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Month of the Mother Saint of Ireland



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ACN IRELAND

FEBRUARY 2026
MONTH OF THE HOLY FAMILY



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

PONTIFICAL
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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.



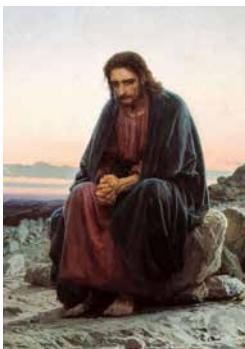
If you would like to find out more information,
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Contents



INTRODUCTION

- A Chance to be in Prayerful Solidarity with Palestinian Christians – *Michael Kelly* 4

FEATURES

- St Brigid Burns Brighter than Ever – *Michael Kelly* 6
- Christians call for Peace and Prayers as Violence returns to Aleppo – *Syria* 8

PROJECT NEWS

- A Much-Needed Vehicle for a Prison Chaplaincy – *Egypt* 10
- **Success Story!** A New Village Chapel in the Parish of Morafeno – *Madagascar* 12
- Help for 29 Religious Sisters in the Diocese of San Jancito – *Moldova* 14
- Nigerian catechist, who bravely avoided Death, receives Award from ACN – *Nigeria* 18
- Helping Religious Live out the Lord's Service in one of Europe's Poorest Countries – *Moldova* 22
- **Success Story!** A Holy Year Pilgrimage of Hope to Rome and Italy for 51 Young People – *Holy Land* 25

SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

- Re-Discovering Fasting this Lent – *Fr Billy Swan* 26

FEBRUARY CROSSWORD 30

- Lord Hear Our Prayers... 31

INTRODUCTION

A Chance to be in Prayerful Solidarity with Palestinian Christians

**MICHAEL KELLY,
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Bishop William Shomali praying in the Cremisan valley for Christian families.



Dear Friends,

Anyone who knows me, knows I love the Holy Land. I first visited Jerusalem when I was 18, and the only word I can use to describe that experience was to say I was intoxicated. The holy city and the places associated with the earthly life of Christ touched all of my senses and I knew from that brief visit that this was a place I would return to again and again.

And, thank God, I have been blessed to visit the Holy Land more than 30 times and even spent an extended period living there. As my appreciation of the prayerfulness and spirituality of the Holy Land grew, so too my love for what we call the '*living stones*'. The Holy Land, of course, is filled



with stones – some ruined, others intact. They mark out the holy places, but without people to pray at them and maintain them they are just stones. It is the local Christian community who are those '*living stones*' that keep the faith alive in very difficult and painful circumstances.

I want to let you know, dear friends, about a wonderful opportunity we will have in Ireland this year to join in concrete and spiritual solidarity with the suffering Church in the Holy Land, especially in **Gaza**.

This year the **ACN Ireland annual pilgrimage to Knock Shrine will take place on Saturday May 16**. We are honoured that the chief celebrant for our pilgrim Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady Queen of Ireland will be **Bishop William Shomali** from Jerusalem.

Bishop Shomali was born in the Palestinian village of Beit Sahour, which is where the angels first appeared to the shepherds to tell them about the birth of Christ in the nearby town of Bethlehem. He is a living stone of the Holy Land, and shepherds God's faithful people there.

This year, our pilgrimage will have a special focus on Palestinian Christians, and what we can do to ease their suffering.

At Knock, it will be an opportunity to gather in prayerful solidarity with all the suffering people of the Holy Land, especially those in Gaza who have constantly been in our thoughts and prayers.

Bishop Shomali will share with us the challenges of keeping the Christian faith alive in the Holy Land, but also the joys of the people who are the descendants of those who were the first to hear the angelic message that God had made his home among us and had been born in Bethlehem.

We are truly blessed that Bishop Shomali will bring the grace of the holy city of Jerusalem all the way to Knock for us.

God bless you all!



MICHAEL KELLY

Director of Public Affairs, ACN Ireland



An ACN delegation meeting with Bishop William Shomali at the Latin Patriarchate, Jerusalem.

St Brigid Burns Brighter than Ever

MICHAEL KELLY

St Brigid of Kildare – whose feastday we celebrate every February 1 – stands as one of Ireland’s three great patron saints, alongside **St Patrick** and **St Columba**. Yet her witness shines with a distinctive light: that of a woman whose faith, courage, and compassion forged a path for the Gospel in a young Irish Church.

Born around 451 in Faughart, Co. Louth, to a chieftain father and an enslaved Christian mother baptised by Patrick himself, Brigid grew up amid the tensions of a society transitioning from pagan roots to Christian hope.

