



ACN

MIRROR

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Street mission in Brazil.

“In all the baptised, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelisation.”

Pope Francis,
apostolic exhortation
“Evangelii Gaudium”

Dear Friends,

Jesus gave his Church a mission, which is summed up in this commandment: “And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Mt 10:7)”. In Baptism and Confirmation the Holy Spirit has been “poured out” into our hearts so that we can be witnesses of God’s love in a de-Christianised and – one might even say – paganised world. It is not only in the hereafter, but in this world that all Christians need to be filled with the Spirit of God and grasp the meaning of the Kingdom of God. In the depths of every soul the Holy Spirit inspires the desire to learn the truth about God and the longing to be united with him.

Thus the Holy Spirit is the central figure in the Church’s mission. Without him the reality of the Kingdom of God would have remained closed to us, and above all we would have been incapable of understanding the Good News of the Cross. Only the Holy Spirit can make us understand that the Cross is the greatest revelation of God’s love and has the power to free every single one of us from sin, to rescue us from eternal

death, and lead us home to the Father. The Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom of the Cross, which is the power of God and unlocks for us the Mystery of God (cf 1 Cor 2:1-5). But it is possible for our Christian life to become altogether spiritless, powerless and unattractive without us even noticing it. In a Pentecost homily, Patriarch Athenagoras



“Each one of us is a door through which the Holy Spirit can reach out to souls today.”

of Constantinople (1948-72) spoke about this: “Without the Holy Spirit, God is far from us, Christ remains a figure in the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church a mere association, authority a form of domination, mission is propaganda, the Liturgy a form of necromancy, and the Christian life the morality of slaves.”

Dear friends, anyone who truly directs his life according to the Gospel and, by renouncing his ego, makes space for God’s love, will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us pray, together with Mary, that we may

better understand our mission to evangelise in the power of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God, who gives life to all things, the world sinks into chaos. But each one of us is a door through which he can reach out to souls today. He longs to inflame us with his fire, just as Saint Faustina was. “I am all fire”, she wrote, “I burn with the desire to

save souls; I hasten in spirit through-out the world and particularly through the most backward countries, in order to rescue souls. I have understood spiritually that so many souls are crying out: ‘Give us God!’ And in moments of intimacy with him I felt as though the fate of the entire world depended on me. Oh how I would gladly be a priest! How gladly a missionary! Oh Jesus, I know that I can be a priest, missionary and apostle and endure martyrdom, if I allow myself to be consumed for love of you!”

With my grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin M. Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Faithful to their roots

Arali: Father Zurab is understandably concerned by the state of his old parish centre.

Their priests were banished and killed, their churches boarded up. Yet the faith of so many Georgian Catholics remained unshaken. In the village of Arali the faithful used to gather in secret in an ancient chapel to pray for liberation from the pitiless religious oppression they suffered during the Soviet era. And their village has never stopped praying.



After celebrating his first Holy Mass, Father Beqa blesses the new generation of Catholics.

© Immael Martínez Sánchez / ACH

The night before their church was confiscated by the communists and turned into a grain store, the people broke in and salvaged whatever they could. Years later, in 2012, after the church had been returned and extensively restored, the central crucifix and the old statues of the saints once again stood in their time-hallowed places.

And their prayer has borne fruit in other ways as well. Today the village of Arali is blessed with the most priestly vocations in Georgia. ACN was privileged to attend the ordination of Father Beqa Chilingarashvili who was born here. And here too is where his spiritual father and mentor, Father Zurab Kakachishvili was born, the first native-born Catholic priest to be ordained after the fall of communism in Georgia.

The village of Arali lies in the far south of Georgia, not far from the Turkish frontier, where most of the Catholics in the country now live – and have done for centuries. The people are poor, but almost everyone has a small piece of land on which to grow food. Yet sadly, given the lack of opportunities, many young people quickly move away after finishing their schooling, to the bigger towns and cities like Akhaltsikhe and Tbilisi.

In Arali, which was once an entirely Catholic village, only around 70% of its 4,000 inhabitants are Catholics today. As a result of Catholic villagers converting to marry Orthodox Christians,

Catholic numbers are declining. And sadly, relations between Catholics and Orthodox can be frosty.

But along with his older fellow priest, Polish missionary Andrzej Graczyk, Father Beqa has no intention of standing by and watching the Catholics disappear, little by little, from Arali, its neighbouring village of Ude and the five smaller villages in the region, to which the two priests minister together. No, they are planning to do something about it, and the Catholic faithful want to see the Faith preserved. In addition to the well-attended Masses and the various other social activities they already organise in the parish, Father Beqa organises events for the 45 or so young people of his parish, gathering them together regularly for a range of different activities. But the Church's premises are run-down and, in winter, which in Arali can be as cold as -20° centigrade, impossible to keep warm. When we visited the centre last October, we felt a little trepidation even about climbing the rickety stairs leading up to this building.

The local bishop, Giuseppe Pasotto, is fully supportive of his two priests and has now turned to us for funding to build a simple but functional parish centre, with two flats for the priests, a parish office, a community centre and large meeting hall for the young people.

We were able to see for ourselves the excellent work being done by the Catholic Church in Georgia and are consequently only too happy to agree to the £120,600 needed. Can you help us, so that the Catholic community in Arali can thrive and continue to be a fount of future vocations?



Helping to keep the lights burning in Bethlehem



Easter Vigil in Saint Catherine's Church in Bethlehem.

