



Dear Friends,

“Pater Sancte, sic transit gloria mundi”, (“Holy Father, thus passes the glory of the world”) – These words were repeated three times in a loud voice by the Master of Ceremonies, while a bundle of flax was burned on the end of a pole. This was a deeply meaningful part of the historic “coronation ceremony” of the Roman Pontiff.

On Easter Monday, after 12 years of service as the Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Church of Christ, Pope Francis has finally entered eternal life. These were years of intense, almost feverish, activity, which the vast majority of the world’s media followed and acclaimed. The Pope, who aroused many strong reactions, navigated the treacherous waters of popularity, defied winds of disputation and has now entered the realm of Truth – which so closely corresponds to the calling and character of the faithful believer and pastor.



“Between ACN and Pope Francis there was, and still is, a clear and obvious affinity.”

Of his labours, which were numerous and even arduous, what remains is the good that he accomplished for the love of Christ, for the greater glory of God and for the supreme law of the *salus animarum* (the salvation of souls). We, who knew him, remember him in this light. This aspect of his life remains with us as a blessing.

There was, and still is, a clear and obvious affinity between ACN and Pope Francis. This was brought into focus by our charm and our daily activities in the global Church. He always valued and supported us, and we clearly felt his affection. It was also reflected in his enthusiastic promotion of our cherished initiative, “One Million Children Praying the Rosary for Peace

and Unity in the World” at his Sunday Angelus greeting. This was a very special occasion for us. But how could we fail to see his closeness to us, and our closeness to him, in our emergency initiatives for the Churches in their time of distress? And we also felt that Pope Francis was the guardian of our special charism, as he always encouraged us to focus on supporting the pastoral needs and activities of the suffering Church.

We have always accompanied him in filial prayer asking the Lord for every blessing. Now we entrust him, with unwavering devotion, to God’s merciful love!

Cardinal Mauro Piacenza,
President of ACN



A POPE full of surprises



Pope Francis was a pope of surprises, and a pope of “firsts”. He was passionate about peace, and could be unconventional when he felt deeply about things ...

Nothing could have been more typical of him than the time when on his trip to Africa in November 2015 he ‘threatened’ to jump by parachute in order to visit the Central African Republic. Everyone had advised him against visiting the country, which was then in the throes of civil war, and which most people barely knew anything about, except for the terrible headlines they read. But he prevailed – and in the capital Bangui, he symbolically opened the Holy Door in order to usher in the Holy Year of Mercy and proclaimed Bangui the “spiritual capital of the world”.

He was the first Pope in centuries not to have been born in Europe, the first Jesuit to sit on the throne of St Peter and the first and only Pope to have visited his living predecessor. Moreover, before him no head of the Catholic Church had met with the Patriarch of Moscow. In this, he was able to fulfil what his predecessors had long dreamt of. He was also the first Pope to have travelled to modern Iraq. Regina Lynch, then Head of Projects and today Executive President of ACN, was able to accompany him in March 2021. Among the emotional high points were the visits to Mosul and Qaraqosh, where in 2014 thousands of Christians had been expelled by Daesh (Islamic State) and, with the help of ACN, were now able to return to their former homes.

The 12 years of his pontificate were marked by a dramatic increase in wars and violence throughout the world, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, and (since February 2022) in Ukraine as well. Again and again Pope Francis spoke out



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Meeting with Muslim and Jewish leaders in Ur, Iraq (6.3.2021).



Interfaith encounter in Mongolia (3.9.2023).



Blessing handicapped children in Saint Peter's Square, Rome.



Delighted by the DOCAT book, which was co-funded by ACN.



Meeting with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in Havana (12.2.2016).



Consecration of Russia and Ukraine to Mary (25.3.2022).



With Nigerian Father Fidelis, who cares for victims of Boko Haram.



A moving moment among the crowds.