Tradition describes her childhood marked by extraordinary generosity – giving away butter that miraculously replenished, or her father’s sword to a beggar – acts that foreshadowed a life poured out in service. An example emulated by Irishmen and Irishwomen in every generation who courageously left everything as priests and religious.



Refusing marriage arranged by her father, Brigid embraced the consecrated life, possibly receiving the veil from **Bishop Mac Caille** or **Mél**.

Around 480, she founded a double monastery at Kildare – ‘church of the oak’ – a groundbreaking community for both men and women under her abbatial leadership. There, with **Bishop Conleth**, she established a centre of learning, hospitality, and prayer.

The monastery produced illuminated manuscripts, nurtured scholars, and tended the perpetual flame that symbolised Christ’s enduring light, guarded by nuns in a cycle of 20 with Brigid herself on the final night.

Her recounted miracles, reveal a heart attuned to mercy: multiplying food for the hungry, healing the sick, turning water to beer for the thirsty, expanding her cloak to claim land for God’s work, and protecting

the vulnerable, even intervening in cases of injustice.

These stories, blending faith with the poetic imagination of Celtic tradition, portray Brigid not as distant holiness but as practical love — milking cows, caring for lepers, advocating for the poor, and fostering peace in a divided land.

In today's Ireland, St Brigid's relevance burns brighter than ever. The Church faces profound challenges: declining practice, wounded trust, secular shifts and a cultural landscape where many feel disconnected from institutional faith.

Yet, Brigid offers a model of renewal rooted in authentic Gospel living rather than power structures. As abbess who wielded spiritual authority in a male-dominated world, she embodies the dignity and vocation of women in the Church — a reminder that leadership flows from service, not domination. Her double monastery prefigures a co-responsible Church where men and women collaborate in mission.

Meanwhile, her care for creation speaks urgently to our ecological crisis. Legends tie her to the land — cattle, springs, fertility — and her feast on February 1 marks the stirrings of spring.

In an era of climate concern, Brigid calls Catholics to stewardship, seeing God's presence in the earth she loved.

Her hospitality, welcoming all without judgment, counters division and polarisation, inviting the Church to be a house of welcome amid social fractures.

The 2023 designation of St Brigid's Day as a public holiday reflects a national reclaiming of her legacy, bridging pre-Christian heritage with Christian faith. This syncretism need not dilute truth; instead, it shows how the Gospel transforms culture, as Brigid did by Christianising fires and wells.

For Irish Catholics, she inspires hope: the flame she guarded still burns at the *Solas Bhride* Centre in Kildare, tended by Brigidine Sisters dedicated to justice, peace, and reconciliation.

In a Church seeking vitality, Brigid teaches that holiness flourishes through radical charity, bold faith, and deep contemplation. She challenges us to rebuild from the margins — feeding the hungry, healing wounds, protecting life — rather than clinging to the past.

As Ireland commemorates 1,500 years since her death, may St Brigid intercede for renewal: that the Irish Church rediscover her spirit of generous, inclusive love, igniting anew the light of Christ in hearts and homes. In her, we see that true reform begins not in grand pronouncements, but in the quiet, persistent acts of mercy that mirror God's own heart.

FEATURE

Christians call for Peace and Prayers as Violence returns to Aleppo

SYRIA

© Piotr Wolski

Christians in Aleppo, **Syria**, are calling for prayers from the international community as violence returns to the city.

Government forces and members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led coalition based in northeast Syria, have been fighting for control over parts of Aleppo. Clashes had begun in late December and were then paused as both sides established a truce, but fighting rekindled on 6 January and has already resulted in several deaths, including of Christians, according to local sources who have been in touch with Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

The return of violence coincided with Christmas for the Armenian Orthodox



faithful and Epiphany celebrations for the other Christian communities in Aleppo, but all celebrations were cancelled as people are too afraid to leave their homes.

“Schools, universities and public services are closed, only hospitals remain functioning, and Christian families are trapped in their houses because they are on the front lines,” says ACN’s source on the ground, who asked not to be named, for safety reasons.

The local Church has opened many of its buildings to families who had to flee their homes, and the government has opened two passages for people to leave the affected areas, but there is fear that the situation will become even worse once these are closed again. *“It appears that*

both sides are planning something bigger, according to the amount of bombing and gunfire we are hearing,” says ACN’s source, adding “I ask for prayers that both parties may reach an agreement and that peace prevails over the country.”

Fr Fadi Najjar, an ACN project partner, also sent a message in which he explains that *“the government is bombing Kurdish areas, and the Kurds respond by bombing our neighbourhoods. The rockets are raining down on us.”*

“Of course, the civilians are always the weakest link, and those who suffer most. Many people have left their homes, and many have died,” the priest adds.

