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0345 646 0110 • acn@acnuk.org • www.acnuk.org



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“Consecrated life consists in this prophetic vision that sees God present in the world, even if many do not notice him; it is a voice that says: “God is enough, the rest passes away”.

**Pope Francis,
Homily on 2nd February 2019**

Dear Friends,

Is consecrated life still relevant today? What’s the point of it? Isn’t it just for people who can’t cope with the world? Or who are running away from themselves? Many people cannot understand why someone would join a monastery, renouncing a professional career, independence and even the prospects of marriage and a family. The true meaning of the consecrated life, however, is not about renunciation, but about responding to the silent call of the loving God. The consecrated religious remind the world of the presence of God and the existence of heaven. They remind us that we do not find our deepest and greatest happiness in material possessions, in an independent life, or even in human relationships, but in God alone. “For you have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it rests in you”. With these words, Saint Augustine recognises in his *Confessions* that he is touched by the call of God.

The vocation of completely and totally surrendering ourselves to God is based on the mystery of his love, of his unfathomable counsel

and plan of salvation. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16). Some are chosen to leave everything for the sake of the kingdom of God: father and mother, house and home, possessions and homeland. The decision to follow Christ more closely, to give selfless, and possibly unrecognised, service to others, can only be achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mother Laura Montoya, Colombia’s first female saint, spoke about this powerful working



“The celibate, consecrated life is a special, unmerited gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and the world.”

of God’s Spirit when she was challenged by an uncomprehending cousin: “Yes, the Sisters are indeed mad, as you say”, she replied. “But theirs is a madness that you cannot know and that no one who has not experienced the love of God can know. And they will never be healed of this madness. And yet it makes them happy.”

Dear friends, the celibate, consecrated life is a special, unmerited gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and the world. However, we are all

called to give ourselves completely to God, no matter in what state we live. Children, adolescents, fiancées, spouses, parents, single persons, widows, grandfathers and grandmothers are also called to become one with the Divine Heart of the Redeemer and with the will of the Father. This unity finds its highest expression in the Holy Eucharist. Through the Paschal gift of the Eucharist we are all called and chosen to live a “consecrated” life close to the Heart of

God. As the recently beatified Italian youth, Carlo Acutis, put it, “It is marvelous, because, like John, all men are called to be beloved disciples. It is enough simply to become Eucharistic souls, allowing God to work within us the marvels that he alone can do! But it does require the free assent of our will. God does not like to force anyone. He wants our freely given love.”

My grateful wishes to you all for a blessed Easter season,

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



“Flower gardens” for God



Bosnia: The flowers need loving care – just like our souls.



Mozambique: “Serve the Lord with joy” (Ps 100:2).



Life in God’s presence – for their work is also prayer.

When Saint Teresa of Avila founded the Order of Discalced Carmelites, her Father Confessor wrote these words: “God wanted ... a house where he could rest, a dwelling for his consolation. He desired ... a flower garden with these chosen souls, in the midst of whom he wished to rest, to unveil to them his mysteries and open to them his Heart.”

The vocation of a Carmelite nun consists in transforming her whole being, in silence and seclusion, into a ceaseless prayer, and thereby nourishing a deep and intimate friendship with Jesus Christ. Saint Therese of Lisieux put it quite succinctly: “In the heart of the Church I wish to be love.” Out of love she wanted to “pour away” her life, like precious oil.

There are Carmelite convents, or Carmels, in many countries of the world today, and the Sisters include the needs of all mankind in their prayers. As recently as 2019, a brand new convent was built in **Mozambique**, close to the capital Maputo. It is dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima. The initial four professed nuns have since been joined by other young women.

The Carmelites want to be able to support themselves by baking unleavened wafers for Mass. It is an activity ideally suited to the contemplative life, since it does not disturb the Sisters’ commitment to ceaseless prayer. At the same time it constitutes a valuable service for the local Church, as there is an urgent need of unleavened wafers in the archdiocese of Maputo, which has 48 parishes and around 800,000 Catholic faithful. In fact they even have to cover the shortfall by purchasing imported wafers. **The only problem, however, is that the convent cannot afford to purchase the specialised baking machinery which, with all the relevant accessories, costs around £14,900. So will you help us to come to the aid of this young community with the money they need?**

As for the Carmelite Sisters in Stup, in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, they have already been through many difficulties, as their convent was destroyed during the Bosnian war, after it had only just been built. The Sisters had barely moved in and had not even unpacked their belongings, when they had to flee again because their convent was on the front line.

