



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN CANADA

MIRROR



*The Cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem,
where our Redeemer was born.*

Dear Friends,

“Let us go to Bethlehem!” In this season of Advent, I would like to extend this invitation from the shepherds to you (Lk. 2:15). Advent is like a door of hope that opens at Christmas, like a haven of peace where we can return home.

I feel that this is a special gift because, these days, there are many grievous things weighing on our hearts. From Burkina Faso, we frequently receive reports of terrible massacres of Christians and bloody persecutions. In Lebanon, where I only recently gave a retreat for our local coworkers, massive retaliatory strikes are inflicting profound suffering and prompting floods of refugees. In Ukraine, the war continues to cause many people to endure unspeakable suffering day after day—and now they have a harsh winter before them.

These conflicts threaten to escalate and pose great dangers, far beyond the regions concerned. In addition, there are the smaller wars, within families, within

society, and in the workplace. All these troubles can be too hard and too heavy a burden for one poor heart to bear.

So: Let us set out and, with all these cares we carry in our hearts, make our way to Bethlehem! To Him, the God made Man, to whom, we are well assured, “all authority in heaven and on



“Firm in faith, let us entrust the entire world, so greatly in need of redemption, to its Saviour and Redeemer.”

earth has been given” (Mt. 28:18). It matters how and with what mindset we approach the manger. Let us do so with unshakable trust that He can do all things and can—and will—lead this blighted creation to its sure fulfilment. And so, firm in faith and filled with joy and gratitude, let us entrust the entire world, so greatly in need of redemption, to its Saviour and Redeemer.

There is another thought I would like to share with you on the way to Bethlehem:

Although the Incarnate Son of God is infinitely and ineffably noble, holy, eternal, and almighty, He nevertheless comes to us in the manger as a little child. A child who smiles at us, reaches out his arms to us, and wishes only to be embraced by us and to be with us. This child has no ulterior motive, sets no conditions, and asks nothing of us. He merely wishes to give Himself to us—the Christ Child in the manger, our God, the Saviour of the whole world.

Let us set out and go to Jesus in Bethlehem. United with you in heart and in prayer as we do so, I wish you all a living, redemptive, and joyful encounter with the Child Jesus in the manger.

Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Your gift assures their survival



Two million people have been forced to flee their homes. ACN has stepped up its help!

The apocryphal gospels contain a story of a date palm, bending low over the exhausted Holy Family, in the desert on the flight into Egypt, in order to refresh them with its fruits.

The story of refugees fleeing their cruel persecutors continues to this day. In **Burkina Faso** alone, some two million people have been forced from their homes by jihadist terrorists. Thousands of Christian families have had to flee, with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They still suffer hunger, thirst, and exhaustion, have no access to medical care, and have no idea how, or if, they will even survive the coming day.

“The children spend the whole time crying,” says one of the mothers, 35-year-old Augustina. Most of the refugees have sought shelter in parishes in safer areas of

the country. But how on earth is the Church going to cope with such a flood of refugees in these dirt-poor local communities?

It would take thousands of date palms to stoop down and feed them—and who would expect a miracle like that in the 21st century?

No, today, it is our hearts that must lean with compassion over these people who, like Mary, Joseph, and the Christ Child, have been forced to flee their homes. Perhaps you could offer them a gift this Christmas, a gift that could even save their lives?

Will you help us to repeat this “miracle of the date palm” for these people today?

For \$130
You can save a family from starvation for a month.

For \$40
You can save a small child from malnutrition for a full month.

For \$120
You can enable a boy or girl to attend school for half a year, giving him or her hope for a better future.

Good shepherds for the Church in Peru!

Priests are urgently needed in Peru, whether in the rapidly growing urban areas, the Amazon rainforest, or the high mountains of the Andes.



Three young Peruvians being ordained as deacons.

Wherever there is a shortage of priests, sectarian groups fill the void. This is why one of our chief priorities in Peru is training tomorrow’s priests, and, thanks to your help, we are currently supporting no fewer than 25 seminaries in this country.

This includes the seminary in Puno Diocese, which we have been supporting now for 20 years. This year, the seminary shared the good news that three young

men have been ordained to the diaconate and are now looking forward to their ordination as priests.