Fr Najjar also ends his message to ACN with an urgent request for prayers and for peace, recalling that *“blessed are the peacemakers, because they shall be*

called children of God. Please, pray for us and remain united in prayer. We don’t know what is happening or what is going to happen so please help us with your prayer and your solidarity. Raise your voices for peace, so that this war ends immediately.”

Tyrone’s **Regina Lynch**, Executive President of Aid to the Church in Need, stated that *“once again, alarming news is reaching us from Aleppo. Our brothers and sisters there are asking for prayers, and at Aid to the Church in Need we join this appeal with deep concern and hope.”*

“I ask our benefactors and all people of goodwill to pray for the people of Aleppo, especially for the Christian communities who are once again suffering the consequences of violence. May God touch the hearts of those responsible, so that dialogue and peace may prevail.”



SYRIA: Father Fadi Najjar welcoming children to school in Aleppo.

A Much-Needed Vehicle for a Prison Chaplaincy

EGYPT



© ACN

Again and again, we hear from prison chaplains just how important it is to accompany not only prisoners but their families also. Offenders are frequently converted as a result, repent of their past deeds and become worthwhile members of society. While innocent victims, unjustly imprisoned, are encouraged and saved from despair.

People who have never experienced love or kindness in their lives encounter the Good News of Jesus for the first time, while families are frequently saved from breakup and grinding poverty, and many souls find their way to Christ.

The pastoral ministry to prisoners and their families is one of the many

important priorities for the Coptic Catholic Church in **Egypt**. Unfortunately, the crime rate is very high. But it also happens that families often lose their sole breadwinner, simply because the father or husband is unable to pay his debts.

The economic situation in Egypt is dire and there is high unemployment, while living costs have soared at the same time. As a result, the father often ends up in prison, in a vicious cycle that unfairly affects those who are already poor and socially excluded. For their families it is nothing less than a catastrophe.

The priests go into the prisons, celebrating Mass, hearing confessions and offering spiritual and psychological

help and support to all who ask. At the same time, they help prepare prisoners for reintegration into society.

They also strive to ensure that every prisoner receives the medical care they require and is treated humanely, and of course they are an important link between the prisoners and their families, whom they also care for. Frequently they are able even to provide a little financial help and ensure that the children can still attend school.

Most prisons in Egypt are situated well away from built-up areas, in the desert, sometimes as much as 150 to 300 km from the nearest town. So the priests have to travel long distances every week in order to minister to these prisoners.

In visiting the prisons, they often take family members with them, who otherwise would have no way of visiting their husband, brother or father. These journeys are also an opportunity for lengthy conversations and shared prayer.

The Diocese of Minia has asked our help to provide a vehicle specifically for these prison visits, and we are planning to offer €20,000.

We would be most grateful for any help you can give us.



EGYPT: Providing transportation for prison servants and families of prisoners, Minia.

SUCCESS STORY!

A New Village Chapel in the Parish of Morafeno

MADAGASCAR

Blessing the start of construction of the new church in Morafeno.

Ankililoaka Mission is set in a remote and underdeveloped rural region of southwest **Madagascar** and is run by the Salesian Fathers. The people here have only recently encountered the Gospel for the first time, and their numbers are now growing.

“The efforts of many years are finally beginning to bear fruit,” writes **Fr Charles Armand Randimbisoa**, their parish priest. Again and again, the people of other villages who have found their way to the Catholic faith are appealing to the priests for help to build a chapel of their own.

Nevertheless, so far no more than 7% of the population are Christians and ancestor worship and belief in sorcery are still very much widespread. The Salesians

have built schools and set up a radio station with the aim of raising the general level of education.

In particular, they are also working to enable girls to attend school as well, since women and girls are very much disadvantaged. There is still a great deal to do, but the Good News of Christ, for whom all souls are equally precious, is touching more and more hearts.

Fr Randimbisoa explains: *“In a population with no education and trapped in its ancient traditions and customs, the Church is bringing great hope. She is playing a vital role, not only in evangelisation but also in education. Society can only benefit from the moral upbringing of its children and young people. Indeed, the Church is assuming*

© ACN



an indispensable place in the midst of the population.”

The village of Morafeno is currently one of 18 outstations in the mission, and there is a growing community here. The people have already built a small chapel, using traditional materials, but this was badly damaged in 2022 by a tropical storm.

Although the faithful continued to gather there to pray they were frightened that the crumbling building might collapse on them, and in any case it had become far too small for the growing number of worshippers. So, it was the dearest wish of the community to rebuild and enlarge this chapel. But given the fact that the people were so very poor, this seemed an unattainable dream for them.

