

THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE

# MIRROR

A Christmas Wish for Peace from Gaza

© ACN



Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

DECEMBER 2025  
THE NATIVITY OF THE CHILD JESUS

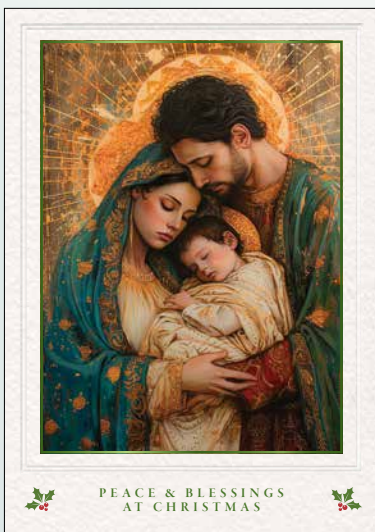


# Order your ACN Ireland Christmas Cards now!

Keep CHRIST in Christmas, this year send a religious card!

Visit our ACN Ireland Online Shop and see our individually designed Christmas Cards for 2025

Each mixed pack of 10 cards, sized at 105mm x 148mm, costs €10 per pack (plus €3.00 p&p or €6.00 p&p for 3 packs).



A Christmas Novena Card is also available, which will include the recipient in a Novena of Masses offered by an ACN priest beginning on Christmas Eve, and ending on January 1.

To order your Christmas, or Novena Cards please call our office on **01 837 7516** or scan the QR code to visit

**[www.acnireland.org/shop](http://www.acnireland.org/shop)**

Be assured all proceeds from sales will go to the persecuted and suffering Church.



# Contents



## INTRODUCTION

- Bringing the Light of Christmas to Today's Stables –  
*Michael Kelly* ..... 4

## FEATURES

- We Yearn for the Coming of Christ – *Fr. Anton Lässer CP* ..... 6
- ACN Report Reveals Religious Freedom in Peril around World ... 8

## PROJECT NEWS

- Four Motorcycles for Priests in Remote Rural Parishes  
of Tenkodogo Diocese – *Burkina Faso* ..... 10
- Will you Help with a Surprise Gift at Christmas? ..... 12
- Mass Stipends for Priests in Several Different Dioceses –  
*Colombia* ..... 14
- **Success Story!** Support for 34 Religious Sisters  
in the Diocese of Holguin – *Cuba* ..... 18
- **Success Story!** Help for the Formation of  
25 Seminarians of a New Congregation – *Indonesia* ..... 22
- Psychological Training for Priests who are  
Supporting their Traumatized People – *Ukraine* ..... 23

## SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

- In spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword: A Stations of the Cross in  
the Company of 'Modern Martyrs' ..... 25
- The Mystery of Christmas: Water and Wine – *Fr Billy Swan* ..... 26

## NOVEMBER CROSSWORD ..... 30

- Lord Hear Our Prayers... ..... 31



Cover image: An altar boy holds a candle during a Mass for peace in Holy Family Church in Gaza City.  
Thanks to generous benefactors, ACN has been supporting the parish throughout the war.

---

## INTRODUCTION

# Bringing the Light of Christmas to Today's Stables

MICHAEL KELLY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Dear Friends,

Sometimes it can be hard to see the hand of God in our lives. If you're like me, you'll have had many times in your life where your prayer is: *"Lord, I can't see the bigger picture, I don't know what you're doing with this moment in my life, but I trust and believe that you know the bigger picture."*



I often think of Our Lady as the ultimate model of trust. A young woman, told by an angel that she was to be the Mother of God. She couldn't have understood the implications of this, but trusted that God was with her.

The first Christmas was nothing like the polished sanctuaries we deck for Midnight Mass nowadays. A trough for feeding oxen became a cradle; a teenage mother, far from home and family, wrapped Eternity in strips of cloth. No trumpets, no banners — just the lowing of cattle and the stunned silence of shepherds who had never been invited anywhere important!

That is where Christmas begins: not in power, but in vulnerability; not in splendour, but in straw. We forget this when December becomes a sprint through crowded shopping centres and carefully curated Instagram feeds. Lights twinkle, carols loop, and the baby in the manger is reduced to a plastic figurine glowing under artificial snow. Yet the Gospels refuse to let the story stay nostalgic. Luke lingers on the census, the forced journey, the *"no room."* Matthew soon adds fleeing refugees and a tyrant's sword.

The first Christmas was not safe; it was exile wrapped in swaddling clothes. Humility was the signature of the Incarnation. The One who spoke galaxies into being, chose the confinement of a womb, the dependence of an infant, the toil of a carpenter's shop.

He who could have summoned legions of angels accepted the limitations of dusty feet and calloused hands. When the Magi finally arrived, they laid gold and incense before a child who would one day wash his disciples' feet. The throne he claimed was a cross; the crown,

---

thorns. If we miss this humility, we miss the heart of Christmas.

This year, let the manger pull our gaze outward, past our own hearths to the places where Christmas is not guaranteed. In the refugee camps outside Aleppo, mothers rock children to sleep under plastic sheeting while drones hum overhead.

In the drought-scarred villages of the Sahel, grandmothers ration the last handfuls of grain and pray for rain that may never come.

In the paediatric wards of understaffed hospitals in Haiti, tiny chests rise and fall beneath mosquito nets, fighting diseases we vaccinate away with ease in our own country.

