

EASTER

# MIRROR

Hope in Difficult Times



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Aid to the  
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ACN IRELAND

APRIL 2026  
MONTH OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST



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ACN IRELAND

PONTIFICAL  
FOUNDATION



# National Pilgrimage to Knock

**Saturday  
May 16, 2026**

To give thanks to God for all the blessings he showers on us, Aid to the Church in Need is delighted to announce details of our national pilgrimage to our Eucharistic and Marian Shrine at Knock, Co. Mayo.



If you would like to find out more information,  
or to organise a bus, please contact us by

**EMAIL [info@acnireland.org](mailto:info@acnireland.org) or  
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**Cover image:** Sister Adriana of the Missionaries of Merciful Comfort with children at a daycare facility supported by ACN benefactors in Sao Tome and Principe, the second smallest country in Africa.

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## INTRODUCTION

# The Dawn of Unconquerable Hope: Easter's Message for a Troubled World

MICHAEL KELLY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Dear Friends,

Every spring, as the earth awakens from winter's grip, the Church invites us to the greatest mystery of our faith: Easter. More than chocolate eggs or family gatherings, Easter is the solemnity of solemnities, the triumphant proclamation that Jesus Christ has – is – risen from the dead.



This singular event stands at the heart of Catholicism, transforming despair into joy, fear into courage, and death itself into the gateway to eternal life.

The Resurrection is not a distant historical footnote; it is the very reason we can face tomorrow with confidence. St Paul declares with apostolic boldness, *"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins"* (1 Corinthians 15:17). But Christ has been raised! On that first Easter morning, the stone was rolled away, the tomb stood empty, and the women heard the angel's words that still echo through the ages: *"He is not here; he has risen!"* (Matthew 28:6). In that empty tomb, God declared once and for all that love is stronger than hatred, life stronger than death, and mercy stronger than sin.

I have seen this, dear friends, in very troubled parts of the world where people are persecuted for their faith in Jesus and supported by your wonderful generosity. For persecuted Christians, this victory is no abstract theology. It is a living source of hope, especially in the darkest hours of human history.

Today, as wars rage and Christians face greater levels of persecution, the Resurrection speaks with particular power. Consider the suffering Church across the globe, that we serve. According to the most recent ACN report, some 413 million Christians – one in seven – live in countries where religious freedom is severely violated. Of these, approximately 220 million – about one in ten – live in countries where they are directly exposed to persecution.

Last year alone, thousands of Christians were murdered for their faith. Churches were burned, families displaced, believers imprisoned or forced underground. In war-torn regions such as **Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, and Myanmar**, violence shatters communities, and innocent blood stains the soil. Yet, precisely in these crucibles, Easter shines brightest.

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The Resurrection does not promise the absence of suffering like some trite magic formula; it guarantees its ultimate defeat. Jesus himself told His disciples, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

The same power that raised Christ from the grave now lives within his body, the Church. It sustains the underground believer whispering the Creed in a darkened room, the mother in Nigeria cradling her child after losing her husband to militants, and the Ukrainian family sheltering in a basement while shells fall overhead.

We Christians are called to be pilgrims of hope, who place our feeble hands in God’s strong and mighty hand and set out on the journey with the risen Jesus. The Resurrection does not ignore the cross — it passes through it. Just as Christ’s wounds remained visible after his rising, our scars and sorrows remain, yet they are now radiant with glory. They become signs of victory.

This hope is not passive wishful thinking. It is an active, conquering force. It compels us to pray for peace, to aid the persecuted, to forgive our enemies, and to live as Easter people even when the world seems trapped in Good Friday.

The early martyrs understood this. Facing lions in Roman arenas, they sang hymns because they knew the tomb was empty. Today’s martyrs in **Nigeria, Syria,** and **North Korea** do the same. Their blood, like the blood of Abel, cries out — not for vengeance, but for the triumph already won on Calvary and sealed on Easter morning.

As Catholics, we are called to live this hope concretely. In our parishes, we can pray for persecuted Christians. In our homes, we can teach our children that no regime, no bomb, no threat can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In our hearts, we can cling to the promise of St Peter: *“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Peter 1:3).

So, then Easter becomes far more than an annual feast. It is the daily reality that reshapes how we meet every trial. When war clouds gather or persecution knocks at the door, we do not despair. We remember the women running from the tomb with hearts aflame. We remember the disciples who, once fearful, became fearless witnesses. We remember that the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus dwells in us.

Let Easter make us bold witnesses of the victory of love and the disarming power of life. In every conflict zone, in every persecuted community, and in every anxious soul, the risen Lord walks ahead, whispering the words that conquered death itself: **“Do not be afraid. I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (Matthew 28:20).

He is risen indeed. Alleluia! And because He lives, we too shall live—now and forever.



**MICHAEL KELLY**

Director of Public Affairs, ACN Ireland



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FEATURE

# Young Irish show increased interest in Religion

A new report on religious trends in **Ireland** has found that there is a generational gap between millennials and Gen Z in relation to religiosity – with 18-24-year-olds more likely to identify as religious or ‘not sure’ than 25-34-year-olds.

According to the study, this younger Gen Z cohort are more likely to engage with faith through reading, attending classes or courses or on the internet through YouTube or influencers than millennials.

The research also reveals that 18-24-year-olds are more positive about the Church than those aged 25 to 34, and fewer have a negative attitude towards priests and nuns.

The report, *The Turning Tide?*, notes that 18-24-year-olds are less likely to check horoscopes than those aged 25 to 34, and in the north they have a more negative view of astrology than those aged 25 to 34.

