair the Sisters' convent. Sister Nicolas sends a message to ACN's benefactors: "I know that God is with us, I see it in the hands of so many who will not leave us alone, with your help we can continue our work and start over. We have to rise from the ruins. Our Lady of the Holy Rosary guides us in our work."

(ACN International: Feature, 16.11.2020 /Lebanon/Beirut / Sisters Holy Rosary by Maria Lozano

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### SLIDE 15:

#### Hospital of the Cross

Run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Cross, staff at the Hospital of the Cross care for patients suffering from psychiatric illnesses.

The Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross is a Catholic non-profit facility in Beirut that the economic crisis has brought to the verge of collapse. Since its establishment over sixty years ago it has been taking care of the most abandoned people but is now at risk of closure for lack of secure funding. When ACN met her in Beirut, Sister Jeanette explained that if the hospital were to close, most of the patients would end up in the streets. "Many no longer have families," she said. Even worse, many families abandon their children in the hospital leaving false names, addresses and phone numbers. Unfortunately, the nun said, this often happens in the most serious cases. However, she assured ACN that, should funding not arrive and the establishment be forced to close, she would do her best to make sure are not abandoned to their plight.

### SLIDE 16:

Before his sudden death in 2021, Fr Toufic Bou Hadir provided support to young Catholics who lost family members and friends in the Port of Beirut explosion. Staff from ACN met with Fr. Toufic Bou Hadir and young Catholics connected to the Maronite Youth (left to right): Fr. Toufic Bou Hadir, Sergio Moukarzel, Gisèle Nacouzi, Johnny Khoueiry, Miled Refaat, Carlos Moawad, Reinhard Backes. All the young Catholics present in the meeting lost friends during the blast of August 4, 2020 and they know people who lost everything.

### SLIDE 17:

St Antoine Dispensary is a clinic founded by Sr Hanan Youssef (Good Shepherd Sisters). From there emergency food as well as medicines are prepared and distributed. Here you can see Sr Hanan speaking to refugees from Iraq and from Syria. *"I often thank the Lord for your presence beside us. Without you, it would be so hard to go on with our ministry."* Sr Hanan Youssef, project partner, Lebanon.

### SLIDE 18:

Preparation of emergency food aid in the city of El-Ahmar, 100km from Beirut, close to Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley. This is needed as Georgette explained to ACN's team: *"I live in a poor neighbourhood and our*

*situation is very bad, especially after the explosion. I live there with my three grandchildren. I am responsible for them and I have no one to help me, except God and ACN's benefactors."*

**SLIDE 19:**

Sr Rita distributes food to families in the district of Karm Al-Zeytoun in Beirut. Sr Rita distributes food to families in the district of Karm Al-Zeytoun in Beirut. ACN met Mona, a Lebanese woman aged 52. She lives with her mother Juliette, who is 91 and who has witnessed at least five wars – or is it six? She can no longer remember exactly... “Ever since the explosion on 4 August she has been traumatised, she starts at every single noise”, Mona explains to ACN. In a country where there is no retirement pension or social security or other pensions, it has been the children who have supported their parents, or the weakest members of the family, but now, with the economic crisis, Covid-19 and lastly the terrible explosion, this has simply become impossible. Mona has been without work for five years now.

**SLIDE 20:**

Following the Port of Beirut explosion, Sr Violette distributes emergency aid to residents, who live in the Nabaa district, in Beirut. Each family food package - divided between two boxes - contains basics such as lentils and beans, canned items and cooking oil.

*“I am so thankful for this centre,”* said one recipient called Bassima, balancing her boxes in a stroller to transport them home. *“The social worker and the sisters are always here to listen to me and help me.”*

A total of 786 families benefited from the food package distribution at the Nabaa dispensary. In all, more than 5,800 needy families are being helped through the ACN-funded initiative - in cooperation with CNEWA and Caritas - at several distribution centres in areas of Beirut affected by the August 4 catastrophic double-blast.

*“I thank God that He sent ACN to organize together to help us. It’s a sign that the Church is close to our people in their suffering. I hope for more collaboration and projects to come,”* said another sister called Marie Justine.