However, Fr Charles eventually turned to ACN, asking for help, and thanks to the generosity of so many of our kind benefactors, he has now finally been able to consecrate the new chapel. **You contributed €14,000 towards the cost.**

Fr Charles reports: “*The faithful are most grateful for the help you have given. They all got together and agreed to help and so keep the costs to a minimum, taking turns with jobs like transport and getting basic materials like sand and gravel. They worked tirelessly, walking and pushing wheelbarrows to bring cement and steel the 13 km from the nearest national highway to the building site.”*

Now there is great rejoicing at their completed chapel. Says Fr Charles, “*When they finally saw the beautiful new church, bigger and more spacious than the one before, their hearts were filled with joy, and it has also made a big impact on the rest of the population.”*

“*Many people have come to look at the church, and I have no doubt that very soon the building will be quite full. We want to express our heartfelt thanks to all our benefactors, for supporting us and continuing to help us.”*

Thank you for your support in bringing Christ closer to some of the most remote Catholic communities around the world.



MADAGASCAR: Construction of a new village church in Morafeno.

Help for 29 Religious Sisters in the Diocese of San Jancito

ECUADOR



© ACN

Across vast swathes of **Ecuador** poverty and violence are making life difficult for many sections of the population. Social inequalities are becoming more extreme, leaving many families broken and torn apart. Many people are leaving the country at the first opportunity in the hope of finding a better life elsewhere.

There are many families in need of help, and the Catholic Church is frequently the first place they turn to. The religious sisters in particular are '*ministering angels*' to so many people in need.

In the Diocese of San Jacinto there are 29 religious sisters, belonging to six different congregations. They support

families in difficulty, comfort the bereaved and sorrowing and prepare the faithful for reception of the sacraments – Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Matrimony.

They also provide support and shelter for children and young people facing domestic or other violence, run soup kitchens and generally help the poor with food parcels, medicines and other necessities.

Bishop Gustavo Adolfo Rosales Escobar cannot praise the work of the sisters too highly. "*Their witness, their catechesis, their home visits, care for the sick and service in the liturgy are crucial to the maintenance of the Faith*," he tells us.

Especially in those places where there is no permanent priest, the sisters “*hold the fort*” and are a sign that the Church is still present. Sadly there are too few priests in the diocese, and most of them have to minister to two or three parishes at the same time. There is just one priest to every 14,000 Catholics.

Two of the communities in the diocese are contemplative communities. Their convents are truly ‘oases of prayer’ and many of the faithful love to visit, in order to share the calm and silence, to pray and find spiritual support. Many also like to come for days of recollection, in order to withdraw momentarily from the bustle of daily life and seek the presence of God.

But the enduring economic crisis and rising living costs are hitting all these sisters hard. In fact, they would not be able to fulfil their mission without outside help.

So we have promised the diocese a total of €9,150 for the coming year, so that these sisters can continue to offer their precious and indispensable service.

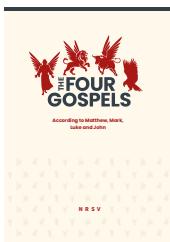


ECUADOR: The Sisters of San Jacinto after holy Mass with Bishop Gustavo Adolfo Rosales Escobar.

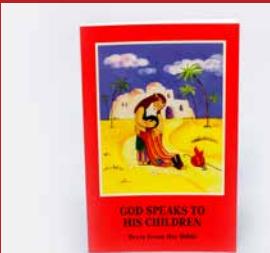


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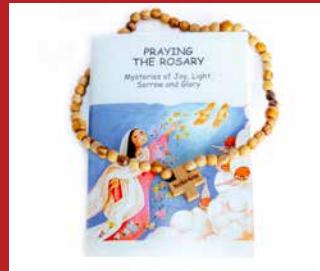
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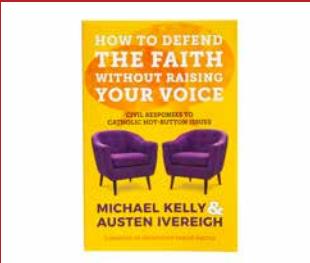
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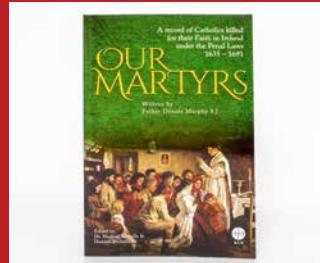
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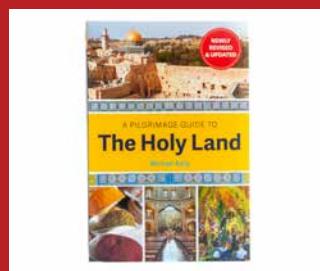


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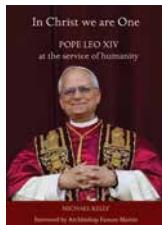