The Canticle of the Sun, in which Saint Francis of Assisi praises God in his creation, is one of the most well-known prayers.

The Canticle is referred to by Pope Francis in his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*. In the encyclical he calls, among other things, for us to use the natural resources that have been given to us responsibly.

The Franciscan Friars, who have been ministering at the birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem since the 13th century, now want to use the sun as a source of energy. Not only is this better for the environment, but also more cost efficient. This is vitally important, because since the pandemic began fewer pilgrims have travelled to the **Holy Land**, meaning this source of income for the Franciscans has dried up. Meanwhile, energy prices have gone through the roof and the cost of electricity is now the heaviest financial burden on their monastery and for the thriving parish it serves, along with the 1,655 Palestinian Catholic families who belong to it.



Solar power could save the Franciscans a great deal of money. Of course, the initial outlay for the necessary technical equipment is expensive, but it is an investment that will pay for itself in a few years.

So we have promised the £149,900 required for the project – so that the lights can be kept burning in Bethlehem's Holy Places.

A place to make a new start

For decades Guatemala was plagued by violence and terror. During the country's civil war, which lasted from 1960 to 1996, around 200,000 people were killed and a million forced to flee.

The parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the town of the same name in southwest Guatemala, has become a place to make a new start for many of these people. A great many former refugees have settled here after returning from neighbouring Mexico.

It is not easy for them to build a new life here. But their faith gives them strength. At first, they could only celebrate Holy Mass beneath the trees. Then later they managed to cobble together a temporary chapel with planks and sheets of timber. Later, by uniting all their efforts, they were able to build a proper chapel, but in the meantime it has become far too small.



Guatemala: the faithful can hardly wait to see their church completed.

Now the Catholic faithful, who belong to seven different indigenous tribal groups, have once again made great sacrifices and managed to scrape together a quarter of the money they need for a new and larger church.

"This is an admirable effort", says Bishop Pablo Vizcaino Prado. "For they are by no means wealthy and only grow what they can on their small fields, harvesting sometimes more, sometimes less. Their income is barely more than they need to live on." So he is asking us to help them. Their commitment alone shows us how great their desire is for this new church.

We want to help them with a contribution of £25,800, so that their dream can become reality. Will you help us?



Speaking truth to power



As part of the 2022 International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief, organised by the UK government, ACN project partners Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, Iraq, and Sister Annie Demerjian of Aleppo, Syria, spoke to delegates about the problems facing Christians. Archbishop Warda and Sister Annie both spoke at a plenary session of the Ministerial. At a fringe event on the Middle East organised by ACN (shown above), Archbishop Warda said: "There are still people being persecuted because of their faith and thankfully ACN didn't accept the political correctness and said, 'Yes, Christians are being persecuted'". Also speaking were Lisa Cameron MP (far left), who chaired the meeting, and Bishop William Kenney (far right). As part of the Ministerial fringe events, ACN also co-sponsored an event on Gender-Specific Persecution with Open Doors and joined the Freedom Declared Foundation's roundtable on the impact of COVID-19 on religious freedom.



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

Dear Friends,

You may be surprised to learn that, once again, we have spent just under 30% of our annual aid budget on construction projects. On the one hand this is due to the (most gratifying) fact that the Church is growing in many countries and urgently needs new structures. On the other hand, however, we must also help where church buildings and infrastructure have been destroyed because of war or persecution.

Thanks to your generosity, ACN is ready and willing, just as soon as the appalling war in Ukraine comes to an end, to step in and help repair the damage the Church has suffered there.

We are all aware that these buildings will only stand firm if they are built on sound foundations with professional supervision. However, the most important prerequisite for their sustainability is that their foundations are deeply embedded in the faith and spirituality of those who will use them. This is why it is so important for the success of our mission that your financial contributions are always accompanied by your prayers for our project partners. And going hand in hand with our aid for construction is our worldwide support for the formation of priests, religious and catechists, in order to guarantee that everything is on a sure footing.

Thank you for continuing this time-honoured tradition!

Need, love and thanks – your letters

United in heart and prayer

We are praying for all the intentions of ACN. Now we are especially praying for Ukraine. It is moving to see the incredible witness of faith shown by persecuted Christians all over the world, even to the shedding of their blood. The testimonies of these persecuted Christians help to us to remain truly united in heart and prayer with them.

A supporter in Germany

Holy Mass is the greatest gift

I would like my letter to be published in the Mirror to encourage people to help ACN by offering Holy Masses for others. Knowing and strongly believing that a Holy Mass is the greatest gift we can offer for someone, living or deceased, I've been quite often asking for Masses for family members, friends, strangers and causes. At the same time our offerings are helping priests, missions and the poor.

A friend in the USA

Our finger on the pulse

Thankfully we have Aid to the Church in Need, who have an eye for the most needy and vulnerable people, and you have your finger on the pulse of where the need is the greatest. We need you, but more importantly, the needy and the poor need you.

A religious Sister in Australia

A sense of peace

I received your newsletter this morning and read it this afternoon. I would like you to know that I felt a sense of peace as I read the Mirror. Many thanks for giving me this feeling of peace, as I know that peace is granted to those who help their neighbour. I would like to give you this small but heartfelt donation to help our brothers and sisters who are suffering around the world, and I would also like to continue receiving the Mirror.

A benefactor in Brazil

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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