In the year 2000, five years after the war had ended, they were finally able to move back into their convent, which had been rebuilt with your help. It had been the personal wish of Pope Saint John Paul II that, particularly in this country which had been so wounded by war, there should be contemplative Sisters, devoting themselves entirely to prayer for peace and reconciliation. Cardinal Vinko Puljic, the Archbishop Emeritus of Sarajevo, is still grateful for the presence of the Carmelite Sisters who, as he puts it, are a “sign both for Christians and for Muslims”. But it is nevertheless difficult for them to support themselves, despite their very modest lifestyle.

And so we are helping the six Sisters in the convent with a contribution of £2,500 for their basic support. Would you like to contribute, so that they can continue to pray for peace?



The Rosarian monastery: a refuge for those in need.



Young brothers, joyfully following Christ.

The folly of the Cross

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mt 16:24). Again and again, for over 2,000 years now, these words have moved men and women to radically imitate the Lord. So it was with Bastiampillai Anthonipillai, who was born in 1886 in what is today Sri Lanka.

Known within the order as Father Thomas, he slept barely three hours a night and, despite his weak health, observed a life of strict penance. In 1928 he founded the first home-grown male contemplative congregation in Asia, the Rosarians. And he even accepted young men from the lowest castes – a scandalous thing in those days! That was how he “earned” himself the nickname of the “mad monk”. And in fact he himself chose as the motto for his community the words of the Apostle Paul: “We are fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor 4:10). The folly of the Cross – to this day it is still a stumbling block for the world.

Yet despite this, many young men today still choose to live a strict life of prayer and penance. But the pandemic has also hit the Rosarians hard. As a result we have received an appeal from the regional superior, Father

Francis Jeyaseelan, on behalf of 31 of these Rosarian brothers. He writes: “Every day some of our neighbours are dying, and one of our brothers also died of Covid-19. The economic crisis our country is going through is terrible. Our living costs are rising astronomically and people can barely make ends meet – and it is the same for us too. But the poor are still coming to us, seeking our help. And so I am turning to you, on behalf of the Rosarians of **Sri Lanka**, to ask your help so that we can purchase food and other necessities as well.”

We wanted to respond as quickly as possible to this SOS and have already promised £23,600.

Also following Christ on his Way of the Cross are the Dominican Friars in **Pakistan**. “The Cross is the royal gate through which we

enter the temple of holiness. Whoever seeks holiness elsewhere will seek in vain”, said Saint Dominic.

In Pakistan the Church is always beneath the shadow of the Cross. Persecution, discrimination and even death are potential daily realities for many Christians in this country. The 56 Dominican Friars working in the parishes, schools and educational establishments, and in other areas as well, are very close to the people. Unsparing in their energies, they give themselves completely. And so the regional province of the order has established a one-year programme for them, so that they can deepen their own spiritual life and not suffer complete burnout. At the same time they have the opportunity to continue their education, so that in a rapidly changing world they will still be in a position to respond to the questions and problems of the people around them.

We are proposing to give £11,800 towards the cost of this important programme. Will you help us?



Holy Mass: the daily source of strength for the Dominicans.



Ongoing spiritual formation: strengthening and confirming them in their vocation.



Comfort in distress

Sister Srpouhi: bringing comfort and sympathy for Gohar and her Sister Anahit.



With food, flowers and a song of welcome, visitors from ACN were received by the children of the Armenian Catholic orphanage in Gyumri. They all dressed in their Sunday best, but many of their little faces looked very serious.

“No matter how good we are with the children and how terrible the domestic conditions are, we can never replace their parents,” explains Sister Haguinta Muradyan, who is the superior of the orphanage. 35 children have found a new home here. Many are not truly orphans, rather they are in social care: “But wherever possible, we send the children back to their own family homes to sleep.”

Traditional hospitality offered by the little ones.



Even without being mothers themselves, the Sisters radiate a sense of motherliness. Two-year-old Emmanuel, who lives in the home with his two older siblings because his mother died of cancer and his father works far away in Russia, snuggles up to Sister Srpouhi Poghasyan and affectionately calls her “Mama”, no matter what the Sister says. She explains why she became a religious Sister: “I always wanted to have a lot of children. Could I ever have had so many?” She laughs heartily and looks lovingly at the crowd of children at the dinner table.

with God” – supported by ACN. Last year, 600 children came, including many refugee children from Nagorno-Karabakh. Little Alisa enthuses: “It’s the best camp I’ve ever attended. We had such a good time, and went on wonderful trips. I also learned a lot of prayers and many other important things for my life.” For many children, the camp also provides preparation for baptism.

The Armenian Catholic Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Mary have had an eventful history. Founded in Constantinople in 1847, the Congregation dedicated itself to the education of poor girls. After the Armenian genocide, the Sisters fled to Syria and Lebanon. It was only after the fall of the Iron Curtain that the Sisters began their apostolate in Armenia. In 1998 the orphanage in Gyumri was opened.