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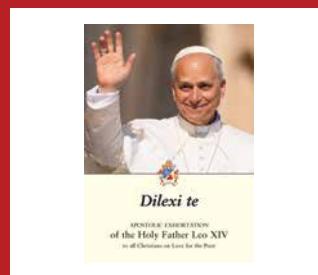
Hand Carved Bethlehem
Olive Wood God Bless
Our Home – €20



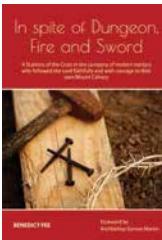
Olive Wood Crucifix on stand
or Olive Wood Crucifix
for wall – €20



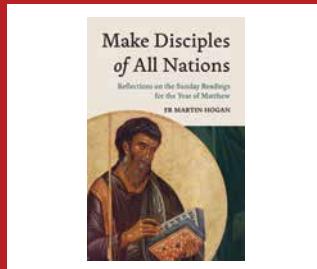
Olive Wood Jerusalem
Rosary Beads
– €10



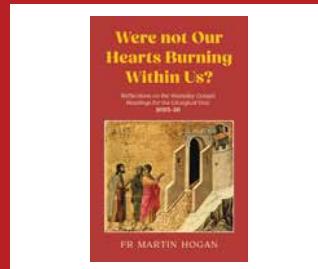
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Hearts Burning
Within Us?
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Nigerian catechist, who bravely avoided Death, receives Award from ACN

NIGERIA

© Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

ACatechist, who received an award after narrowly escaping death and forgiving his attackers, has '*inspired*' his whole diocese in north-west **Nigeria** - his bishop has said.

Tobias Yahaya, recipient of Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) #RedWednesday Courage to be Christian award, was given a hero's welcome during a thanksgiving Mass back home in Sokoto.

Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto, who presided at the Mass at Holy Family Cathedral, an occasion packed with clergy, catechists and lay faithful, said: "*The award is an inspiration to us in the diocese.*"

In the statement sent to ACN, Bishop

Kukah added: "*After the ceremonies, [Tobias] spoke to the congregation, proudly showed the award to great applause and merriment... Tobias shared with them his 2025 Courage to be Christian Award certificate, which he received in London's St George's Cathedral, Southwark, last November.*

Bishop Kukah thanked Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark for agreeing for the award ceremony and Mass to be held in his cathedral. He said: "The conferment of the Award of Courage to be Christian to... Tobias was one of the great moments in our annals. The impact of the award was felt throughout the diocese. We are eternally thankful to Aid to the Church in Need for their unyielding support to us."

Tobias, a father of four - a catechist teacher and lay leader - was at home in Sokoto with his young family when one night he stepped outside to confront intruders. One of them stabbed him in the chest and when he lunged forward a second time Tobias grabbed him by the wrist seeking to wrestle him to the ground.

His wife raised the alarm, prompting neighbours to rush out and apprehend the man. Tobias was in intensive care and, after leaving hospital, the case went to court.

He received permission from the judge to embrace his would-be killer and he did so with the words "*I forgive you.*" Tobias said: "*In northern Nigeria, this ministry is not only indispensable but also heroic. Catechists are men and women, many with families, who respond generously to God's call in an environment often marked by poverty, insecurity, religious tension, and limited resources.*"

He said over time, the role of the catechist has expanded far beyond teaching catechism. In many parishes, catechists serve as evangelists and preachers, parish secretaries and record keepers, marriage instructors, prayer leaders and liturgy coordinators, maintenance workers, altar assistants and ministers.

He added: "*Despite their sacrifices, catechists are often misunderstood, ridiculed, or looked down upon. Most*

catechists are poorly paid or not paid at all. Many struggle to feed their families, pay school fees or meet basic needs."

Tobias's story came to ACN's attention when a delegation from the charity met him during a fact-finding and project assessment trip to northern Nigeria where the charity funds catechists' training and ongoing support as well as Christian education books and other materials.

John Pontifex, head of press and public affairs at ACN UK, who met Tobias on the trip and who helped organise his UK visit in November when he received his award, said: "*In more than 20 years travelling around the globe meeting survivors of persecution, I have met many heroic witnesses to Christ but few have been as brave as Tobias - his testimony of faith and forgiveness is truly remarkable.*"



© Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

Tobias Yahaya receiving the 'Courage to be Christian' award, St George's Cathedral, London.

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
or call 01 837 7516



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



Helping Religious Live out the Lord's Service in one of Europe's Poorest Countries

MOLDOVA



© ACN

The Republic of **Moldova** lies to the east of **Romania** and to the south and west of **Ukraine**. This small country, which became independent in 1991 after the collapse of the **Soviet Union**, is one of the poorest in Europe.

A significant proportion of the adult population regularly spend shorter or longer periods living abroad in order to earn a living. As a result, children and elderly people are often left behind alone.