These are the stables of our time — cold, overlooked, smelling of fear and antiseptic. And, thanks to the generosity of so many ACN benefactors, people like you, we are bringing light to this darkness. The Christ-child is born there, too. *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these,”* he will later say, *“you did for me.”*

The humility that brought him to Bethlehem now compels him to identify with the hungry, the stranger, the sick. The incense of our compassion rises no less fragrant than that of the wise men when we reach out at Christmas and think of others, as well as our own needs.

This Christmas, our trees will gleam and the table will groan under turkey and ham. None of that is wrong. Joy is part of the story — angels sang, after all. But, for the many people who ACN is blessed to serve, that joy can seem a far distant land. Somewhere a baby cries, and somewhere else a mother sings the only lullaby she knows. Both sounds drift toward heaven, and the God who once lay helpless in Bethlehem hears them. He is not far off. He is in the cry and in the song, in the giver and in the need. Christmas is the annual reminder that the distance between palace and stable is only one obedient heart.

So come, let us adore him, with open hands if not. Let the straw prick our conscience. Let the star guide our generosity. In the end, the measure of our Christmas will not be how brightly our tree shines but how widely its light travels, carrying warmth to the coldest corners of God’s big world.

Thank you for all your support. Happy Christmas.



**MICHAEL KELLY**

Director of Public Affairs,  
ACN Ireland



---

FEATURE

# We Yearn for the Coming of Christ

FR ANTON LÄSSER CP

Dear Friends,

**W**e walk together as ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ through this jubilee year of 2025, which concludes on January 6 with the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. Let us focus on this final furlong and enter with faith into this Christmas season to celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God, with hearts full of hope. For although the Incarnation took place in the “*fullness of time*,” it seeks to be constantly realised in our own lives and, in this jubilee year, bring forth special fruits of redemption.

Everywhere we look there is a deep yearning for resolution and redemption. Events bombard our senses, crises afflicting the world, there are alarming threats to world peace, and the political and social



upheavals are simply too much for many people. All these things tear at our hearts.

Our hearts go out to our project partners who bring their dire needs to our attention. So many of their stories touch us deeply. Our hearts ache for them and yearn for the coming of the one who can defeat every evil and bring us all health and healing (cf. 1 Peter 2:24).

## **God has become man – to save us!**

The Infinite, Almighty, Ineffable One, who is far beyond our understanding, manifests himself to us as that love to which all hearts aspire – he is coming to us! He desires to enter our world today to heal our wounds. He wants to lead us into all truth (cf. *John* 16:13), and reveal to us his Father’s eternal plan of salvation, that our lives may be lived well and lead us to perfection.

For all who can welcome it, this is truly an all-transforming, beautiful and joyous message! One that enters our lives by faith – and hope – not by sight. But it has proved true and believable, millions of times over throughout history.

But how could we believe and hope, if God had not come to share in our weakness and limitations? God *“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2:6-7).

Christmas overturns all our well-worn assumptions. Instead of might and glory from above, it is humility and closeness from below that God has chosen as the

way to our hearts. A child in the manger, reaching out his arms towards us.

*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord”* (Lk 2:11). And He Himself assures us: *“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Mt 28:20). It is these promises of God which enable us to go forward into the future, filled with hope and joyful faith, and thus towards perfection.

In this spirit I wish each and every one of you a merry, and richly blessed, Christmastide.

*F. Anton Lässer CP*

**FATHER ANTON LÄSSER CP**

Ecclesiastical Assistant, ACN International



**EGYPT: ‘Flight to Egypt’ in the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral of Assuan.**

---

## FEATURE

# ACN Report Reveals Religious Freedom in Peril around World

Michael Kelly reads during the ACN Religious Freedom Report launch Mass in St Peter's Basilica.



Last month, Aid to the Church in Need released the 2025 edition of its **Religious Freedom in the World Report**, bringing to light the situation of ongoing discrimination and persecution around the globe.

Looking at 196 countries, this report - covering the period of 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024 - stressed Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”*

In a conference at the Patristic Institute Augustinianum, attended by ACN Ireland members **Michael Kelly** and **Brandon Scott**, members of Aid to the Church in Need reflected on the figures and information gathered since the last report, two years ago, regarding countries facing persecution and discrimination.

This year's report was the largest since ACN began publishing them in 1999, showing that the trend of religious persecution continues to rise. The report warns that 64.7% of the world's population – almost 5.4 billion – live in countries with *“serious or very serious violations of religious freedom.”*

**Marta Petrosillo**, the editor-in-chief of the 2025 report, explained how 24 countries suffer persecution and 38 face discrimination based on religion. She also highlighted that in a number of nations, religious freedom is not guaranteed by law and others have laws where everyone is equal on paper but not in practice.

During the conference, Ms Petrosillo pointed out the different causes of religious persecution that vary from country to country: authoritarian

---

governments, extremism, ethno-religious nationalism, organised crime, and hybrid persecution and legalised intolerance.

In the digital age, persecution and discrimination can also be found online. Believers are tracked, censored, and even arrested for their online activity. Ms Petrosillo argued that *“authoritarian regimes and extremist groups weaponise technology to silence dissent and target minorities.”*

What makes the ACN report unique is that it takes on a deliberately universal approach, looking not only at Christian religions, but all.