For several years, the Sisters have also been taking care of about 50 families who live in stark and sub-standard conditions. We visited one such family in a ruined house near the bus station. Here lives 70-year-old Gohar, who lost her house in the great earthquake in 1988. In the neighbouring apartment we meet Susanna, who suffers from cancer, and is only a shadow of her former self. When Sister Srpouhi comes to visit her she always brings a gift, and it is not just the basic necessities she brings, it is the profound consolation of knowing you’re not abandoned by God.

But the Sisters are also working in the community: Sister Srpouhi, for example, gives catechesis in seven villages. And since 1994, the Sisters have been organising “Holidays

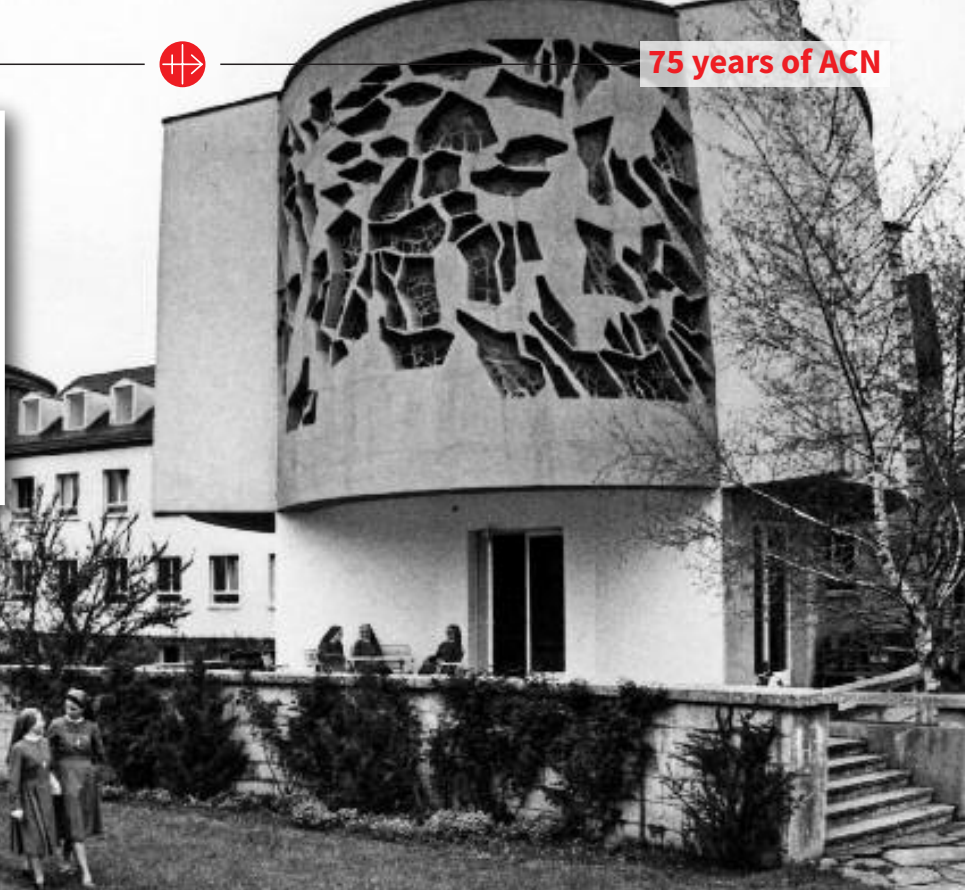
ACN supports the work of the Armenian Sisters as well as the work of Sisters in no fewer than 100 other countries. Will you help us to support them?



Emmanuel loves his second “mummy”.



Holy Eucharist Sisters in 1959: "Apostles" to the East.



The Herrnau convent: two Sisters in front of their "fortress of faith".

Fortresses for God

"Bulwarks against communism" is what they were intended to be – the string of convents and monasteries on the German border with the communist East, directly along the Iron Curtain. ACN helped build them from 1952 onwards. Each one of these "Fortresses for God" comprised a church, a monastery and a retreat centre. They were designed as centres of prayer and "focal points of apostolic zeal" – and also and at the same time as forward bases for the priests working in the scattered communities of German refugees living in mostly Protestant areas in Western Germany.

This was nothing less than an effort to strengthen Christianity in a now divided Europe, in which Germany in particular was affected, being divided into two separate countries. Communism was literally on the doorstep. Early on, our charity had already understood that Christian "power houses" were more important here than military bases. They were also designed to help with the pastoral care of the millions of people who had fled from the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany, whose numbers were constantly growing and who could find pastoral support in these spiritual centres.