A child hugging the Pope.

against the “Third World War, being fought piecemeal” as he described it, and appealed to the consciences of those in power, the prayers of the ordinary faithful and the intercession of the Mother of God. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 2022, he wept as he spoke about the war in Ukraine. He was willing, he said, to go in person to Moscow and Kyiv to appeal for peace. The consecration of the world – and of Russia and Ukraine in particular – to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 25 March 2022, the feast of the Annunciation, was one of the most moving moments of his pontificate.

On Easter Sunday of this Jubilee Holy Year, Pope Francis, frail from illness, was able to give the ‘Urbi et Orbi’ blessing one last time. In his message, he wrote: “The Lamb of God is victorious! That is why, today, we can joyfully cry out: ‘Christ, my hope, has risen!’...He fills us with the certainty that we too are called to share in the life that knows no end.”

On Easter Monday morning, he returned to his – and our – heavenly Father, who may now grant him eternal life and endless paschal joy.



Pope Francis – Friend and supporter of ACN

In 2001, while still Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio wrote to ACN, describing the rigorous and tireless pastoral work being carried out in his diocese, asking our help and promising to pray for all our benefactors and the work of our charity.

As Pope he was *ex officio* our “supreme head”, given that ACN had been raised to the status of a Pontifical Foundation in 2011. Just a few months after the start of his pontificate, he addressed the following words to ACN and its supporters during a General Audience: “Dear friends, may the Lord render ever more fruitful your prayers and your work in support of the Church’s mission throughout the world, especially where she suffers spiritual and material need or faces discrimination and persecution. From my heart I bless you all.”

However, he did not content himself with encouraging words but also supported us in practical ways. He auctioned off the ‘special edition’ Lamborghini Huracan, which had been presented to him in 2017 by the famous Italian carmaker, and donated a large part of the proceeds to ACN for the rebuilding of the Christian towns and villages of Iraq’s Nineveh Plains. Pope Francis was also the first to donate to the “Be God’s Mercy” campaign, organised by ACN in response to the Pope’s desire for



ACN prayer campaign: blessing the icon for Syria’s Christians.

works of mercy to be performed throughout the world during the Year of Mercy.

ACN’s “Comfort my People” campaign was especially dear to his heart. Launched in 2019, it aimed to revive the hopes of Syria’s conflict-scarred Church. He blessed the rosaries to be given to Christian families who had lost loved ones during the war. And he also blessed the icon of *Our Lady of Sorrows – Consolatrix of the Syrian People* that was subsequently carried in pilgrimage for three years through all 34 of Syria’s Catholic and Orthodox dioceses.

And every year he invited children around the world to take part in the prayer initiative “One Million Children Praying the Rosary” for peace in the world; and on several occasions he called on the Catholic faithful to take part in other ACN campaigns.



At a General Audience in St Peter’s Square.



Meeting with an ACN delegation in the Vatican.

We mourn the loss of a great friend and supporter and we trust, now that he is with God, that he will keep his promise to pray for you and for us all, so that together we can help the Church wherever she is in need.

Dear Friends,

We know from our meetings with Pope Francis and from his public messages that he had very much at heart Christians, who were persecuted or found themselves in the middle of wars. In the latter case, I think of his daily evening phone calls to the tiny Christian community in Gaza. The Christians who had sought refuge in the Holy Family parish in northern Gaza since the beginning of the war in October 2023 were comforted by his proximity, the children looked forward to the daily call from their kind “grandfather”.

I myself witnessed Pope Francis’ concern like the Good Shepherd for his little flock in Iraq during his visit there in March 2021.

In Qaraqosh, the main Christian town in the Nineveh Plain, I saw how he was deeply touched by the testimony of the Catholic mother, Doha Sabah Abdallah, whose son was killed by the invading Islamic State.

Her message prompted Pope Francis on the plane back to Rome to remind us of the importance of forgiveness, especially of one’s enemies. “This is the pure Gospel,” he said.

**May God grant him eternal rest.
We will miss you, Pope Francis.**

Regina Lynch



Regina Lynch with the Holy Father on the flight to Iraq.