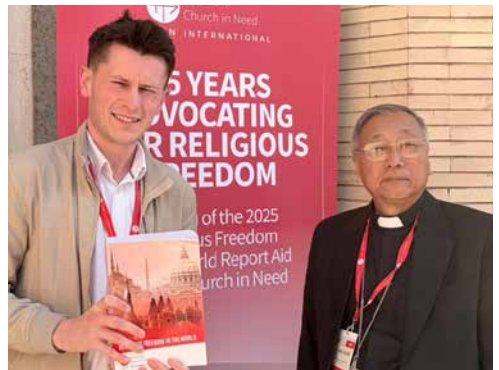
Executive President of ACN International and Tyrone-native **Regina Lynch** reflected on **Pope Leo XIV**’s words in an audience with members of the charity a few days before the launch: *“Religious freedom, therefore, is not merely a legal right or a privilege granted to us by governments.*

*It is a foundational condition that makes authentic reconciliation possible.”*

Ms Lynch furthered this stating that *“the right to live according to one’s conscience is the heartbeat of human dignity.”* She stressed that where it is respected, peace and justice flourish. But where it is denied, the human spirit and society lose their very foundations.

Ms Lynch invited everyone to join ACN in signing their first-ever global petition. This petition calls for concrete action to be taken in the form of laws to defend people’s right to religious freedom.

The petition will be available to sign until November 2026 when it will be formally presented to the United Nations, European Union, representatives of democratic governments and the diplomatic community encouraging them to join the movement.

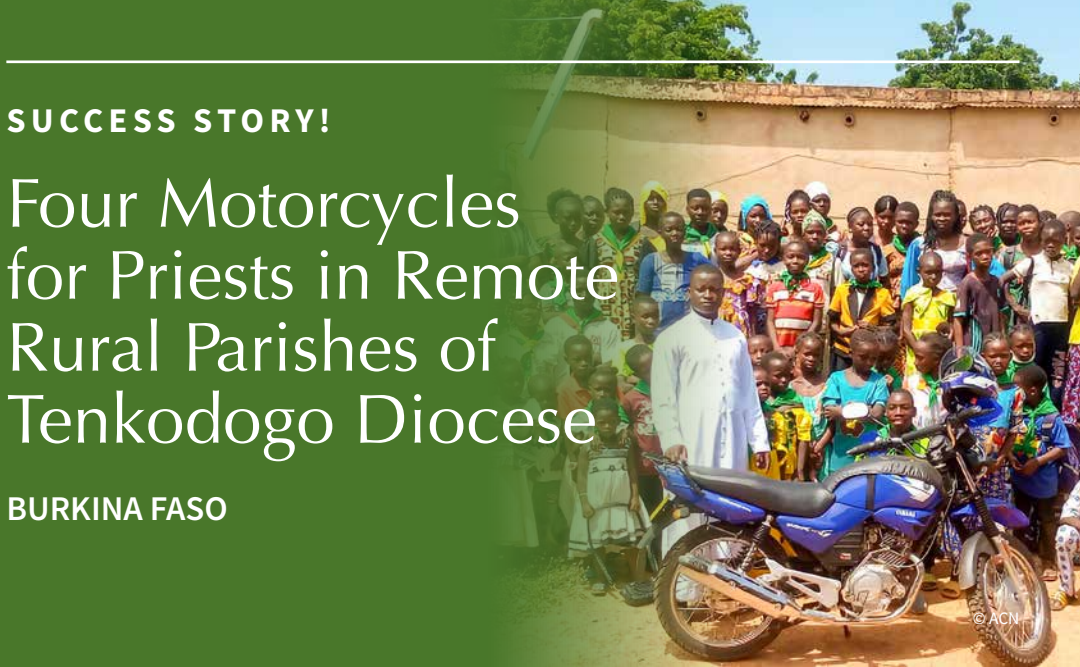


**Michael Kelly/Brandon Scott with Archbishop Linus Neli of the Archdiocese of Imphal in India. ACN Ireland provides Mass stipends for priests in the archdiocese, which is often the centre of anti-Christian conflict.**

## SUCCESS STORY!

# Four Motorcycles for Priests in Remote Rural Parishes of Tenkodogo Diocese

BURKINA FASO



The Diocese of Tenkodogo was established just 13 years ago and is therefore still only slowly becoming established. It covers an area of a little under 4000 square miles (10,000 km<sup>2</sup>) – bigger than many small countries (such as **Lebanon**, for instance).

But so far it has only 12 parishes, which are similar in area to many European dioceses. It has just 200,000 Catholics, widely scattered and ministered to by a total of just 35 priests, who must inevitably travel long distances in order to reach the villages within their respective parishes. Needless to say, some of these outposts are extremely difficult to access.

As a result the priests urgently need motorcycles for their ministry. The local

Church is poor, since **Burkina Faso** has long been among the poorest countries in the world. And the situation has only grown worse recently, as a result of the severe economic crises of recent years and above all the precarious security situation.

For in recent years wide swathes of the country have fallen prey to a growing Islamic jihadist terrorism. And even where the situation is still more peaceful, the consequences are evident everywhere, with numerous families having fled for safety to these areas. The local communities have taken in these people and are helping to care for them, thereby leaving very few resources left for other purposes.

Nevertheless, **Bishop David Koudougou** is very committed to promoting the

proclamation of the Gospel. He wants to bring the faithful closer to Christ and his priests to be closer to the people, so that they can support them in their faith and accompany them in their needs and difficulties.

Last year, thanks to your generous help, we were able to equip seven newly ordained priests with motorcycles for their pastoral work. *"We want to express our heartfelt gratitude to ACN for this precious support,"* Bishop David writes.