The research findings regarding Gen Z and millennials echo those of the Bible Society’s report *The Quiet Revival*

in *England and Wales*. According to the research authors, the Irish findings raise the question of whether there may also be a ‘quiet revival’ or a ‘turning tide’ in Ireland.

Among the reasons suggested for this uptick among this youngest cohort is the fact that some among the Gen Z group have found religiosity beneficial for their mental wellbeing, while 70% of this generation follow at least one influencer online, and religious influencers may be having an impact.

*The Turning Tide?* was commissioned by the Irish bishops, and draws on sources such as the European Social Survey, the Iona Institute surveys and academic studies on patterns of belief, practice and religious identification.

While key measures of Irish religiosity have declined significantly since the European Social Survey (ESS) began in 2002/2003, the most recent survey of 2023/2024 shows a strong uptick in religious affiliation and religious practice.

In terms of Mass attendance, the report notes that Ireland’s Catholics are among Europe’s more practising, with 31% saying they attend at least once a week. This places **Ireland** fourth overall in Europe, alongside **Italy** (32%), but well behind **Poland** (49%) and **Slovakia** (46%).

You can see more on [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

FEATURE

# ACN Ireland's Successful Weekend at the Divine Mercy Conference

Marian Hunt, Claire O'Reilly, and Anne Hughes at the Divine Mercy Conference.



**A**id to the Church in Need Ireland spent a very fruitful weekend at the Divine Mercy Conference in the RDS, February 27 to March 1.

ACN Ireland's own Claire O'Reilly, Anne Hughes and Marian Hunt worked tirelessly to cater to the thousands that came up to the stand and reported constant warm feedback and generosity throughout the weekend.

This year's Divine Mercy Conference was our most successful in terms of donations. Over €12,000 was raised throughout the weekend, with many donors citing the increased volatility facing Christians around the world as reason for their material support to the charity.

We are conscious that in a cost of living crisis, money can be difficult to come by. Despite this, our benefactors were unstinting in their charity and even went beyond our previous numbers.

**Thank you for making a contribution to help create a world where Christianity can truly thrive.**



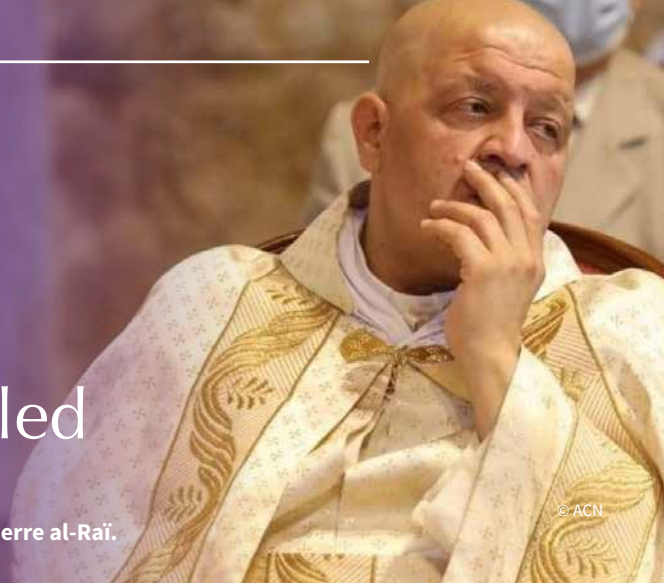
Brandon Scott, Claire O'Reilly, and Michael Kelly at the Divine Mercy Conference.

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FEATURE

# Lebanese Catholics say ‘We will stay’ after priest killed

Lebanese Maronite Catholic priest Fr Pierre al-Raï.



On March 9 2026, **Fr Pierre al-Raï**, a Maronite priest from the Christian village of Qlayaa, in the south Lebanese district of Marjayoun, was killed in an Israeli airstrike against his village. Four civilians were also wounded. Casualties included residents and members of the rescue teams that had come to help following the initial blast.

According to information received by Aid to the Church in Need, the priest was helping people affected by a bombardment in a nearby area when another attack occurred. The exact circumstances of his death are still being clarified.

Fr Pierre al-Raï collaborated with ACN in supporting the pastoral activities of Klayaa Parish in the Maronite Diocese of Tyre, which serves around 3,000 parishioners. The foundation had been working with the priest on this project.

Despite the intensification of the fighting, and Israeli evacuation orders, many inhabitants have chosen to remain on their land, in their villages and churches, because they fear that their property and their fields might be destroyed if they leave.

Alma Sha'b is located just two kilometres from the Israeli border. Before the fighting resumed there were almost 350 inhabitants in the village. Currently the number has dropped to 100, between adults, children and elderly.

Speaking to ACN, **Maronite Chorbishop Maroun Youssef Ghafari**, said that “we support them in this decision. We will remain despite the war.”

The parish priest of Alma Sha'b added that the community has paid a high price because of the conflict. “Around 90% of the houses were destroyed when we were

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forced to leave in late December 2024. We believe that if we go again, for any reason, we will not be allowed to return and that whatever is left behind will be destroyed once more.”

“Since 28 February 2026 we have been going through difficult times, because there have been strikes on the village and surroundings which have damaged some houses, although there are no casualties to report so far.” The priest also told ACN that other Christian villages near the border have made the same decision.

“We have taken the appropriate measures with the Apostolic Nuncio, the local Church and civil authorities and with the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL), informing them that we are not going to be leaving, even though we know that in a time of war there are no guarantees,” the Chorbishop said.