One notable project was the convent of Herrnau in Salzburg, Austria. It was established for the Sisters of the Eucharist who had earlier fled from Czechoslovakia and who, having lost everything, for years after the war had been housed in cramped and unhealthy conditions. Despite these unpleasant circumstances, however, more young women continued to join them. Their goal was to go to Eastern Europe as

soon as possible and carry out a fruitful apostolate there. So part of their formation included learning some of the Slavic languages. So, with the help of Dutch Catholics in particular, ACN built them a new Mother house, which was consecrated in 1959.

But all convents are really "fortresses of faith" and "powerhouses of prayer". Above all, the prayer of contemplative religious makes pastoral activity in the parishes bear fruit. They are praying constantly for new vocations and asking for strength for the priests, who daily face so many new challenges. It was for the same reason that, 11 years ago, the then Bishop of Ayaviri in **Peru** invited the contemplative Sisters of the Holy Trinity to come and settle in his prelature, which is situated in one of the poorest regions of the country. Owing to the shortage of priests, many people are becoming alienated from the Church in this country. The Sisters live in strict enclosure and live a life of silent prayer, sacrifice and penance. It is a life



Consecrated life today, in prayer and silence: Trinitarian Sisters in Ayaviri.

that is attractive to many young women today, and their numbers have increased from 4 to 18. Their average age is just 32. But they need our help to support their life and ministry, because as a result of the pandemic they are barely able to sell any of their liturgical vestments and other creations and products.

We are helping them, along with over 2,100 other contemplative religious Sisters throughout the world, so that these convents, these "fortresses for God" will be bolstered in such difficult times – this is in the tradition of those first "fortresses of faith" that we were able to support 70 years ago.



“THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!”



This threefold thank you comes to us from the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** where, amid the grinding poverty of the diocese of Bokungu-Ikela, nine priests are rejoicing over the nine motorcycles your generosity has enabled us to give them. All in all you gave £20,000. The individual parishes of the diocese are all over 38 square miles in area and have many outstations as well. And the transport links in this rural area are poor, needless to say. But the Catholic faithful are full of enthusiasm for the Good News and filled with zeal. Now, thanks to your help, they will not have to wait so long to see their priests.

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Rebuilding in Lebanon

We happened to be in Beirut over Christmas time and attended Holy Mass in the church of Saint Francis. The priest told us about you and how you had helped with the rebuilding of his church. It left us deeply moved, and has encouraged us to make a donation. My wife and I both wish you all the very best for the year 2022!

A Lebanese married couple in Germany

Charity

Please accept our gift in recognition of the wonderful work you are doing for the poorest and weakest in our world. Charity is one of the pillars of our Christian faith! It is charity that you put into action, and it is admirable!

A married couple in Belgium

The intercession of Saint Joseph

Thank you, and God bless you once again for the very informative talk your director [Herbert Rechberger, head of ACN (Austria)] has given on Radio Maria. It was so good to hear his voice again. Today there is a great deal of talking, but

very little is really said. Yet in the account of the Creation, it says ‘God spoke...’ I’d like to send you a picture of the statue of Saint Joseph that is in the church in our Mother House. I am there with him every morning at 8 am sharp, entrusting to him the needs of the sick and the dying, and all the sorrows of the world, including ACN of course. He holds the Child Jesus so that his arms are free to welcome everyone. May Saint Joseph protect you in all you do and undertake.

A religious Sister and friend of ACN in Austria

Help for those in need

There are so many people suffering and in need. We know that the most important thing we can give anyone is the time we devote to them and our practical help. Sadly, though, that is not always possible. So the least we can do is to give something of the little money we have in order to make someone else’s life better. ACN is a charity that really helps people in their poverty, which is why it deserves our support.

A married couple in Slovakia



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

Dear Friends,

The support that ACN has been able to bring to thousands of religious worldwide for decades, thanks to your faithful generosity, is an essential part of our mission. Often the presence of the Church is only manifested through Catholic religious orders and their fruitful, active charity. This applies not only to our project partners’ countries, but also to our own countries.

Again and again members of these religious orders succeed in sharing with us their own spiritual experiences and thus give us helpful insights in our own daily life. During the pandemic, the virtue that they have particularly exemplified is their trust in God. This virtue does not deny our fears and concerns but rather helps to develop new solutions. First and foremost, this trust is based on faith in God, and also on our faith in the goodness of our fellow human beings and our own God-given abilities.

Our trust in God has its origin in the resurrection of Christ, which we celebrate at Easter.

May our trust be strengthened by the coming Paschal feast and so may we find new ways out of our existing afflictions.

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.

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ACN UNITED KINGDOM

12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA
Tel. 020 8642 8668 | A registered charity in
England & Wales (1097984) and Scotland
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