



**CHILE**

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# Faith under Fire

A statue consumed by flames when rioters torched St Francis Borgia's Church.

**Around midnight on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023, the Chapel of Our Lady of the Rays was set ablaze by eight heavily armed men in Araucanía, central Chile.**

More than 60 churches have suffered arson attacks over the last seven years – especially in the Araucanía and Biobío regions. Most of them were Catholic. In October 2021, President Pinera declared a state of emergency in Araucanía after churches were torched.

After the March 2023 attack, ACN's Magdalena Lira said: **"The flames consumed the building in a matter of**

**minutes, leaving the community... without a place of worship for their activities."** She added: "By a small miracle a small plaster image of Mary, which for a long time had been kept in a nearby cave, was found intact".

The Church in the country is facing ongoing attacks. Global media covered the October 2020 desecration of St Francis Borgia's Church and the Church of the Assumption in Chile's capital Santiago. Hooded rioters broke into the nineteenth-century churches, setting fire to statues and furnishings, and

vandalising the buildings. On one wall they scrawled: "Death to the Nazarene".

And yet despite being a Church under fire, Chile's Catholics are continuing to stand firm in their Faith.

As you will read inside, **ACN is helping them to persevere in the face of this crisis, by training tomorrow's priests, rebuilding churches, equipping young people for mission in prisons and hard-to-reach rural areas, among other support.**

**Your generous love can help a Church under fire to survive and flourish.** ✚

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Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN UNITED KINGDOM

# Persecuted – but not Forsaken!



Strengthening a Faith under fire – a youth event organised by the Shalom Community.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;  
perplexed, but not driven to despair;  
persecuted, but not forsaken;  
struck down, but not destroyed;  
always carrying in the body the death of Jesus,  
so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.  
St Paul, 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 (RSV CE)

Chile's Church is standing strong despite continuing attacks. The reasons for these acts of violence are far from straightforward. The October 2020 attacks on churches in the capital Santiago grew out of protests over the spiralling cost of living, and disillusionment with politicians and public institutions, including the Church. St Francis Borgia's Church was torched for the second time, having been attacked the previous January.

Ongoing attacks in Araucanía and Biobío are carried out by militias linked to the Malleco Mapuche Resistance, a guerrilla group that claims to defend the rights of the Mapuche people. ACN's Magdalena Lira said they "see Christianity as a symbol of colonisation, even though that is not the case. Many studies show that the majority of the Mapuche identify as Christian." She

stressed that most chapels, including the one razed in March 2023, were built by the indigenous communities.

ACN is helping the Church face these difficult times – media training from Catholic Voices will enable the Church to get its message across, and hopefully even start to correct the misinformation leading to attacks on churches.

ACN is also supporting the Church's witness to Christ's love: building a house to act as a base for the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Jesus' work, equipping Emmaus Retreat House to open its doors to refresh more weary souls, and backing the important work of the Shalom Community who are helping the poor and organising spiritual events for young people.

**With your help the Church will not only survive but flourish.** ☕



The Catholic Church of the Assumption, Santiago, during an attack in 2019.



Graffiti covering the doors at Vera Cruz parish, Santiago.

# Mission on the Margins

**"I urge you to serve Jesus crucified in every person who is marginalised, for whatever reason... We will not find the Lord unless we truly accept the marginalised!" (Pope Francis)**

Misión País calls university students to spend time working on mission projects on the margins of society. This year around 450 students working with Misión País will spend time ministering on the margins including difficult to reach parts of Chile and prisons.

Fr Tomás Scherz, Vice Chancellor of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, whose students take part in the programme, wrote to ask ACN for our support. He said: **"Love must drive our mission – which is about announcing the Good News even in far-flung parts of the country where we know the Church is suffering."** ☕



Misión País lets young people bring the love of the Gospel to far flung places: Sisters in the Andes with a lay volunteer.

## A Decade with no Church

**Parishioners at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Peñaflor, El Prado turned to ACN for help rebuilding their church.**

The community have been raising money for its reconstruction, holding bingo nights, raffles, lunches, cake sales and fundraising every way they can think of. The diocese has supported their efforts with several second collections, and an appeal to local Catholic businessmen. But all their years of hard work have only managed to raise c.300,000,000 Pesos (£300,000) – barely half the funds they need.

Their church was not destroyed by violence – rather it was damaged when a devastating earthquake and tsunami hit the region in February 2010, killing 525 people. **Bishop Cristián Contreras Villarroel of Melipilla explained: "This is the last parish community in the diocese that has not yet been able to restore its church, mainly because of the cost of the repair".** Building experts stressed it needed completely rebuilding and must conform to strict new earthquake regulations.

With the area growing and a new metro station due to be built near the church, the bishop thinks it is important to make the church usable. They have been rebuilding in stages, and have asked ACN for 45,000,000 Pesos (£45,000), which will enable the church

to be used – even if it will still be some way from being finished.

Bishop Cristián concluded: **"I hope I can count on your valuable assistance, and I thank you in advance for your help."** ☕



One of the churches destroyed in 2010.



# A Growing Problem



San Bernardo's seminarians.

**The Seminary of St Peter the Apostle in San Bernardo Diocese has a problem – a joyful problem – vocations are growing!**

It's a great problem to have, but with 31 young men at different stages of initial formation – and eight others discerning their vocation – they turned to ACN for help.

Bishop Juan Ignacio González Errázuriz told ACN: "Our joy has been increased by the arrival of these young men to our seminary!"

Would you help them to bear the burden of training these future priests with even greater joy? 🙏

## To make the Good News known

**Following the COVID-19 crisis, widespread political unrest and soaring inflation, San Marcos de Arica Diocese has been hit by rising crime.**

The diocese's Eduardo Carrasco Zamorano told us: "In 2021 international criminal gangs arrived and have positioned themselves in several cities in Chile, and as Arica is on the border, they also settled in our city, increasing the frequency of crimes of all kinds." But they are optimistic: "Our diocese can emerge strengthened from the crises we have had to live through and face the new and great challenges that lie ahead."

This year the diocese is looking to equip parishes, communities and

movements such as the Legion of Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, so that they can respond to the needs of Arica and Parinacota's 230,000 inhabitants.

Training and renewal will focus on priests, deacons and deacons' wives and aims to:

- + Strengthen the missionary spirit and pastoral work of the clergy.
- + Renew clerics theological knowledge and allow them to incorporate cutting-edge insights from social sciences into their ministry.
- + Strengthen the spiritual life of all participants.
- + Achieve greater pastoral commitment.



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Eduardo concluded: "Although we live in difficult times – and there are so many different voices and views in our country and our city – **the wisdom of God will be manifested through the Church, fulfilling what the Evangelist says: 'For it is not you who will speak, but the Spirit of your Father who will speak in you' (Mt 10:20).**" 🙏