The killing of his own brother the day before, greatly shocked him and the Christian community. **Sami Ghafari**, 70, died on 8 March when he was in the garden of his house in Alma Sha’b. A delegation from ACN visited the village during the ceasefire, before the current conflict began, and took part in Mass there with the local community. Sami Ghafari was among those present.

The Christians of Lebanon are living proof that Middle Eastern Christianity is not only a demographic reality, but

a living presence, embodied by men and women who bear witness to their attachment to their faith and to their land. In this sense, the parish priest of Alma Sha’b highlighted the importance of prayer and practical support. “If the universal Church does not care for these communities spread out near the border – which have been reduced to no more than 15 damaged Christian villages – they risk suffering the same fate as the Christians of the Holy Land,” he warned. “We hope they do not disappear over time. Through their attachment to their sacred land, they offer the most beautiful witness of faithfulness and perseverance.”

Fr Ghafari believes that the priority at the moment is ensuring safety and restoring peace, and thanks ACN for its support. “In the name of the parish, and especially of the poor – those closest to Jesus – I wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all who support us, especially to ACN, which has been by our side through the provision of material aid, food and medical supplies.”

“We remain united in prayer, with the Catholic Church, Christians from all over the world, and all people with common sense, for an end to this disaster,” he added.

**ACN joins in prayer for Fr al-Rai’s soul, for his family and for all those affected by the violence.** The charity invites the faithful around the world to pray for peace in Lebanon and for the protection of Christian communities in the region.

FEATURE

# Our Hope Depends on God Alone

FR ANTON LÄSSER CP



Dear Friends,



Recently, a young man from **France** asked me, “Father, what can I do in order not to lose hope in the face of all that is happening in society and around the world?”

As we were talking, we quickly agreed that our sense of hope and Christian joy has to be rooted in faith and trust in the Kingdom of God and not in world developments.

True hope can only spring from the knowledge that suffering, want, and even death – which we can neither ignore nor trivialise – do not have the last word or, to put it in another way, do not last forever. History tells us that in every age we are confronted with sorrow, violence, suffering and even death and we always will be.

And yet, in two ways, we find reason for hope in what the Prophet Isaiah foresaw and what St Peter confirms in so many words after the Resurrection of Jesus: “By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

On one hand, this tells us that all darkness and evil is swallowed up in the passion and death of Jesus – in other words it is truly ‘healed’. And so, it is not insurmountable for us as well.

And on the other hand, the fact that we are healed by his wounds directs us to a specific aspect of Christian hope, namely that suffering and death are not destructive and without meaning or value.

As with Jesus himself, they can instead be the highest expression of love – the expression of his loving self-sacrifice for

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the “beloved thou.” Suffering and death are transformed here, in the deepest sense, into good and thereby totally redeemed.

And so, we too are individually called to offer up our own experiences of suffering in life – that is to say our ‘wounds’ and even our death – in and with the wounds of Jesus to the Eternal Father, in reparation and for the redemption of the world, just as Jesus Christ himself has done.

Then everything we have to suffer acquires meaning and value and our wounds will be healed in the very deepest depths of our souls. In every age such faith gives rise, ever anew, to a confident trust, freedom and strength which render sin, suffering and Satan powerless. And we are thereby made able to perform those good works which embody the love of God – and bring this love to others.

I am blessed, here at ACN, to have come to know so many people who truly live by this hope.

People who by their lives and their work illustrate what is so beautifully expressed in St Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “*Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” (Romans 5:5).

With these thoughts, I send my greetings to you and extend to you my warmest blessings this Easter and always.

*F. Anton Lässer CP*

**FATHER ANTON LÄSSER CP**  
Ecclesiastical Assistant, ACN International



**GHANA: Celebration of Holy Thursday with sisters on mission in the country.**



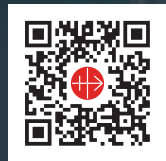
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## SUCCESS STORY!

# Ongoing Training for 300 Catechists in the Apostolic Vicariate of Hawassa ETHIOPIA



The Apostolic Vicariate of Hawassa (Awassa) is situated in the south of **Ethiopia** and covers a vast region of some 118,000 km<sup>2</sup> – or roughly one third the size of **Germany**.

The vicariate is divided into just 20 parishes, each of which covers numerous villages, many of them extremely remote in isolated and inaccessible areas. Some of these villages have a chapel of their own, since the nearest parish church is simply too far away.

In most of these small villages it is only possible to celebrate Holy Mass every two or three weeks at best, since the few priests of the vicariate simply cannot be in two places at once.

Consequently, every chapel community has its own lay catechist, who prays with the people, instructs the children, young people and adults in the Catholic faith and celebrates prayer meetings and services of the Word – sometimes being permitted by the bishop to also distribute Holy Communion.

Hence these catechists play an extremely important role in transmitting the faith and supporting the people in their prayer.

Clearly, if they are to pass on the faith in all its integrity, these catechists need to be thoroughly well-trained themselves. Above all it is important for them to be able to help the young people to become strongly rooted in their faith, since otherwise there is a real danger that they will be wooed away by the very active sects.

Many of the catechists still have an inadequate grounding in theology, teaching and pastoral skills. And so many of those in the Vicariate of Hawassa have expressed a desire to be given further training so that they can better fulfil their service within the communities. But this comes at a cost, of course.

The plan is for 300 of them to take part in an intensive ongoing training course at the catechetical centre in Dongora. The cost for each participant will be something over €58 – a very modest sum – but nevertheless the total of €17,500 is far more than the vicariate can afford.

