

# POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

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## In the Shadow of the Soviet Bear

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In post-Communist countries the Church is helping the poor, the elderly and those in need.

**“I see how parishes grow, and new churches sprout. I see how priests are able to travel from one place to another, sometimes great distances, to provide catechesis.”**

Despite decades of Soviet rule trying to completely eradicate Christianity, there are the vibrant signs of life in the Church in many former Communist countries as Bishop José Luis Mumbiela Sierra testified.

Catholics spent more than half a century underground during the Communist era. Today Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is committed to supporting Catholicism in the former Soviet Republics – and not only in the

better-known ones like Ukraine and Russia, but also in countries like Georgia, Kazakhstan and Moldova.

In Kazakhstan, only one percent of the population are Catholic, many are the descendants of Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and even Koreans sent there during the Communist period – at one point, the country had 11 detention camps. But now the Church is slowly growing and providing vital help – including for women who have traditionally been second-class citizens. A similar picture can be found in Georgia and Moldova, where the Church provides help for the poor, homeless and even Ukrainian refugees.

Bishop Sierra added his thanks for



all your support for Christians still living in the shadow of the Communist past: **“With all of my heart, and with the hearts of all our faithful, I say thank you to ACN and to all who have supported you... May God bless you.”** ✝

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# Empowering women denied their Dignity

Growing up in a traditional Kazakh family, Udanai learnt that a woman's role was to be silent and do what she was told. Studying was out of the question, as education was wasted on women.

Udanai (pictured far right) did not feel loved by her family, but a Church-run training centre changed her life, teaching her life skills and giving her job training.

Women and girls in Kazakhstan face a wide range of problems, from low self-esteem to lack of vocational skills, but the training centre in Almaty – Kazakhstan's largest city – is helping them address these issues.

At the centre, which helps everyone from youngsters to the more mature, activities range from cultural and educational seminars, not to mention individual mentoring schemes, for girls aged 8-17, to vocational and other training for those in older age groups.

**But this life-transforming work is under threat unless the centre receives help including fixing the roof to stop damage from water leaks, repairing to the entrance of the building, where the harsh weather has damaged the paint and pipes, and refurbishing their classrooms.**

Your support could help more girls like Udanai transform their lives. 🙏



This training centre in Almaty runs various programmes to strengthen young girls and women.

# Living the Truth of Christ



Sisters from the Servants of God and Our Lady of Matara, some of whom are based at St Theresa of the Child Jesus Church, Shymkent.

**A zealous Muslim, Aida set out to prove that Christianity was false – and ended up being baptised.**

Born into Kazakhstan's Tartar ethnic group, Philosophy student Aida was determined to expose the flaws in Saint Thomas Aquinas' thought – but couldn't find any! Today she teaches Philosophy at the country's Catholic Seminary.

Her fervent Faith is typical of the 100 regular Mass-goers who attend St Theresa of the Child Jesus Church in Shymkent, Kazakhstan's third-most populous city. Most of the congregation are young adults. But, while the church rejoices to be thriving with younger people, the congregation is not able to support all the parish's running costs.

One of the three Sisters from the Servants of God and Our Lady of Matara, who are based in the parish, told ACN: **"Most of our parishioners are low-income people**



One of the Sisters with young parishioners.

**who do not have enough money for their children's education and food, so they cannot help support our Church. To give you an idea, the average Sunday collection is 500 tenge" – around £1!**

The parish needs help to cover vital maintenance, including new electrical wiring and plumbing – not to mention other costs like heating during the winter months when temperatures plunge below freezing. **"If the heating does not work, fewer people will come to Mass in winter,"** they pragmatically told ACN.

Providing these essentials in a poor country will help a vibrant young parish to live out the truth of Christ. 🙏

# Descendants of the Generation that faced Genocide



Father Benny presenting the Holy Scriptures in Aramaic, in St Simon the Tanner's Church, Tbilisi.