But at the same time, he has another request. He wants to establish two new

parishes in the western part of his diocese, since at present these areas are simply too big to permit a fruitful pastoral outreach. There will be two priests in each of these new parishes, and he is hoping to be able to enlist four missionary priests to come and work in his diocese. They too will urgently need motorcycles in order to be able to reach the Catholic faithful in the villages.

The cost of these four motorcycles is €13,300, or €3325 each. Bishop David is hoping you will be able to help him once again. He writes, ***"We are counting on you once again for the future! And may God bless you."***



**BURKINA FASO: Yamaha YBR motorcycles for the pastoral care of new priests in the Diocese of Tenkodogo.**

# Will you HELP with a surprise gift at Christmas?



© ACN

When you think about the first Christmas, simple shepherds were the first catechists of the Christian era. They proclaimed what they had learned from the angels about the birth of the Redeemer. *“And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.”* (Luke 2:18)

Although no longer instructed by angels, ordinary men and women around the world still continue to play a vital role in proclaiming the Gospel today. Where parishes are so vast that priests can only rarely visit the many individual villages, it is the catechists who pray with the faithful, prepare the children, young people and adults for the reception of the sacraments, offer comfort and support and act as role models and helpers for the Christian families.

Their work can even be dangerous. **Fr Edgard Ouedraogo**, who runs a training centre for catechists in **Burkina Faso** in West Africa – a country suffering terribly from Islamist terrorism – writes to tell us, *“The catechists are the pillars of the Church and often risk their lives. They are the ones in greatest danger and sometimes they pay the highest price. In fact, there are more martyrs among the catechists here than among us priests.”*

In 2023 the parish of Rollo was overrun by terrorists. The inhabitants fled and are only gradually beginning to return. For the 16 catechists working in the area, it is not just the looming threat of violence but also the long distances that make life difficult. They have to travel long journeys on their old and battered bicycles, over stones, down potholes and through mud. Some of the

catechists are sick, and many are already quite elderly – people like André, who is proud of the fact that he is still able to drag heavy stones to build a grotto for Our Lady in one of ‘his’ villages. Nevertheless, riding home in the evening on his bicycle, he is utterly exhausted.

**Fr Étienne Sawadogo**, the parish priest, wants to make the labours of these catechists just a little easier. If each of them had a motorcycle, they would be able to reach the faithful much more quickly and easily. Each motorcycle costs €1,170 and he needs 16 of them, so €18,720 in total.

But this is an astronomical sum for this desperately poor parish. So, Fr Étienne is

counting on your generosity of heart. Will you help this priest, who himself survived the terrorist attack, to provide a surprise for his catechists this Christmas?

Committed lay men and women are not only helping proclaim the Gospel message in Africa, but also in Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, and they are rarely being paid to do so. You can be a ‘*ministering angel*’ for these catechists by helping with their training, contributing to their support or providing them with Bibles, catechisms and prayer books.

Your Christmas gifts can bring joy to the remotest villages... “*The Redeemer is born! Come, let us adore Him!*”



**BURKINA FASO: Fr Etienne Sawadogo with a group of displaced people.**

---

## PROJECT NEWS

# Mass Stipends for Priests in Several Different Dioceses

## COLOMBIA

**COLOMBIA: Mass intentions and tridua for priests of the Diocese of Tibú.**



Ever since the mid-1960s there has been violent conflict in **Colombia**. During this time around 6 million people have been uprooted from their homes and around 200,000 killed. A further 60,000 people are registered as still missing.

Despite a peace accord in 2016, many areas of the country are still controlled by armed groups, and the violence has in fact escalated since last year. In the more rural regions the growing of coca for the drugs trade has all but wiped out the traditional agricultural cultivation. The situation is also exacerbated by a large influx of immigrants from neighbouring **Venezuela**, thereby still further intensifying the people's poverty.

For Catholic priests Colombia has been a perilous country for decades now. Over the past 40 years almost 100 priests have been murdered in this South American country, and dozens more abducted. Yet despite this, the priests have not allowed themselves to be intimidated. Thanks to your generosity we have been able to regularly support these priests in various different dioceses of Colombia. For they urgently need our help. And so we regularly pass on your Mass stipends to them.

**Bishop Israel Bravo Cortés** of the diocese of Tibú writes: *"A region like our own, which is so severely marked by violence and death, needs God. Its people need the*

*presence of the Lord in their hearts if they are to be able to confront and transform so very many painful situations that have marked their lives. We feel an obligation to strive to build up a new culture, centred on the joyful Gospel message of peace.*

*In this environment we feel called to practise mercy, to be a missionary Church and bearer of hope. In a region where people have ceased to dream of better times, where the option of progress no longer seems credible, where death continues to leave its mark, we know that we are playing a decisive role in proclaiming the Lord Jesus and opening up new horizons of hope by being truly reliable*

*companions to people who today feel so vulnerable in the present situation.”*

Other similar letters have reached us from other dioceses in Colombia. By passing on your Mass offerings to them, we intend to continue supporting these brave priests, who are standing by their people and proclaiming the Good News of Christ, without regard for the safety of their own lives.