And so the bishop has turned to us for help. Thousands of the faithful will ultimately benefit from this training. **Would you be willing to cover the cost of one, or more, of these catechists?**

# Mass Stipends for the 44 Priests of the Diocese of Chinhoyi

ZIMBABWE



© ACN

**T**he diocese of Chinhoyi, in northern **Zimbabwe**, covers a vast area of over 56,000 km<sup>2</sup> – considerably larger than some whole countries, like Switzerland or the Netherlands for example.

Hence its 22 parishes all cover very large areas, with numerous scattered villages that the priests have to minister to.

The people here urgently need the support and guidance of a priest in their faith life – someone to bring them the sacraments, help them grow in faith and at the same time little by little to improve their own concrete living conditions. Unsurprisingly, the priests are on duty at all hours. And yet they receive no fixed salary for their hard

work of service and sacrifice, since the diocese itself simply does not have the necessary resources.

Consequently, it is very difficult for the priests to provide for their own support at the same time as attending to the pastoral needs of their parishes.

There is no way they can expect support from the ordinary Catholic faithful, who themselves are far too poor to be able to cover the livelihood of the priests from the scanty Sunday collections.

Most of them barely make ends meet from the scanty harvests on their fields and the frequent droughts. And then there are communities in some regions which – like

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their ancestors – are still hunter gatherers, quite literally living from hand to mouth.

And so, thanks to the generous help of our benefactors, we are able to provide regular support for the 44 priests of the diocese by means of your Mass offerings. This is a huge help for them and really eases the financial burdens they face.

As a result, they tell us, they can afford the fuel they need and so visit the remotest villages more frequently. These can sometimes be up to 140 km away, on rough and lonely roads.

And the priests can also obtain the vital food, medicines and medical treatment which they could otherwise

not afford, and even purchase religious literature for their own personal spiritual development and for the ongoing training of the lay catechists.

As a result, their pastoral ministry is better and more intensive, the people's faith is strengthened and the bond between priests and faithful grows deeper and stronger.

So once again this year we are planning to pass on your Mass stipends to the priests of the Diocese of Chinhoyi.

**Can we count on you once again to help these 'good shepherds' with your financial and spiritual support?**



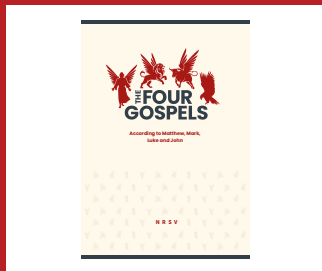
**ZIMBABWE: Mass stipends for 44 priests working in Chinhoyi diocese.**



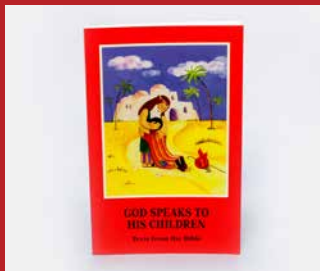
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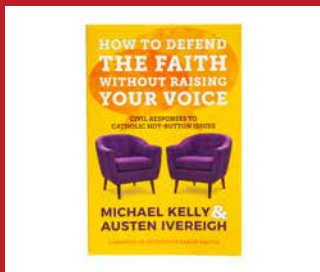
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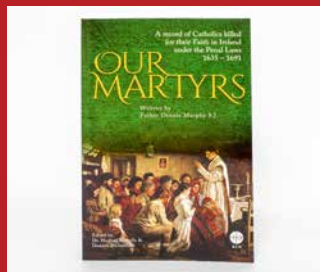
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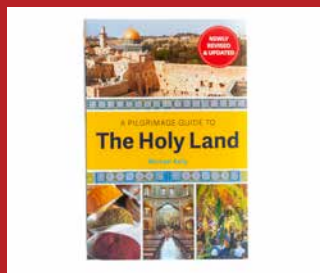
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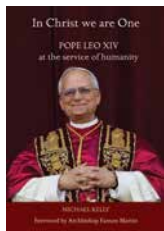


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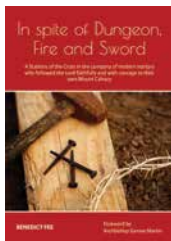


**Olive Wood Jerusalem Rosary Beads**  
– €10

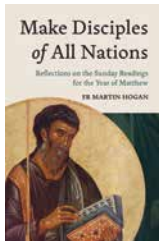


**Dilexi te**  
apostolic exhortation of the Holy Father Leo XIV on all Christian Love for the Poor

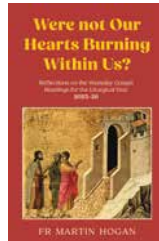
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## SUCCESS STORY!

# A Vehicle for Transporting Elderly and Sick Religious Sisters

ARGENTINA



**T**he Schönstatt Sisters of Mary have a house in the city of Florencio Valera, within the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, where 17 of their retired and sick sisters dwell. After a life of selfless service of God and neighbour, they are themselves now receiving loving care in the evening of their lives.

However, until recently, transport was a major problem. The sisters frequently have to be ferried to and fro to the nearest hospital for specialised medical care, a journey of 30 km in each direction. And the ageing vehicle owned by the community was in a very poor condition, with serious damage to the transmission.

**Sr Bernardita Guagliano** turned to us for help and explained the situation: “A reliable vehicle is no luxury, but a necessity, if we are to provide properly for their well-being and quality of life. A reliable and well running vehicle will enable them to receive the urgent medical care they need without putting their health or safety at risk.”

