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Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN CANADA



Nuns Everyday heroines



May their example inspire us!

Dear readers,

You do so much good in the world, and for that I would like to thank you!

In this first 2024 edition of the *Magazine*, you'll be able to see that the work of Sisters and their resilience are at the root of great stories. However, without your support, the best will in the world would never amount to all the good that they do.

Many Sisters in the Church carry out their work anonymously — without ever being seen or recognized. Of course, though their choice may have been made freely and responsibly, there are certainly times when the cross seems so heavy that they may be tempted to despair.

In these moments of darkness, knowing that there is a whole community of solidarity formed by benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need, like yourselves, is a great source of comfort. You form an informed, prayerful and active community that they need so much.

Jesus conquered death and, with Him, we enter into the light of Easter morning and dare to believe that a better world is possible. Sisters are our heroes! They have no armour or swords to fight the hatred and violence of the world. Our heroines work, pray and praise the greatness of God in the little things of everyday life.

May their example inspire us!

Happy spring.

Marie-Claude Lalonde
National Director



A FEW PROJECTS WE SUPPORTED IN 2023

ASIA

- Emergency relief for the displaced and people affected by the clashes in the state of Manipur, **India**.
- Existence helps for 55 religious houses and 40 catechists in the diocese of Chilaw, **Sri Lanka**.
- Training young Christian graduates in higher education to obtain better jobs and improve their living conditions over the long term, **Pakistan, Lahore**.

AMERICA

- Production of popular biblical catechetical programs and strengthening of the network of broadcasters in marginalized areas of Argentina, 2023, **Argentina**.
- Formation of 27 seminarians in three of the four stages of initial formation: 5 in preparation, 6 in discipleship and 16 in configuration at the Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio, Havana, 2023-2024, **Cuba**.

AFRICA

- Construction of a shed for mass celebrations, Jésus Bon Pasteur parish in Vindoulou, **Congo**.
- Solar photovoltaic system for the bishop's residence and general services of the Diocese of Dori, **Burkina Faso**.

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It doesn't cost a thing, but it helps a great deal!

Cover page: Sister Lucia and an alpaca at the *Mary of Nazareth* farm, run by nuns. Located at an altitude of 3811 meters, the center offers a home for teenagers experiencing family difficulties.

Texts: ACN International and Mario Bard. **Revision and translation:** Julie Bourbeau, Translation Services and Paul Charland.
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Who Looks after Trauma Victims?

Many Sisters live in areas of conflict and war, or in societies where violence is part of everyday life.

In Cameroon, the Sisters of Ste. Anne, a congregation founded in Italy in the 19th century, are educating and supporting the country's disadvantaged children and teenagers. Their house of formation is located near the town of Bamenda, just two kilometres from an area where there are regular attacks. "There is an atmosphere of fear," says Sister Pamela Bongben, who runs the house.

In 2021, three postulants, five novices and 37 young Sisters who have taken their temporary vows have been trained in the Order's house. "They are traumatized by the violence they experience up close and by the constant fear. So, during a two-week workshop, they have to learn how to deal with their experiences and cope with the situation without suffering further damage. The aim is to develop new confidence and overcome the ever-present fear." Untreated trauma can lead to a serious existential crisis, which can eventually lead them to renounce their vocation.

This training is not offered free of charge, nor is the purchase of teaching materials, travel expenses, etc. The religious community, which helps the most disadvantaged, is itself poor and unable to raise these funds. We supported this training, just as — in many countries — we also help where consecrated persons and pastoral workers are confronted with or are even victims of violence in their society.

Training even in Montréal!

"In Montréal, we have been welcoming priests, Brothers and Sisters every year for over 20 years, who come here to learn how to treat traumas or heal their own," explains Marie-Claude Lalonde, National Director of ACN Canada. "We work mainly with the Montreal Institute for Integral Human Formation (*l'Institut de formation humaine intégrale de Montréal*) where real miracles happen, enabling those who are trained and return home to be bearers of hope as well as on the path to healing their own traumas."

Thank you for showing your solidarity so that, in this world where violence is so great, those living alongside it receive the care that is equal to the love they give to build the Kingdom of God.



You Support the Hope of Migrants

Theirs is very often the only real smile a migrant will receive on their long journey to a land of asylum. The Sisters who receive subsistence aid and distribute emergency aid — food, medicine, clothing — are examples of pure generosity, of total giving, like the Good Samaritan in the Gospel.

Every year, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) receives stories of hundreds of Sisters from around the world who play a vital role in the lives of the poorest of the poor: migrants. Imagine having to leave as a result of threats from militias because of your religion. Or, being forced to flee because drug gangs threaten your family. Not to mention those who are victims of climate change, as their land becomes uncultivable.

On the roads of the Americas, Haitians and Ecuadorians, among others, transit through Colombia. Three communities of Sisters take turns on the former tourist beach of Necoclí, in the Colombian Caribbean. In May 2023, ACN followed them for a few days and, though observing their



distress, also witnessed the extent of the hope brought by their work. Here is an extract from the article written on the subject:

The face of Sister Rosa Cecilia Maldonado, a Dominican Sister of Charity of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, is perhaps the last reminder of mercy and love that the migrants will take with them when they board the dock for Panama.