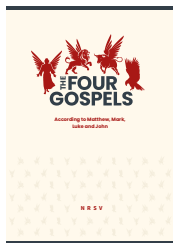
© ACN

**COLOMBIA: After Mass in the Quasi-Parish Our Lady of Guadalupe.**

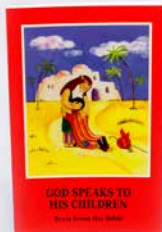


Aid to the  
Church in Need  
ACN IRELAND

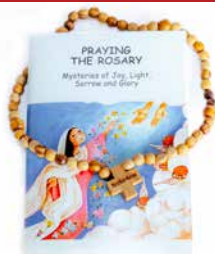
# Online Shop



**The Four Gospels**  
– €15.00



**God Speaks to His Children**  
– €8.00



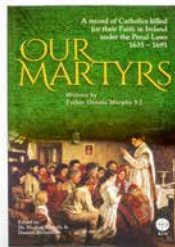
**ACN Rosary Booklet and  
Bethlehem Rosary Beads**  
– €10.00



**ACN Rosary Card and  
Bethlehem Rosary Beads**  
– €5.00



**Olive Wood Christmas  
Ornaments x 9 – €20.00**



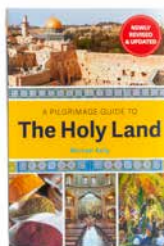
**Our Martyrs Book**  
– €15.00

Order official Aid to the Church in Need devotionals and other items from our online shop.

Help us support the suffering Church around the world with your orders from the Aid to the Church in Need Shop.

**[www.acnireland.org/shop](http://www.acnireland.org/shop)**

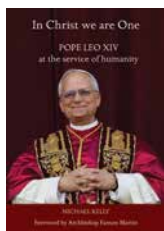
or call **01 837 7516**



**A Pilgrimage Guide to  
the Holy Land**  
– €20.00

All proceeds go to the suffering and  
persecuted Church worldwide.  
All prices include postage and packing.

Please scan  
code to visit the  
ACN Ireland shop



**In Christ we are One**  
– €7.99



**Musical Olive Wood Nativity  
Scene from Jerusalem**  
– €40



**Hand Carved God Bless  
Our Home Jerusalem Cross**  
– €40



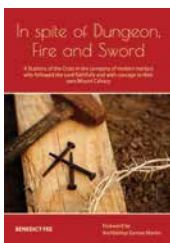
**Olive Wood Crucifix on stand  
or Olive Wood Crucifix  
for wall** – €20



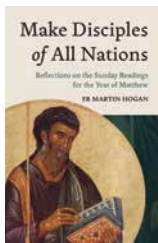
**Olive Wood Jerusalem  
Rosary Beads**  
– €10



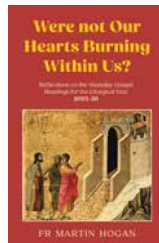
**Dilexi te**  
– €5.99



**In spite of Dungeon,  
Fire and Sword**  
– €6.99



**Make Disciples  
of All Nations**  
– €16.99



**Were not Our Hearts  
Burning Within Us?**  
– €19.99

## SUCCESS STORY!

# Support for 34 Religious Sisters in the Diocese of Holguin

CUBA



© ACN

© ACN

In the Diocese of Holguin in the southeast of **Cuba**, 34 religious sisters from 13 different congregations are caring for the sick and elderly, accompanying families, comforting the lonely and bereaved and bringing the joyful message of the Gospel to all the people.

**Bishop Emilio Aranguren Echeverria** is most grateful for the precious and indispensable ministry of these religious sisters. He describes them as “*a sign of hope*” and tells us how greatly the sisters are admired by all the people.

In truth, hope is the one thing that people in Cuba most urgently need. For many have almost given up hope and see no future for themselves. Struggling

in the midst of a severe economic crisis, many people can see no way out. There is a lack of everything, and everyday life is no more than a bitter battle for survival. And moreover, many of the people still know almost nothing about the Gospel message.

And so the loving ministry of these sisters is urgently needed. Yet they too are severely affected by the same crisis and are struggling to cover the cost of fuel, energy, food, medical supplies and all the other basic necessities of life. Thanks to your help, we were able to raise €16,000 to help towards their support, and this has made it possible for the sisters to continue as a “*sign of hope*” this year as well. Your help is indeed a

---

precious contribution to the support of their life and ministry.

The sisters of the Congregation of Mary and Martha have now written to thank you, on behalf of all the religious in the diocese. *“We are immensely grateful for your support, and above all because you are helping us not only materially but also spiritually. Time and distance mean nothing, for it is love that unites our souls. We promise to return your kindness in the form of our prayers. We entrust you to the protection of Our Blessed Lady. Please consider yourselves now and for ever as a part of our spiritual family! There are no words to express our gratitude. May*

*the Lord ever bless you and grant you abundant graces!”*



**CUBA: Aid for subsistence and travel for 40 religious belonging to 13 communities.**

# 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**





**TANZANIA**  
A seminarian walks  
down a corridor of  
St Augustine's Major  
Seminary in Peramiho.



---

## SUCCESS STORY!

# Support for the Life and Apostolate of 54 Religious Sisters

INDONESIA



**T**he '*Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord*' is the title of a new congregation of priests and brothers. Its members are especially active in the prison ministry – an important pastoral apostolate in the Church. Through the encounter with Christ – who died for all sinners – many former offenders have thereby found the strength to begin a new life.

Once they are able to acknowledge their sins, repent and ask Our Lord for the grace of inward healing, miracles can often happen in the lives of such people, many of whom have gone off the rails already in their youth. Some have never known anything but violence; strangers to mercy and sympathy until they themselves were able to experience this mercy, to understand that God himself is love, through encountering people who treat them with genuine respect and sympathy.