**Thanks to the generosity of our benefactors we were able to respond to their appeal and provide €12,566 to enable the sisters to purchase this urgently needed vehicle, which has now arrived.**

The sisters are overjoyed and Sr Bernardita has written to us again on behalf of them all. “*We would like to express our profound gratitude to you for your generous support. Thanks to this practical aid our sisters can now more easily get the treatment they need. We pray every day for you and for all our benefactors who have made this possible.*”

Our thanks likewise to all of you for helping these elderly and infirm religious sisters to receive the care they need.



**ARGENTINA: A new vehicle delivered to the Sisters of the Secular Institute of Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary in Florencio Varela.**

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## SUCCESS STORY!

# Help to Repair the Solar Water Heating System for the Seminary in Ushhorod **UKRAINE**



The city of Ushhorod lies within the Greek Catholic eparchy – or diocese – of Mukatshevo, in **West Ukraine**, on the border with **Slovakia**. This area is more remote from the ongoing war and has taken in thousands of refugees.

The Greek-Catholic seminary here – named after the martyred **Bishop Theodore Romzha**, murdered in 1947 and beatified by **St Pope John Paul II** in June 2001 during his visit to Ukraine – has been supported by ACN since its very beginning.

In fact it was the first seminary to be rebuilt in Ukraine following the collapse of communism. There had in fact already been a building here before the Soviet era, but this was confiscated by the communists and was still not returned to the Church even after the end of communism.

So in the 1990s ACN funded the construction of the new seminary and has been supporting the training of its priests ever since.

But now the seminary has encountered a major problem. As the rector, **Archimandrite Petro Pavlo Beresh**, has told us.

*“After around 10 years of use, the existing solar water heating system in our seminary, where over 65 seminarians currently live and study, has become seriously damaged. Many parts of the system have rusted away and it has now been out of use for several months. During this time we had to heat water with electric heaters, with correspondingly high energy costs. We therefore need to repair or renew the entire system, so that we can once more provide the warm water the seminary needs in an efficient manner.”*

**We are planning to give €8000 for the necessary repairs, so that the seminary can once again provide the warm water it needs without having to face such high extra costs.**



**UKRAINE: Blessed Theodore Romzha Theological Academy of Uzhhorod.**

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## SUCCESS STORY!

# Help for the Chaplaincy Outreach in Baabda University

LEBANON



Ever since 2019 **Lebanon** has been going through one of the gravest economic crises in recent history. Such is the collapse that somewhere between half and three quarters of the population are now living below the poverty line, with even the middle classes suffering extensive poverty.

This situation is a result of a combination of factors – structural corruption, political paralysis, a massive financial crisis, successive military conflicts and the permanently overhanging danger of war in the region. On top of all this, the country is also sheltering a disproportionately high number of Syrian refugees in relation to its small population.

All these problems are bearing down on the lives of the ordinary people of the

country, a land once known, not so long ago, as the “*Switzerland of the East*.” It is a crisis with not merely economic but also grave psychological consequences, with despair and apathy spreading widely and in recent years an increase of some 21.7% in the suicide rate.

Most young people in the country can see little future for themselves, with many dreaming of starting a new life for themselves abroad. Many have already left, in fact, or are planning to do so imminently.

So the country is yet further weakened, since it is precisely these largely better educated people whom it so desperately needs in order to build a better future. Moreover, it is Christians in particular who are leaving, thereby bleeding away the life of the Christian communities.

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And this in the one country of the Middle East that for so many years was blessed with a Christian majority.

And so the student chaplaincies in the Catholic universities are working hard to encourage their young students to stay on in Lebanon. Through shared prayer, pastoral accompaniment and fostering a sense of community with other young Christians they are hoping to encourage the students to work together to help shape their society on the basis of their faith.

One such centre is the University of Baabda, in the west of the country and run by the order of **St Anthony**. With the help of ACN the chaplaincy has intensified its pastoral outreach and developed a special programme.

The aim is to listen to the students, counsel and accompany them and so help them overcome their difficulties. Spiritual activities, shared prayer and scripture readings, spiritual retreats and shared outings with a spiritual theme are helping them to live their faith in their daily life and giving meaning and purpose to their lives.

The students are also encouraged to develop a sense of social involvement so they can learn to take responsibility for the needier members of society. A further aspect is the vocations apostolate, and the aim is to witness the beauty of consecrated life and priesthood. In this way the team hopes to awaken a sense of vocation

among the young people and encourage them to consider committing their lives to the service of the Church

**Fr Ruben Makol**, the student chaplain, explains, *“The principal aim of this programme is to help the young people to have a genuine experience of the Lord and renew the sense of a bond with their Church and their country, so they can build up a sense of living community that will give them new meaning, hope and stability.”*

*“We are witnessing real transformations among those who are travelling with us. They are more deeply rooted in their faith and showing a renewed and greater motivation for their studies, their future and their involvement in the Church. The sense of community is fostering in them a sense of what many themselves describe as a second family.”*

Needless to say, the order itself is also heavily impacted by the economic crisis and cannot raise the funds to continue these activities. And so, this year once again, we are proposing to support this valuable programme, for 300 students.

**We have promised a contribution of €17,200. Will you help us to help these young people to discover new hope?**



# TRAINING OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

Our aid has always focused on the theological training and qualification of seminarians. After all, future priests will ultimately be spiritual pillars and safeguard sacramental life.

Therefore, our educational assistance mainly flows into countries where the suitable and continuous training of future priests is endangered or not adequately ensured due to poverty, war, or persecution.