Sadly, many mothers return only after many years and sometimes not at all, after falling victim to human trafficking and forced prostitution. According to estimates, around 100,000 children are affected by this pattern of parental

migration and left either to themselves or in the care of grandparents, who are themselves often in need.

Some 22 Catholic religious sisters and one religious brother, belonging between them to eight different religious congregations, are working here today on behalf of the poor and abandoned, the sick, the elderly and these neglected children.

At the same time, they are working in the parishes, giving catechetical instruction and providing essential churchwarden services in the churches in order to ensure that Mass can be celebrated fittingly and worthily and the churches kept clean and well-decorated.

Bishop Anton Coşa is most grateful for the service of these religious. But the Catholic Church in this country is small and very much dependent on help from abroad. The economic situation has been made worse as a result of the war in Ukraine and church collections have inevitably dwindled as a result.

The Catholic population, who number only around 20,000 faithful can for the most part give no more than the famous 'widow's mite.'

And so, with your generous support, ACN has stepped in, providing a subsidy

of €23,000 to help with the overall living costs – or €1,000 per person – for the coming year.

For these 23 brave religious sisters and this brother give their services freely, for the sheer love of God, while at the same time having to cope with the soaring cost of living.

Will you help us to help them to continue bringing hope and consolation to so many others?



MOLDOVA: Religious sister feeding the sick and elderly in the Diocese of Chisinau.

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
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SUCCESS STORY!

A Holy Year Pilgrimage of Hope to Rome and Italy for 51 Young People



HOLY LAND

For the Holy Year 2025 you helped 51 young people from the Holy Land to join with the Universal Church as 'Pilgrims of Hope', visiting **Italy** and **Rome**.

"In every church we visited in Italy we prayed for the benefactors of ACN, whose sacrifices and whose faith made this pilgrimage possible," the young people subsequently wrote. Among the places they visited were Rome, Assisi and Padua.

Katia, from Zababdeh on the Palestinian West Bank, summarised her impressions: *"I have never had such a wonderful experience before. Already as we arrived in Rome, I was overwhelmed by the feeling of unity, peace and spiritual renewal. It was deeply moving to be surrounded by people from all over the world, who were filled with joy and faith."*

"Passing through the Holy Doors and participating in Holy Masses and processions in such sacred and historic places filled my heart with gratitude and reverence. It was a journey that left a lasting impression both on my soul and on my perspective of life. The Jubilee reminds me of the power of faith and forgiveness, and I will always hold this experience in my heart."

Fr Louis Salman, who is responsible for the youth apostolate in the Holy Land, also wants to thank our benefactors once again, on behalf of the entire group. *"I'd like to express our deepest gratitude for your generous support and our faithful partnership. Thanks to your help and above all thanks to divine providence, the young people were able to experience an unforgettable pilgrimage that has kindled the flame of their faith afresh and strengthened their awareness of belonging to the Universal Church."*

"Yours was not only a financial contribution but also a genuine act of love that has enabled our young people to witness to the fact that, despite the many challenges of war and all the travel restrictions, hope is still very much alive in the land of Jesus' birth."



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Re-Discovering Fasting this Lent

FR BILLY SWAN



The main reason we fast during Lent is because of Jesus' decision to fast in the desert for 40 days which connects his experience to ours for the 40 days of Lent.

I believe that the traditional practise of fasting is in crisis. Let's be honest, we don't take it too seriously anymore. It's true that as children, many of us gave up sweets for Lent or gave up something that we liked. Looking back, it wasn't always clear why we were fasting – what was the purpose of it all.

For many, when childhood ended so did things like fasting for Lent. Fasting today or eating less is almost exclusively associated with losing weight and living a healthier lifestyle. Therefore, we badly

need to rediscover the meaning and value of fasting in the Christian life.

First of all, there is a very practical reason why we fast. We do without so that others might do with. This means that if I give up a meal once a week, the money I save can go to the needy, for example. Someone else will then benefit from my sacrifice. It's that simple.

Moreover, when I fast like this, I am entering into a real solidarity with people who have only two meals a day, or only one at best. When our bellies are full, we rarely think of these people. But when we fast, we become one with them. Even for a while, we suffer with them, which draws us into the battle to combat world hunger, poverty and how we can help.

Second, fasting is a means and never an end. There is a very important spiritual dimension to fasting in that it helps the soul turn back to God. It is a practise that Jesus endorsed and practised himself. This is a point that has been largely forgotten and neglected. The truth is that we all have needs and desires. We hunger for many things but hunger most of all for God. Not all of our needs and desires pull in the same direction.