**SLIDE 21:**

Archbishop Charbel Abdallah, Archbishop of Tyre, and Fr Geryes distribute food parcels in Tyre, an ancient city and modern-day beach resort about 80km south of Beirut.

**SLIDES 22 – 24:**

Syrian refugees at St John the Merciful Table

**SLIDE 25:**

In the past, the refugees came to eat and meet friends at the various centres. However, with the arrival of the pandemic, around 800 people now come here to collect a hot meal to take away, while for the remaining 200 or so, who are either incapacitated or unwell, the meals are brought to them at home.

At the same time they are able to enjoy some human contact and spiritual counselling.

**SLIDE 26**

One of the people who comes every day is Labiba, who now lives together with her two unmarried sisters in a room measuring just five square metres. They came here from Homs, because they were

dying of hunger. The economic crisis had made it impossible for them to find work and they arrived with just the clothes on their backs. They are unable to cook either, because the room they live in has just two divan beds where they sleep and a small paraffin stove.

They are profoundly grateful to be able to eat at least one hot meal a day, thanks to the St John the Merciful Table.

The people who come not only receive food for the body but also psychological and spiritual support and encouragement. They all agree that their faith is their sole source of strength and that it is only thanks to this that they are able to endure the poverty and hardship and exercise patience in the midst of their suffering.

**SLIDE 27:**

What about prayer? The following slides will answer these questions.

**SLIDE 28:**

Ask participants to offer a prayer for the people suffering in Lebanon every time they think of their phone, or on impulse go to check it. This is prayer linked to sacrifice, which according to St Pope John Paul II "is the most powerful force in the world"

**SLIDE 29:**

Following the example of St John the Merciful, help us to recognize the face of Jesus in our suffering brothers and sisters and to serve Him with humility and joy. Teach us to be carriers of God's tender love and mercy and so bear witness that God still loves the world through each one of us. Amen.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION – From ACN International**

**Help for Syrian refugee children to be able to attend school**

The situation in Lebanon is a desperate one. The profound political and economic crisis that has gripped the country since the end of 2019 has plunged large sections of the population into poverty. The pandemic has made matters still worse. And on top of this, as a result of the war in Syria, one and a half million Syrian refugees have flooded into the country. Thus, a population of just 4 million Lebanese has had to absorb an additional 1.5 million refugees from Syria. It is a Herculean task for such a small country to cope with such a vast number of refugees and care for them appropriately.

An exceptionally large number of refugees have settled in the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon, close to the frontier with Syria. One of the most urgent tasks is to provide some kind of schooling for as many of these Syrian children as possible. For otherwise they will be a lost generation, one without a future either abroad or in their own home country. For without education the problems will become still worse in the long term, not only for the children themselves but for society generally. Besides, the possibility to extend schooling opportunities locally is an important factor that will help persuade their families to stay in the region and perhaps motivate them in the long term to return to Syria, rather than attempting to emigrate to Europe, the United States or Canada. For well-educated young people are desperately needed in Syria in order to help rebuild the country.

The port explosion was in August 2020 when 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in a warehouse in the port of Beirut. Father Raymond Abdo, ACN project partner, said "it felt like an atomic bomb with red smoke everywhere and enormous damage."

This explosion has been considered one of the most powerful non-atomic explosions ever recorded. The blast left more than 200 dead, 6,500 injured and nearly 300,000 houses and homes destroyed or severely damaged. More than 100 churches, convents, church-run schools and other institutes were reported to be in need of repairs following the blast.

Christian neighbourhoods were among the nearest to the explosion, where houses, churches, and hospitals were destroyed. Father Samer Nassif said that "in one second, more damage was done to the Christian quarter of Beirut than throughout the years of the civil war." Even Jad, a father of a family mentioned in an interview to ACN, exclaimed that his first thought when everything blew up was "that war had broken out."

ACN helped fund over 8 million dollars and funded 67 projects ranging from Construction and transportation aid, Mass stipends, emergency aid and existence help for religious sisters, to name a few.

The situation in Lebanon is still facing a great crisis. The economic crisis generated by the accumulation of public debt and the collapse of the Lebanese pound, which has lost more than 80% of its value against the US dollar, is putting heavy burdens on the Lebanese people and the price of consumer goods have skyrocketed. So now more than ever the Lebanese people need our help and our prayers!