## 10,991 SEMINARIANS SUPPORTED

One in every ten candidates training for the priesthood was supported by ACN in 2023. Most of these were in Africa (5,793) where priestly vocations are the most numerous, followed by 2,103 in Latin America, 1,996 in Asia and 1,099 in Europe, including over 600 seminarians in Ukraine.

Your support is essential to continue this vital mission. By donating to Aid to the Church in Need, you can help ensure that future priests receive the training they need to become the spiritual leaders their communities desperately need.

Every contribution makes a significant difference. Please consider donating today to support the theological education of seminarians and strengthen the Church's presence in regions affected by poverty, war, and persecution.

Please donate what you can at  
[acnireland.org/donate](https://acnireland.org/donate)  
or call **01 837 7516**





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**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**  
Seminarians from  
the Wabag diocese.

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SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

# Young Catholics, a Growing Force in an Indifferent World

JAMES TOURISH

*“Dear young people, aspire to great things, to holiness,  
wherever you are. Do not settle for less.”*

These were the words of His Holiness **Pope Leo XIV**, at the Jubilee of Youth’s closing Mass, celebrated at Tora Vergata in August 2025. It was a message of hope, in a world that has become increasingly secular, but we know that story already.

What we must focus on, is not the decline of religious practice amongst youth worldwide, at least relative to previous times, but in the fervour of those who hold onto the faith.

For them, practise of their Catholic faith is not just a part of their life, it is their reason to live, to strive for holiness and reject the prevailing attitude of today’s culture, one that glorifies earthly pleasures and the liberty to do whatever one wants,

even if it is detrimental to themselves and those around them.

We’ve heard of the sweeping tides of secularism, but do we know of the tremors of the energetic culture of young Catholics across the world? In the **United Kingdom**, according to a poll from the Bible Society, among 18 – 24 year olds who are at least monthly Churchgoers, 41% of them are Catholic, double that of young Anglicans.

We look at events in Rome, where over 1 million young people prayed with Pope Leo at the Mass at Tore Vergata for the Jubilee of Youth. Also, are the examples of young men like **St Carlo Acutis** and **St Pier Giorgio Frassati**, who have been of great inspiration to many young Catholics all over the world.

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I think also of my home country of **Ireland**, where university chaplaincies and Catholic societies are flourishing, with converts and those coming back to the faith, increasing the numbers of the faithful.

I look at Dublin, and many parts of **France**, where adult baptisms are hitting record numbers, 70 for the Archdiocese of Dublin's Easter Vigil in 2025, many of them young adults and teenagers. In France, according to the Bishop's Conference, last year saw over 10,000 new catechumens for the Church, a 45% increase from 2024.

As **Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen** once put it so greatly, "*People aren't looking for a question mark, but an exclamation point!*" We live in a world of great doubts, the future is uncertain, the news seems to be a cycle of crises and upsetting events across the globe.

At a personal level, perhaps most particularly in the West, towns and cities have lost a sense of community, the sense of belonging that most people used to have, has been undermined by an increasingly digital age that has swamped many.

The consumerist culture engrained in our societies tells us what to buy and do, not what to live for and value. Young people don't want ambiguity, they want clarity.

That is why we see the turn towards organised religion amongst young people, it offers them a break from the 'ordinary', and takes them on a journey to the extraordinary, perhaps even the supernatural. Young people are discovering their love for traditional practices, especially those pertaining to the liturgical realm.

Fascination with the mystery of the Mass, and the solemn reverence that should go with it, is a mainstay for young Catholics. The world offers us young Catholics noise, distraction and an everlasting string of things to buy and do.

The Mass and prayer break that vicious cycle, and invites us to contemplate things much bigger than ourselves. The Universal Call to Holiness, reinforced by the Vatican II, is a challenge that young Catholics relish in, rejecting a culture that is infatuated with undermining human dignity, a culture that prioritises monetary success, and one that sees no higher purpose than what we do on this planet.

*"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me first",* spoke Christ in John 15. Being a young Catholic in 2026 is countercultural, but our faith is not rooted in this world's prevailing attitudes, but it is firmly in our Lord, and with that in mind, the best of young Catholicism has truly yet to come.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

# ACN, the Lifeline for Christians in Iraq

PROFESSOR GERARD SLATTERY

IRAQ: Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda at the procession for Palm Sunday by the Chaldean Church in Ankawa.

© Iban de la Sota

We inherit a world where there appear to be fixed parts – the borders of countries and the spread of religions. These are historically shaped. But truth be known, these are all moving parts. None more so than the experience of Christians in **Iraq** over the last twenty years.

Of the twenty four churches that make up the Roman Catholic Church, one in particular – the Chaldean Church – has its roots in Mesopotamia, the Nineveh Plains and other biblical places in modern day Iraq.

It can trace its origin to the apostle Thomas who spread the gospel message to this part of the world. It has persevered,

persisted faithfully despite the ravages of history, hostility and isolation.

Over the last fifty years, a nucleus of Christian communities existed and functioned across many Iraqi centres of population: Baghdad, the capital; Basra, Mosul; Ankawa in Erbil and the Nineveh Plains. Although only representing 4% of the population, Christianity had a living, national identity and was part and parcel of Iraqi identity.

No more. Things have changed for the worse. Outside of the pressures of living in a war zone and the many wars in recent decades, Christian presence has been decimated to the point where Christians may now only constitute

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1%-2% of the population. Physical threat, brutality of grievous proportions, forced displacement from centuries old settlements and the resultant economic displacement have given rise to despair and impoverishment. This has led to forced emigration of many Chaldean Christians abroad.