If we spend our lives trying to satisfy all our desires, then we end up like a balloon that keeps taking in air until eventually it bursts. This is part of what drives a culture that consumes more than it needs; a culture that seeks to satisfy the body but not the soul. We are a delicate mix of body

and soul and both are competing for our attention at any given time.

But which of our appetites steer the ship? Whether we are aware of it or not, our body is ordering us around most of the day: *“Feed me, please me, sleep me, pamper me, wash me, relieve me.”* While the needs of the body are certainly important, fasting is one of the ways the Gospel teaches us to ensure that the body and its desires do not become our master.

Some time ago I watched an episode of The Late Late Show that included an interview with **Philly McMahon**, the Dublin footballer, who lost a brother through drug abuse. Strategies of dealing with drug addiction were discussed but what



PAKISTAN: A woman praying at Mass in St John Catholic Church in Youhannabad.

received little attention was the strategy of teaching ourselves and our children to say 'NO' - No to drugs and no to anything else that leads to harm. By fasting from these things, we say 'NO' in order to say 'YES' to God and the life he wishes for us.

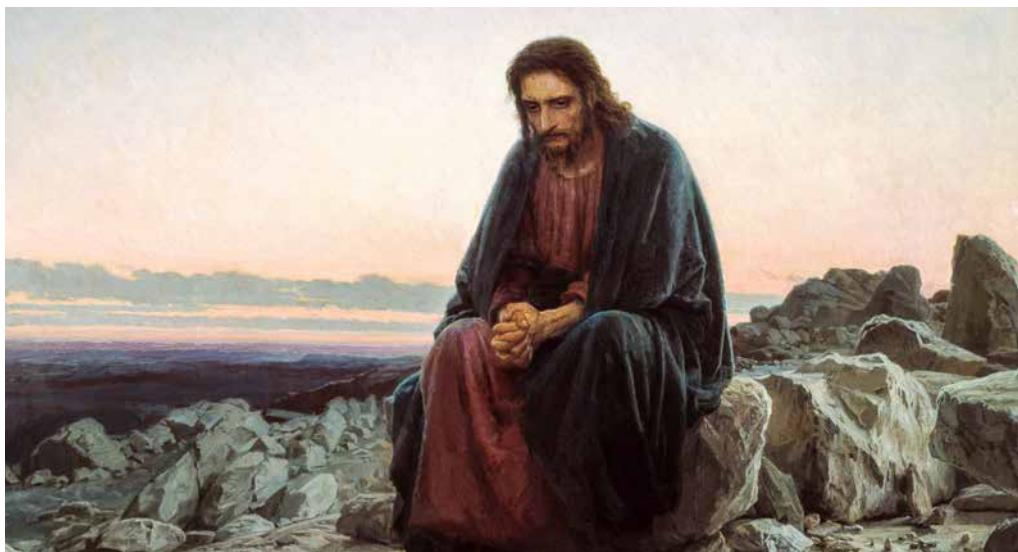
This will not be ours without some degree of sacrifice and discipline which fasting teaches us. Fasting reminds us of the highest good there is which is God himself and to choose him and his ways above all things.

Therefore, fasting is always joined to an internal conversion of the heart that conforms itself more and more to the heart of Jesus - to his way of thinking, acting, loving and to his very nature. The end point of this process of conversion is worship where faith in Christ leads to

loving him which leads to adoring him and worshipping him as our Lord and God. This is what the first reading is about when it talks of '*bowing down in the sight of the Lord your God*' and in the Gospel where Jesus refuses to bow down and worship Satan to worship God alone.

Friends, we change when our habits change. Fasting, especially during Lent, is a good habit when we do it for the right reasons: to do with less so others can do with more as we unite ourselves closer to God and his ways so that He becomes our master and not our desires.

Fr Billy Swan is a priest of the Ferns Diocese serving at the Dicastery for Clergy at the Vatican.





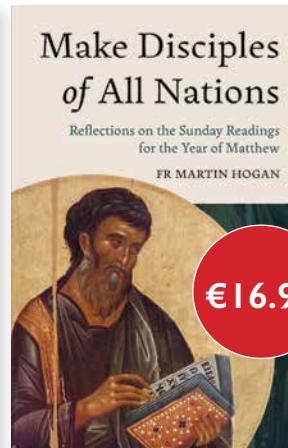
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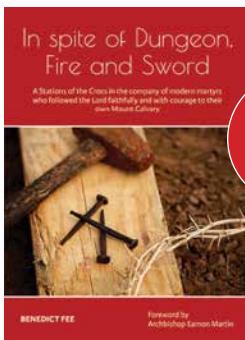


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In spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword, meditations on the Way of the Cross, reflecting on the 'martyrs of our times' by Benedict Fee.

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)*, it's not too late!!