Project Updates that ACN has helped finance:

#### **Lebanon: economic crisis threatens survival of Catholic hospital**

The Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross is a Catholic non-profit facility in Beirut that the economic crisis has brought to the verge of collapse. Since its establishment over sixty years ago it has been taking care of the most abandoned people but is now at risk of closure for lack of secure funding.

Situated in the heights of Beirut, from where the port wreckage can be seen, the Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross accommodates 800 patients suffering from various mental illnesses. All of them need specific and permanent assistance. The hospital is a large compound with several buildings and employs over 300 people, including doctors, nurses and administrative staff.

The facility was founded in 1952 by Blessed Father Jacques Haddad, a Lebanese Capuchin priest who died in 1954 and was beatified in Beirut on June 22, 2008. Its establishment was linked to a project Father Haddad had launched in the aftermath of World War I to care for the many disabled and mentally ill people, often children, abandoned by their families. The Lebanese Capuchin founded the Hospital of the Cross and, in 1930, the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Cross of Lebanon.

Following the footsteps of their founder the Franciscan nuns now manage 25 medical, social, or educational centres throughout Lebanon. The Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross is one of them. From its outset, the institution has dedicated itself to supporting the most disadvantaged.

#### **Appeal for international help**

Recently, the 65 nuns, including the hospital's director, Sister Jeanette, received a visit from a delegation of the pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). Along with other organizations, ACN supports and funds projects that allow the facility to continue caring for its patients. The economic crisis has put a strain on the establishment, which currently lives on its reserves and, without international solidarity, would only survive a few months.

The hospital is in desperate need for money to pay its staff, feed its patients, buy expensive drugs, the prices of which has more than tripled due to the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound. In addition, with electricity running only one hour a day, the hospital runs generators at full speed which require fifteen tonnes of fuel each week, with one ton costing over 700 US Dollars.

Following the Coronavirus outbreak the hospital has been forced to reduce its capacity from 1,000 to 800 beds. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the State contributed with subsidies amounting to USA\$ 2 per patient, that is a total of \$ 2,000 per month. Although the sum was minimal and insufficient, it represented a regular income. However, since Summer 2020 the hospital has not received any public funds at all. In this context, the only solution for the Congregation is to appeal for international funding without which the Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross would be forced to close. This would be catastrophic for its patients.

### **Abandoned and without a family**

When ACN met her in Beirut, Sister Jeanette explained that if the hospital were to close, most of the patients would end up in the streets. “Many no longer have families,” she said. Even worse, many families abandon their children in the hospital leaving false names, addresses and phone numbers. Unfortunately, the nun said, this often happens in the most serious cases. However, she assured that, should funding not arrive and the establishment be forced to close, she would do her best to make sure are not abandoned to their plight.

The nursing staff, who, like the overwhelming majority of Lebanese, have not been spared by the crisis, obviously want to continue their work. Nurses are often the patients' only contact with the outside world. Foutine, a young woman nurse, highlights the suffering of many patients in the hospital. She said she considers her job a "calling", and she refuses the idea that the facility might close for lack of funds.

Neither Foutine, nor her colleagues, many of whom are “surrogate” families for these children, can imagine having to abandon them.

### ***LEBANON / NATIONAL 21/00518***

#### **Lebanon: “The sisters are a living witness to Christ on earth”**

#### ***ACN pays a visit to Lebanon following the devastating explosion which destroyed whole suburbs of Beirut***

**There is plenty of life in Karm Al Zeitoun, one of the suburbs of Beirut in the district of Ashrafieh, a name which means “Mount of Olives”. The streets are narrow, and the movement of cars and pedestrians results in little bottlenecks on every corner – and especially around the small dispensary run by the Daughters of Charity, from which the international Catholic pastoral charity and pontifical foundation ACN International is helping to support 350 families affected by the explosion.**

The quarter was originally populated by Armenians fleeing the genocide of 1915. They were followed later by Syrians and Palestinians, likewise fleeing war and persecution. And in the last few years immigrants from many different countries, mostly Ethiopians and Bangladeshis, have found shelter in this humble quarter, home to the poorest people and still a place with Christian roots. Its ancient houses rub shoulders along its winding alleyways, while the results of the recent building boom, the modern tower blocks built all round Karm Al Zeitoun, have massively forced up prices in the area and compelled most of the young people to move away to more affordable areas. The only people now left in Karm Al Zeitoun are the old people and the immigrants.