The emergence of ISIS had a devastating impact. Imposing a barbaric form of rule, they systematically plundered the property and lives of people in their way – most notably Christians and the Yazidi people. Before the marauding ISIS combatants, both Christians and Yazidis fled. Those left behind experienced horrific crimes. Genocide took place simply because they were different or Christian.

Many fled from the north to Ankawa, the Christian quarter in Erbil. The Christian community was overwhelmed with fleeing numbers. They were taken care of along with their Yazidi neighbours.

The local Chaldean bishop, **Bashar Warda**, a Redemptorist priest, (who incidentally did his novitiate in Dundalk) coordinated a massive relief effort.

The displaced were given shelter in schools, halls and other buildings. Relief agencies contributed to the effort. Fear gripped these people as an ISIS advance from Mosul threatened. But it was not to be.

A turning point had arrived and ISIS went into retreat and were defeated following sustained military attack. However, most could not go back to their homes. They were either destroyed or their property and farms were ruined. They opted to try to settle in Ankawa, Erbil.

The local Chaldean Church had a huge challenge. The Christian population had increased to four times its previous level. What hope for the future could be provided for them?

Where is solidarity when loss of life, of family, of livelihood, of identity, of security confronted the displaced Christians?

Some emigrated, most remained and made home in Ankawa, Erbil. This is where God's grace at work was revealed. Yes, food for the body was required but also food for hope, for the soul, for one's identity in a diminishing, threatening world.

Working through the bishop and his associates, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) and other Christian organisations (Italian and German bishop conferences) responded to the urgent need.

With a vision to give hope to suffering people by providing them with the means and opportunity to invest in hope, in the future, in their multi-generational resilience, a pastoral plan of significance was initiated.

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Primary schools and churches at parish level were built or extended, new parishes were established along with pastoral care and catechetical programmes for the families; secondary schools were developed including the building of new ones.

A university was established, the Catholic University in Erbil, providing a pathway of qualification and the means to support families and their future in their homeland enabling the continuance of Christianity in Iraq.

Working as a volunteer staff member at the Catholic University, of significance was the vision of the university. With a majority Christian student presence, it facilitated the presence of the marginalised Yazidis and integrated Muslim students to embody a vision of being together, working together, understanding each other and thereby

building a sustainable future of tolerance and safe wellbeing in society.

ACN International has played a critical role in enabling poorer Christian students undertake university studies by providing generous scholarships to local Christian students and those from outlying Christian villages and towns.

This is investment and belief in fidelity to family, tradition and country. Students have responded. Since it opened in 2015, its graduates since 2019 have stayed and implanted themselves in society and in their parishes, providing reassurance for families and dedication to their faith and capacities to keep Christianity in Iraq in a very challenging environment. The power of solidarity!

*Professor Gerard Slattery is from Ireland and is Mission Consultant at the Catholic University in Erbil, Iraq.*



**IRAQ: Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda with students from the Catholic University in Erbil.**

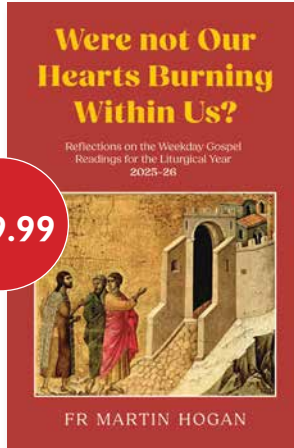


# ACN Church Resources DAC

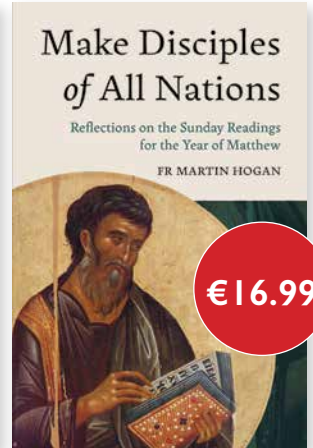


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*Dilexi Te*, Apostolic Exhortation to all Christians on Love for the Poor by Pope Leo XIV

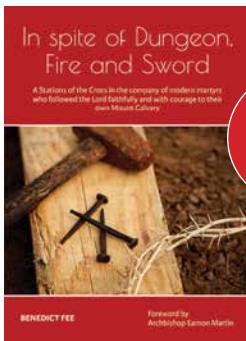


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€16.99

*Were not Our Hearts Burning Within Us?* and *Make Disciples of All Nations* are two new titles from Fr Martin Hogan on weekday and Sunday reflections for the coming liturgical year.



€6.99

*In spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword*, meditations on the Way of the Cross, reflecting on the 'martyrs of our times' by Benedict Fee.

If you haven't already purchased your *Liturgical Calendar for Ireland 2026 (Ordo)*, it's not too late!!



€12.99

## ACN Church Resources DAC

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# APRIL CROSSWORD

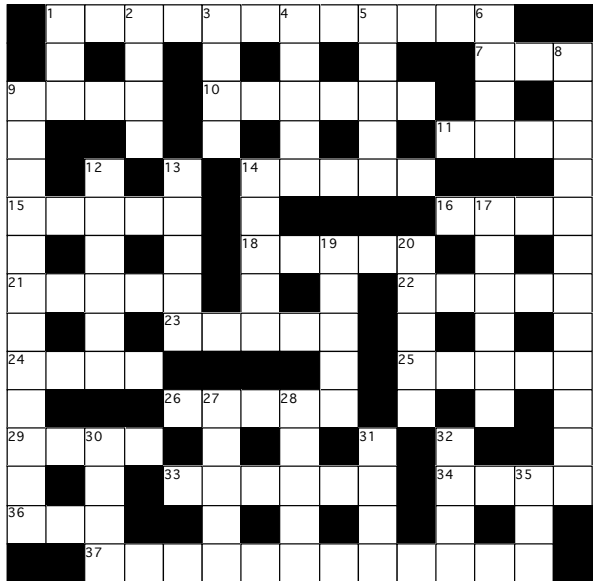
We are pleased to share with you our latest ACN crossword. We will print the answers in next month's edition.