€12.99

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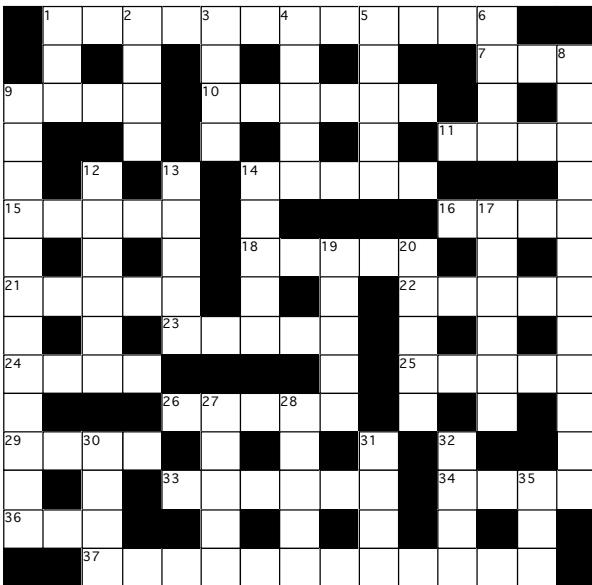
FEBRUARY CROSSWORD

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

Enjoy!

January Solution

Across 1 Nobel Prize, 6 Scab, 10 Tenon, 11 In the pink, 12 Scarlet, 15 Laden, 17 Heat, 18 Ilex, 19 Hopes, 21 Chantry, 23 Hiker, 24 Spud, 25 Aide, 26 Noddy, 28 Rashers, 33 Raconteur, 34 Place, 35 Desk, 36 Gridlocked.
Down 1 Note, 2 Bank clerk, 3 Lunar, 4 Rhine, 5 Zeta, 7 Child, 8 Baking soda, 9 Wealthy, 13 Lech, 14 Thunder, 16 Six hundred, 20 Paperback, 21 Crayons, 22 Ribs, 27 Ducks, 29 Aired, 30 Hippo, 31 Deer, 32 Mend.



ACROSS

- 1 More than one person can access the money in this bank facility (5,7)
- 7 Unconscious (3)
- 9 Boast (4)
- 10 Suitable for tillage (6)
- 11 Leaping insect (4)
- 14 Attempt to learn (5)
- 15 'Ink' for a printer (5)
- 16 A little kiss (4)
- 18 Moves with bounding steps (5)
- 21 Foe (5)
- 22 Mistaken (5)
- 23 Pacific island country, capital Apia (5)
- 24 In physics, charged particles (4)
- 25 Desert in Israel (5)
- 26 Adhere (5)
- 29 Mislaid (4)
- 33 Burning fiercely (6)
- 34 Electrical connection (4)
- 36 Small (3)
- 37 Relating to a city or city life (12)

DOWN

- 1 Jam container (3)
- 2 Character in "Othello" (4)
- 3 Town in Galway (4)
- 4 Map, graph (5)
- 5 Leered (5)
- 6 Work strenuously (4)
- 8 American celebration on the last Thursday in November (12)
- 9 One's sister's husband, perhaps (7-2-3)
- 12 A hospital's resident surgeon (6)
- 13 Salvers (5)
- 14 Scene of America's infamous witch trials (5)
- 17 Ample, sufficient (6)
- 19 Wooden board (5)
- 20 Pigs (5)
- 27 Vegetable such as a potato (5)
- 28 Muscular injury (5)
- 30 Appear (4)
- 31 A chime (4)
- 32 Expectorate (4)
- 35 Container for ashes (3)

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.



“I pray that my marriage improves and that peace returns to what was once a happy home.”

“That Geraldine has the strength to forgive and that Christ guides her through it.”

“I pray that the saints intercede to help my son quit drugs.”

“I pray for the small Catholic community in Gaza. I pray that their faith sustains them throughout this terrible ordeal.”

“That Ireland returns to the light of the Gospel, especially young people who I think are struggling without it in their lives.”

“For priests who might struggle with depression. May God grant them the strength to overcome it.”

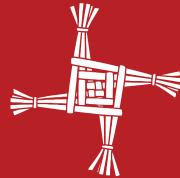
“I pray that more Catholics pray the rosary in Ireland every night in 2026.”

“For those who feel distant from Christ. I pray that they trust in his love and providence and know that he never fails.”

Please send your intentions, in strictest confidence, to prayers@acnireland.org or write to 151, St Mobhi Road, Dublin 9 marking your envelope ‘*petitions*’.



Aid to the
Church in Need
ACN IRELAND



Month of the Holy Family



O Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary,
bless our family.

Graciously inspire in us the unity, peace, and
mutual love that You found in Your own
family in the little town of Nazareth.

AMEN

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