And equally, for the families who have suffered greatly as a result of one of their members breaking the law and being imprisoned, the support of these prison chaplains has been an enormous help. At the same time these priests and brothers also work in the parishes, giving religious instruction in the schools and teaching young people basic skills, for example in

gardening and agriculture.

Since the year 2014 the congregation has enjoyed the full recognition of the Indonesian Diocese of Maumere. It has 60 members today, many of whom are still undergoing formation. They strive to support themselves by hard manual labour, growing fruit and vegetables and rearing cattle.

Nevertheless, this young congregation has had great difficulty covering the cost of the formation of its 25 seminarians currently in training. And so their Superior, **Fr Yohanes Marinus**, turned to ACN, confident of our support.

**And thanks to the generosity of our benefactors, we did not disappoint him but were able to provide €10,000 so that his seminarians can continue their studies.** Fr Yohanes has written on behalf of them all to express his heartfelt gratitude for your generous support.



## Psychological Training for Priests who are Supporting their Traumatised People UKRAINE



Whereas in the early days of the war the emphasis was on direct material support for the refugee families, who desperately needed to be housed, fed and given medical care, it is now increasingly shifting to the need for psychological and spiritual support for the many people who have suffered deep emotional trauma as a result of the frightful things they have experienced in Ukraine.

Something like 80% of the Ukrainian people have suffered some form of trauma, according to **Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk**, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Often it is the priests who are the first and sometimes the only ones such people can turn to for help. But for those who are deeply traumatised, these priests need further psychological training in order to have the necessary tools to effectively help in such cases. Besides, the priests themselves are equally exposed to the burdens and horrors of the war and so they also need support, if they are not to become spiritually burned out. They needed to be able to respond with true empathy for the suffering victims, but at the same time they also need to be able to safeguard their own psychological well-being.

Working in collaboration with a centre for psychological health, a training programme in psychotherapy is being developed so as to enable these priests not only to more effectively help other people, both during and after the war, but also to look after their own psychological health.

This is a three-year programme which includes lectures and practical instruction. At the same time the participants are offered ongoing spiritual and psychological support by experienced priests and psychologists. In this way the priests involved can take advantage of supervision and individual counselling.

**We are proposing to give €30,000 so that the 25 participants can complete the three-year training course.** It will directly or indirectly benefit thousands of individuals.



# SUPPORT RELIGIOUS SISTERS

Help nuns like **Sr Faustina**  
**in Ukraine** deliver vital  
humanitarian aid to the  
neediest of Christians  
around the world.

Your donation can provide education  
and nurture the vocations of  
dedicated religious sisters so that  
people can be guided to Christ,  
whatever the circumstance.

**Please donate today.**



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

# In Spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword: A Stations of the Cross in the Company of 'Modern Martyrs'

It seems timely that in the weeks after ACN published the biennial *Religious Freedom in the World Report* that

**Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin** would launch a new set of meditations on the Way of the Cross called *In Spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword*.

This little book of meditations and reflections comprises a mere 62 pages, written by **Canon Benny Fee PP** of Clonoe, Co, Tyrone, highlights the courage and faith of just 14 men and women from different countries representing the many who gave their lives to uphold the name of Christ in modern times.

At the beginning of the century and the turn of the Millennium, the now retired **Archbishop of Philadelphia, Charles J Chaput** while addressing the US Commission on International Religious Freedom said, *"three things distinguish anti-Christian persecution; first, its ugly; second, it's growing; and third, the mass media generally ignore or downplay it's gravity."*

Here at home the reality is that even very many committed parishioners know little or nothing about the suffering endured by so many Christians for their faith in our world today. So, in an attempt to fill this void Canon Benny has penned this book.

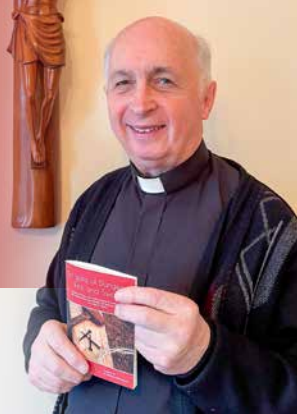
The launch in Armagh on Sunday November 16 last

seems providential as this year celebrates the 400th anniversary of the birth of **St Oliver Plunkett**, martyred Archbishop of Armagh and the 50th anniversary of his canonisation in Rome.

For almost 80 years, ACN has focused on the conviction that solidarity is stronger than fear, and even if the global picture is heavy and the challenges to faith and conscience are profound, believers do not lose hope; history can change, and grace can transform what seems impossible.

Prayer unites beyond borders and languages, it sustains those who suffer. Prayer is never powerless. Canon Benny's hope is that the launch of this book may encourage and support all who profess the name of Christ, to give witness to their faith, even in the face of derision, discrimination, and a deafening silence; yes, *"In spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword."*

**You can order this new book from [www.acnchurchresources.ie](http://www.acnchurchresources.ie)**



# The Mystery of Christmas: Water and Wine

FR BILLY SWAN



When I celebrate Mass as a priest, one of the gestures and accompanying prayer that always strikes me comes as the gifts of bread and wine are being prepared and offered to God the Father. Just after the bread is offered, the wine is then poured into the chalice, followed by the addition by the priest of a small amount of water as he prays these words: ***“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”*** As I make this prayer and watch how the water commingles with the wine as it enters the chalice, I am awestruck at how this deeply symbolic action and prayer express the faith of the Church — that by the Eucharist we celebrate and his Body and Blood we receive, we hope

to participate in the divinity of him who humbled himself to share in our earthly humanity. This commingling of the water with the wine at Mass is symbolic of the coming together of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus that was brought about in the mystery of the Incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas.