**Enjoy!**

## March Solution

**Across** 1 Hesitation, 6 Aped, 10 Vague, 11 Redbreast, 12 Jostled, 15 Paste, 17 Emma, 18 Rate, 19 Regal, 21 Spectre, 23 Slept, 24 Sign of the Cross, 25 Amin, 26 Abeam, 28 Dogfish, 33 Splendour, 34 Annex, 35 Rots.

**Down** 1 Have, 2 Sign on the dotted line, 3 Treat, 4 Terse, 5 Odds, 7 Plans, 9 Prepare, 13 Limp, 14 Descend, 16 Trespasser, 20 Glissando, 21 Stamina, 22 Rung, 27 Eclat, 29 Oprah, 30 Franc, 31 Hoof, 32 Axis.



## ACROSS

- 1 Digit nicknamed the pinkie (6,6)
- 7 Ms Gardner was Oscar-nominated for 'Mogambo' (3)
- 9 Male deer (4)
- 10 Courting (6)
- 11 Gorse (4)
- 14 Name shared by cities in Scotland and Australia (5)
- 15 Steer clear of (5)
- 16 Gyrated (4)
- 18 Appended (5)
- 21 Wear away (5)
- 22 Jewish teacher or minister (5)
- 23 Material used in making jeans (5)
- 24 Avails of (4)
- 25 Grassy plains of South Africa (5)
- 26 Impudent (5)
- 29 & 33 Person born in the years immediately following the Second World War (4,6)
- 34 Outgrowth found on the heads of certain breeds of cattle, etc (4)
- 36 Male sheep (3)
- 37 Became involved in an activity; had a part or role therein (12)

## DOWN

- 1 One item in an auction (3)
- 2 West African country, capital Lome (4)
- 3 Licentious (4)
- 4 Turned to ice (5)
- 5 Musical composition for nine players (5)
- 6 Fairy fort (4)
- 8 Feast commemorating the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Our Lady (12)
- 9 Nine, sixteen, twenty-five, etc (6,6)
- 12 Sullen (6)
- 13 Did nothing (5)
- 14 Shrimp-like crustacean (5)
- 17 Small, rounded stone (6)
- 19 Mannequin (5)
- 20 Operate a motor vehicle (5)
- 27 Legally bring into the family (5)
- 28 Children's humorous magazine (5)
- 30 Swelling (4)
- 31 & 32 A stroke in tennis that sends the ball barely across the net (4,4)
- 35 Scarlet (3)

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## PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

# 'Lord Hear Our Prayers...'

The *MIRROR* magazine, above all, belongs to the friends and benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need, Ireland. At ACN Ireland, we are a faith-filled and praying community. Every month, we invite you to send your prayers of petition, which will be placed on the altar at ACN and these intentions will be prayed for during that month.

We also invite readers, to pray for these intentions.



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*"Please cure Martin of the drink and drugs and help him cope with being off the road."*

---

*"Look after Colm W."*

---

*"I pray for peace for all our families."*

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*"Bring Ka back to what she was."*

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*"I pray for the conversion of a loved one, peace everywhere, the health of my family, the return of a lost article, success in studies, the souls in purgatory, success in operations, that a Down's Syndrome child may be able to speak, for a child who has ADHD, for guidance for young people, and a return to health for all sick people."*

---

*"I pray for healing for my daughter who has Lupus and for her two teenage sons who suffer with back and leg pains."*

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*"I pray for the conversion of a man who doesn't practise his faith and for a family that has broken away from each other."*

---

*"I pray for a lady suffering a mental breakdown, a marriage of many years, grandchildren who don't practise their faith, and people who haven't spiritually grown."*

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*"Please pray that Ed and Bernie return to the practice of their religion and bring up their children in the faith. Help me to do all I can for this to come about."*

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*"Help me to be strong in my faith and help to increase all of our faith."*

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*"Help a couple to be courageous and to get married in the church some day."*

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*"Please pray for me, Richie, Tom, and Martin and for our needs."*

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Please send your intentions, in strictest confidence, to [prayers@acnireland.org](mailto:prayers@acnireland.org) or write to 151, St Mobhi Road, Dublin 9 marking your envelope '*petitions*'.

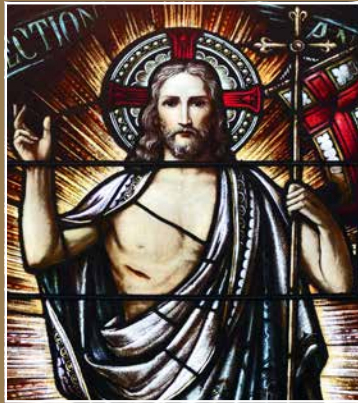


Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN IRELAND



## Prayer for Easter Sunday



O God, who on this day, through your Only Begotten Son,  
have conquered death and unlocked for us the path to  
eternity, grant, we pray, that we who keep the solemnity  
of the Lord's Resurrection may, through the renewal  
brought by your Spirit, rise up in the light of life.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and  
reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

AMEN

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