From Monday to Wednesday, Sister Rosa Cecilia distributes food to the migrants and goes to the docks to pray with them and recite verses from the Bible to encourage them on their perilous journey, knowing that many risk dying on the way.

"One morning I went down to the dock and met two large groups of Ecuadorians and Indigenous people. I went to greet them, prayed with them, they applauded and said they needed all the prayers they could get. This reaction also strengthens our spiritual and consecrated life. The migrants are very grateful," explained Sister Rosa Cecilia. "Talking to migrants who were helping to prepare a hot meal, some of them told us that they had hope because God is above everything. Their example constantly catechizes us," Sister Rosa Cecilia pointed out.



This missionary work leaves a lasting impression on the migrants, to the extent that many of them remain in contact with the Sisters later on. If these links endure, it is perhaps because through these women of the Church, migrants experience the merciful face of God.

Dear reader, this hope is possible thanks to your love and support. Thank you for supporting the hope of migrants!

A great way to support our projects is through a planned giving.
Go to <https://acn-canada.org/planned-giving/>
or call 1-800-585-6333, ext. 221.

You Bring Christ to the World!

Jharkhand is a little-known state in India. Yet it's a real little heaven on earth, where forests and wide rivers mingle with vast fields of crops. Not to mention the rugged terrain, with its monolith-like mountains that never cease to amaze travellers. The name of this state means Land of Forests. This still vibrant presence of nature and its preservation are impressive. This care for nature preservation may well stem from the animist spiritual traditions of the *Adivasi* people of the region, who teach that the tree is a sacred being.

In this state of 32 million, 26% of the inhabitants are Indigenous and are called *Tribals* or *Adivasi*. From the end of the 19th century, members of these nations were moved by Christ's message of love and, above all, by the example of service given by members of the Catholic Church. On July 26, 1897, the feast of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, four young *Adivasi* women founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Ste. Anne. They put themselves at the service of their sisters and brothers, *who were oppressed, exploited and deceived by landowners and moneylenders, and forced to work without pay*, according to the congregation's website.

One hundred and twenty-six years later, this mission of educating and accompanying the youngest among

the tribals continues with a love and selflessness worthy of the Gospel. Sister Prabha Xalxo, novice mistress, explains: "Our origins help us to understand people better. Our way of life is very simple and unadorned. So we can easily live with everyone. We share people's joys and sorrows, their happiness, unhappiness and pain, and we accompany them. Our aim is to lead them to Christ."

"It is thanks to the great grace of God and the sacrifice of our founders that our congregation bears witness to Christ today," she told Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). "The first Sisters climbed steep mountains barefoot and crossed valleys, dense jungles and forests, confronting wild animals and having to cross rivers. Above all, through education, they helped children, young people and women to strengthen their lives of faith," explained Sister Prabha. Even today, the Sisters support all people without distinction.

This year, donations in the amount of \$36,540 will help train 60 young women who want to devote themselves body and soul, to the service of God and the poor. It's your support that enables them to lead people to Christ: Thank you!

Living the Gospel in the Heart of Hell!

Sister Gloria Cecilia Narváez is a survivor. It is a great joy for Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) to count her among its friends.

She is a Colombian missionary and Franciscan Sister of Mary Immaculate who worked in Mali, where she was abducted on February 7, 2017, then freed on October 9, 2021. A few weeks later, while recovering in Colombia, she met with ACN. She told us that she saw her time in captivity, during which she suffered very serious abuse, as "an opportunity that God gave me to examine my life, my response to Him... a kind of exodus."

An extraordinary response, considering the extreme violence of her abduction and the assaults that followed. Her source of inspiration? Francis of Assisi. Even when she was mistreated, she remembered the Saint: "Consider it a grace," she kept telling herself.

In the preface she agreed to write for ACN's *Report on Religious Freedom* in 2023, she denounced her loss of religious freedom, this persecution suffered during these more than four years of captivity. In the same breath, she wrote: "Yet, despite these adverse circumstances, the bad weather, the daily abuse, the humiliations, the deprivation of food and water, I have never— not once — failed to thank God for allowing me to wake up and be alive in the midst of all these difficulties and dangers: How could I fail to praise You, bless You and thank You, my God? For You have filled me with peace in the face of insults and abuse!"

She confided: "I also prayed — and I continue to pray — for my abductors. Even when I was struck without cause, or simply because I was reciting my prayers, I would say to myself: "My God, it is difficult to be chained and hit, but I am living through this moment as You present it to me..." And, in spite of it all, I would not want for any of these [...] abductors to be harmed."



The spirit of human brotherhood that she demonstrates is certainly woven not only from the example of Francis of Assisi but also from the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter five, Jesus says: "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Verses 44 and 45.)

What a wonderful invitation to open our hearts to God's great love for humanity! Moreover, Sisters supported by ACN are committed, throughout the world, to living out this word of God in their communities. Thank you for showing solidarity with them!

Thank you!



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