There are many people milling around the small entrance door to the Mother and Child Protection Centre. Established originally in 1959, it is today one of the six centres from which the ACN emergency aid parcels are being distributed for the families most severely affected by the explosion on 4 August. Altogether they

are helping over 5,800 families. The Daughters of Charity have undertaken to distribute this aid to 350 families; there are 70 of them here today. The two boxes of aid provide sufficient food for five people for a month. They are heavy, weighing 32 kg, and many of the families claiming them have come with little carts, or in the hope that some acquaintance or relative will help them with their car. This is one reason why there is more traffic than normal today, making it difficult to make one's way through the narrow alleyways of Karm Al Zeitoun.

One of those coming to the dispensary is **Mona**, a Lebanese woman aged 52. She lives with her mother Juliette, who is 91 and who has witnessed at least five wars – or is it six? She can no longer remember exactly... “Ever since the explosion on 4 August she has been traumatised, she starts at every single noise”, Mona explains to ACN.

In a country where there is no retirement pension or social security or other pensions, it has been the children who have supported their parents, or the weakest members of the family, but now, with the economic crisis, Covid-19 and lastly the terrible explosion, this has simply become impossible. Mona has been without work for five years now. Before the crisis, one of her brothers used to help her with 300 Lebanese pounds a month (roughly 200 US dollars), but now with inflation this only amounts to around forty dollars, and besides her brother has “enough problems of his own taking care of his family”.

“In 1990 a missile struck my house, killing my sister. I went into a depression, but my faith helped me out. Without faith we could not continue, it is the one thing that helps us to endure the present situation; is the only thing left to us”, Mona tells us, adding, “Sister Rita comes whenever we need her, even though it may be very late, because she is always very busy, but she always manages to find a space for us. For me, this is the living witness of Christ on earth.”

**Sister Rita**, whom Mona and Juliette refer to in almost every other sentence, belongs to the congregation of Saint Vincent DePaul, and works in the front of the dispensary. Despite the frenetic activity around her on this particular day, she still finds time to talk to ACN. “The situation here is a tragic one, because they don't have anything.” The number of families being helped in the dispensary of the Daughters of Charity has increased more than fourfold. Before there were 120 families, now there are 500 families per month, Lebanese Sister Rita goes on to explain. In addition to the volunteers who are preparing for today's food distribution there are workmen working on the dispensary, since the building itself was also damaged by the explosion. All the windows and parts of the roof were blown off. “But we have to continue working, since we have now found someone to do the repairs, and even though we can't pay him for now.”

Among the boxes, piled up in the entrance with the ACN logo on them, there is a crucifix nailed to the wall with a legend in French: “You are the sign of God's mercy”. This is the perfect summary of the work done by these religious, which Sister Rita describes in these words: “Our charism is to alleviate the sufferings of Christ, who still suffers on this earth. We simply want to serve God and bear witness to Him, especially during this so very difficult time we are going through.”



Later, Sister Rita herself goes with representatives of ACN to visit **Nabil**, another of those benefiting from the emergency aid programme sponsored by ACN since the explosion. Nabil is 56, born an only child with a physical handicap. His mother, who normally cares for him, has been admitted to hospital, and it is her neighbour Maral who is now looking after him in her absence. The sisters are also paying for an assistant to look in on him every day. Sister Rita greets Nabil and talks and prays with him. When the explosion happened, she tells us, “all the windowpanes fell in on top of him; it’s a miracle he wasn’t badly hurt”.

Seeing the situation of Nabil, Sister **Josephine**, another of the sisters working in the centre, says, just at this time when so many people are talking of leaving and emigrating: “This is the very moment to remain here. This is the time to support and accompany our people, since here each and every one of them has their problems.” And Sister Rita recalls, with a look of firm decision despite her tiredness: “John Paul II told us that Lebanon is a message. We Christians here have an important role to play in this country, and the day we forget this message, Lebanon will no longer be Lebanon.”