This symbolic gesture has been part of the Mass from very early on. It is a remnant of an earlier prayer that is to be found in the oldest sacramentary (the Verona Sacramentary) as a Christmas prayer, according to which the birth of Christ is the necessary condition for a marvellous union between divinity and humanity, brought about by the loving initiative of God. Objecting to some gnostic puritans

---

who tried to replace the element of wine at the Eucharist with water, **St Cyprian** (c. 200-258) emphasised the symbolic sense of the commingling. For the African Father, just as the wine receives the water in itself, so has Christ taken us and our sins to himself. Therefore, the mixing of the water and the wine symbolises the intimate union of the faithful with him to whom they have bound themselves in faith; and this union is so firm that nothing can reverse it, just as the water can no longer be separated from the wine.

In Cyprian's own words: *"When someone offers only wine, then the blood of Christ begins to exist without us; but when it is only water, then the people begin to exist without Christ"* (Letter 63 to Caecilium). For Cyprian, the key issue here was not the commingling in itself but what it expressed. Together with other Church Fathers, he resisted a false separation between God and humanity that had been overcome by God himself when he assumed our human condition at his conception and birth.

This danger of driving a wedge between the orders of divinity and humanity was to appear again in the course of history. For example, during the Reformation, **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) declared the commingling part of the Mass as unfitting and removed it. Why? Because he perceived the handiwork of God as belittled, indicative of our oneness with Christ. In response, the Council of Trent explicitly defended the practice in order to

defend the unity between humanity and divinity that Jesus accomplished when his divinity was enfleshed in humanity in the womb of Mary and became visible at his birth in Bethlehem (Council of Trent, Session 22, Canon 7).

This is the awesome mystery we contemplate on our knees at the crib at Christmas and every time we participate in the Mass. The controversy over the commingling of the water and wine and the triumph of orthodoxy ensure that when we look into the crib, we see a God who has bridged that gap between himself and all humanity out of love for us. In that Christ child in the manger, we see a God who, because of his birth, has mysteriously united himself to every human being and has drawn our humanity into the very life of the Trinity. So just as the wine receives the water, so the divinity of Christ has received our humanity, yet without confusion of the two natures of divinity and humanity. In the beautiful words of **St Bonaventure** (1221-1274): *"The Eucharist contains the true Body and immaculate Flesh of Christ, in such a way that it penetrates our being, unites us to one another and transforms us into him through that burning love by which he gave himself to us in the Incarnation."*

What Bonaventure, Cyprian, and other saints were so keen to emphasise is the intimate contact between human nature and the divine love that assumes it and transforms it. So, if our humanity is penetrated with divinity, in what way does

---

it shape our lives and make a difference? The fruits of the Holy Spirit come to mind, which should be evident in the life of every Christian: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Here is a brief sketch of ways where these fruits of the Holy Spirit show different colours and how the divinity of Christ begins to transform our humanity from the inside out: I begin to think less of my worth from my job, position, talents, reputation, and what others think of me, to thinking more of being a beloved child of God and loved for who I am; I become less afraid of failure and suffering when united to the One who suffered and died on the cross; my human thirst for success shifts to a desire to be faithful to the One to whom I am spiritually united at every moment; rather than my sexual energy as something to be tamed by my own efforts, it becomes directed by the Holy Spirit as a power to love God with my whole being and serve others, willing their good with warmth and affection; when my feelings of resentment or anger are touched by his divinity they change to forgiveness, peace, and healing; as the wine receives the water and divinity receives our humanity, so I begin to see how it's not about getting God into my world and how I see it, but rather getting into God's world and how he sees it; when feelings of jealousy are infected by divinity they lead to gratitude and rejoicing for the gifts God has given to everyone; instead of feeling hurt when I am challenged, I see it

as an invitation to grow, to mature, and to love more like the divine lover united to me. These are just some of the dynamics of grace that happen when humanity is touched and penetrated by divinity—the mystery that is at the heart of our faith.

At this time of Christmas, we contemplate the Christ child and the love of God we see in the crib when God bridged the gap between himself and humanity by the Incarnation of his only begotten Son. Yet during this time of Christmas and long after it has passed, we also ponder the ongoing mystery of the mystical union between our humanity and Christ's divinity that happened at our Baptism and is sustained and made ever new by our reception of the Eucharist. At that awesome moment when we receive the Lord, the truth of that beautiful prayer earlier in the Mass is fulfilled. For through the mystery of that water and wine, we truly do share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

*Fr Billy Swan is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns currently serving in the Vatican's Dicastery for Clergy in Rome.*

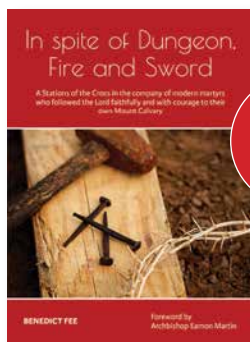




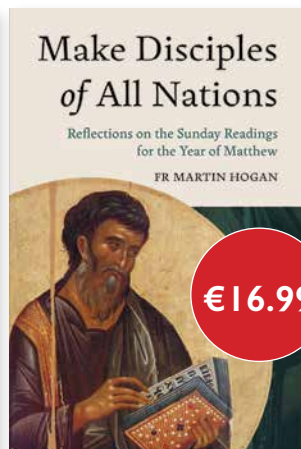
# ACN Church Resources DAC



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



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



*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.