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**Their forefathers fled Turkey in 1914, to avoid the Ottoman Empire's genocidal purge of Christians. But even after the Chaldean Catholics settled in Georgia they were not safe – as Soviet authorities deported them to Siberia.**

Today their descendants live in Gardabani, near Georgia's border with Azerbaijan. There are 400 Chaldean Catholics, including 120 young people and children. The Chaldean Catholic Church is the indigenous Church of Iraq, which has been in full communion with the pope for centuries.

Communism was yesterday's danger, today's is the growing presence of radical Wahabbist Muslims from neighbouring Azerbaijan. And if that wasn't enough, the faithful have to travel 30 miles to Tbilisi for Sunday services.

But Iranian-born priest Father Benny Beth Yadegar, who is responsible for Georgia's 2,400 strong Chaldean Catholic community, plans to build a Religious-Cultural Centre in Gardabani.

This would include a chapel for Mass, which is still celebrated in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus himself. It would also allow the local community to organise catechesis, classes to learn their ancient chant, Aramaic language lessons, as well as leisure and sports activities. **One lady born in Siberia told ACN that during the deportation knowledge of the traditional worship chants and Aramaic language was lost and had to be relearned.**

The centre would be available to everyone in Gardabani, which will help build good relations between the Chaldeans and their neighbours.

Father Benny has already secured £115,595 – the vast majority of the funding – but is turning to ACN for the £46,560 still required.

**We can help build a future for Gardabani's Chaldean Catholic community.** 🙏



# Caring for the sick, the poor, the homeless – and refugees

As war rages in Ukraine, refugees are making their way into neighbouring Moldova, and many of them are being offered shelter and sustenance by religious communities in the Diocese of Chisinau.

In addition to caring for refugees, members of religious orders also help the homeless, distributing daily meals to poor pensioners, educating children from poor families and visiting the sick, to name just a few of their activities.

Although Moldova is wracked with poverty and still reeling from the outbreak of hostilities in neighbouring Ukraine, which has brought tens of thousands of refugees into the country, the small Diocese of Chisinau – with just 20,000 Catholics – is punching well above its weight. This is why ACN is supporting the vital work of 23 Sisters and 2 Brothers.

The diocese tells us “although



Sisters in Chisinau providing food for the hungry.

**the Catholic Church in Moldova represents less than one percent of the population, it always rushes to help those in need.”**

Most of the Sisters and Brothers come from other countries including Romania, Ukraine, Italy and Poland. They are involved in various activities, including preparing for Mass, conducting choirs and teaching catechism.

The Diocese of Chisinau wrote to thank ACN: **“We express our sincere gratitude for all the assistance received from Aid to the Church in Need in supporting the ministry of Religious in Moldova... the work the Congregations carry out is absolutely vital.”** ✚



Civilians evacuating from Irpin, Ukraine during heavy shelling.

Credit: Kristof Holvenyi

## The Tracks of Love

Father Stanislav Obreja makes his way between two rural parishes to say daily Mass and visit the sick and elderly who cannot come to church – and without a car his ministry would be nigh impossible.



Father Stanislav with his new SUV – thanks to you.

Roads in eastern Europe can be near impossible to pass without the right vehicle.

One parish, Stircea, is located off a gravel track, and the village’s roads are riddled with potholes. None of them are tarmacked. In the other parish, Glodeni, things are better – half the villages roads have a tarmac surface! But his 19-year-old vehicle had been put to hard service over the last decade and needed replacing.

**Yet Father Stanislav’s rural parishes of Stircea and Glodeni are growing – despite both communities suffering greatly under Communism – making the need to care for his flocks greater than ever, which includes ferrying parishioners to the Church-run Medical Centre in Stircea parish, providing 50 elderly people with ongoing care.**

Many of the parishioners are pensioners, meaning it was impossible for the parish to purchase a new vehicle, but through *your* love Father Stanislav now has the SUV he needs to minister to his flock. Thank you for all you do for your suffering brothers and sisters. ✚