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

## ACN Church Resources DAC

A: St Joseph's, 151 St Mobhi Road, Glasnevin, Dublin D09 HC82, Ireland

T: +353 (0) 1 727 0003 • M: +353 (87) 445 9329

E: [sales@acnchurchresources.ie](mailto:sales@acnchurchresources.ie)

Order online at: [www.acnchurchresources.ie](http://www.acnchurchresources.ie)

# DECEMBER CROSSWORD

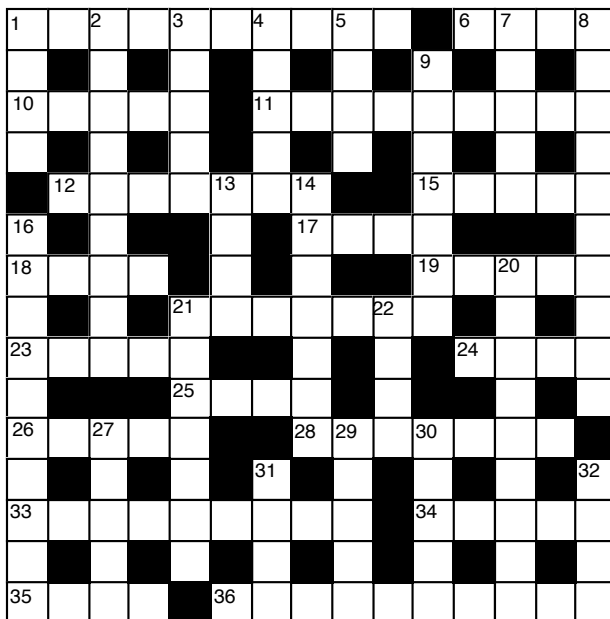
We are pleased to share with you our latest ACN crossword. We will print the answers in next month's edition.

**Enjoy!**

## November Solution

**Across** 1 Sun, 3 South Dakota, 8 Advent calendar, 10 Angle, 11 Dared, 13 Gruel, 15 Iceberg, 16 Curator, 20 Hutch, 21 Skier, 23 Opera, 24 Draughts, 25 Damask, 26 Middle class, 27 Ear

**Down** 1 Stalactites, 2 Navigate, 3 Synge, 4 Tactful, 5 Amend, 6 Orders, 7 Air, 12 Deerstalker, 13 Girth, 14 Louth, 17 Tolerate, 18 Utensil, 19 Wizard, 22 Regal, 23 Orals, 24 Dim.



## ACROSS

- 1 & 16d Feast acknowledging that Our Lady never had Original Sin (10,10)
- 6 Slide it to lock the door (4)
- 10 Flinch (5)
- 11 Demanding request (4,5)
- 12 Spotted cat (7)
- 15 Canal boat (5)
- 17 St Colmcille's Scottish monastic home (4)
- 18 Woodwind instrument (4)
- 19 Sod displaced by a golfer (5)
- 21 Baby frog (7)
- 23 Provide food at a function (5)
- 24 Smirk (4)
- 25 Pain (4)
- 26 Contagious fear (5)
- 28 Traditional long, cutting tools (7)
- 33 This sport features a bully-off with a puck (3-6)
- 34 City in Northern Italy, home to Juventus (5)
- 35 Birds' home (4)
- 36 As traditionally called by barmen just before closing time (4,6)

## DOWN

- 1 American State, capital Des Moines (4)
- 2 Vegetable whose name means 'eat all' (9)
- 3 Inexpensive (5)
- 4 Subsequently (5)
- 5 Cause to incline (4)
- 7 More ancient (5)
- 8 Thinning spirit (10)
- 9 Prohibited (7)
- 13 Glow, emanation (4)
- 14 These may accompany a smile (7)
- 16 See 1 across
- 20 Spinal bones (9)
- 21 Agricultural vehicle (7)
- 22 Indolent (4)
- 27 Requirements (5)
- 29 Underground tomb (5)
- 30 Teacher (5)
- 31 Seabird (4)
- 32 Insects which live in a colony (4)

---

## 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.



*“For peace in my troubled family during Christmas time.”*

*“For those struggling to afford Christmas presents for loved ones.”*

*“That Christ is at the centre of Christmas celebrations.”*

*“That the new year brings hope to Christians facing persecution and threats around the world.”*

*“For the welfare of the homeless during these cold winter nights.”*

*“That I find a new job in the new year after months of unsuccessful applications.”*

*“That more men in Ireland answer Christ’s call and explore priesthood in 2026.”*

*“That my very ill dog makes it to Christmas as I am living alone and don’t have family nearby.”*

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



## For unto us a Child is Born!



© ACN

“That Child figure reminds us that the Lord of Ages chose to hide in human flesh in order that a shaft of eternal light might pierce our winter gloom and that the hope of eternal peace and happiness might dispel our looming despair. The true light of Christmas shines from the Infant in the Crib.”

MSGR BRENDAN DEVLIN

St Joseph's,  
151 St Mobhi Road,  
Glasnevin, Dublin 9

TEL +353 (0)1 837 7516  
EMAIL [info@acnireland.org](mailto:info@acnireland.org)  
WEB [www.acnireland.org](http://www.acnireland.org)

Registered Charity No:  
CRA in RoI: 20023768  
CCNI in NI: 102345



PONTIFICAL  
FOUNDATION