Currently, there are 10 young men in formation here. They will not have an easy task as priests. Puno is high in the Andes, at an altitude of just over 12,500 feet. The climate is harsh and the average temperature is below 10°C. It never gets really warm. These future priests could easily find a more comfortable life elsewhere, but they want to be true shepherds for their people.

For \$125, you can support the training of a seminarian for a full month. Will you help the Church in Peru with the gift of a “good shepherd”?



Help the traumatized people

“The mysteries of Christianity are an indivisible whole. Thus, the road from Bethlehem leads inexorably to Golgotha, from the cradle to the Cross. The shadow of the Cross falls on the radiance that shines from the manger.” So wrote the saint and martyr Edith Stein. Now the Christians in Burkina Faso are living this reality.

“We live in constant terror,” says Father Bertin Namboho. “Everyone knows somebody who has been kidnapped or murdered. The terrorists in Burkina Faso are as dangerous as Boko Haram was in Nigeria. When you leave in the morning, you can’t be sure you will be alive by evening.” His brother priest, Father Jean-Pierre Keita, has already been abducted. “When they took me into the forest, they searched my bag and found priestly objects such as an alb, a stole, and sacred vessels. I didn’t lie about being a priest ... They released me after a few hours.” But his parish was ransacked and everything was destroyed, including the altar, the tabernacle, and every religious object. The people fled. Father Jean-Pierre continues:

“I have one memory that will never fade: the terrorists broke into the clinic and removed the patients’ IV tubes, including from a baby who I was about to baptize. They removed his tubes, and he died. As a pastor of souls, going through a situation like this just makes your heart bleed.”

Despite this, their faith has grown stronger, reports Bishop Justin Kientega of Ouahigouya. “Many of the faithful simply refuse to remove the crucifixes they are wearing. They are willing to die. Already, there are over 100 requests for the beatification of martyrs, waiting to be studied by the Bishops’ Conference.” One particularly urgent issue for the Church right now is how to help those

who have been severely traumatized, because goodwill and kind words on their own are not enough to help children who have been forced to witness their parents having their throats cut, or women who have been raped by the terrorists, or families that have lost everything. Some of them have even lost the power of speech, as a result of the trauma they have experienced.

Special training is needed for those trying to help these people, so we are planning to give \$57,600 to fund a six-day course in trauma counselling for some 360 priests, religious, and catechists.



Despite the danger, God is at the heart of their lives.



“O Lord, how many are my foes! But thou, O Lord, art a shield about me.” (Psalm 3)

To watch videos demonstrating your solidarity with Burkina Faso and to make a donation online, please visit:
<https://acn-canada.org/emergency-burkina-faso/>



Pilgrims of Hope!

On December 24th this year, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica to formally mark the start of the Holy Year 2025, on the theme of *Pilgrims of Hope*.

It was 725 years ago when a Holy Year or Jubilee was proclaimed for the first time by a pope. This is a special gift of grace for the entire Church. Following the difficult years of the pandemic, the escalating violence in the world, and so many other crises, Pope Francis wants to restore "a climate of hope and trust." He invites us in particular to frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation. At the same time, every one of the faithful is called to be, themselves, a "sign of hope" for others, and especially for those who are suffering.



Bringing hope to others is also part of our charity's mission. Recently, a priest in India wrote to us, saying, "Your help is like a beacon of hope." So, together with you and with the whole Church, we want to make this Jubilee Year a true "Pilgrimage of Hope."



May Jesus, the newborn King, bless you in 2025!



Regina Lynch
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

As the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th approaches, many of us will be preparing to set up our Christmas mangers, which remind us that Jesus was born under very humble circumstances in Bethlehem. The beautiful tradition of recreating the Nativity scene is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, who was inspired by a visit to the Holy Land in the early 13th century.

My own Christmas manger was made by Christians living in Bethlehem, who carve mangers, rosaries, etc., out of olivewood as a means of earning a living. I bought my Nativity scene when I went there on a visit a few years ago and met some of the families who do this work. I do not know how many of them remain in Bethlehem today. Sadly, many of the Christians have left this birthplace of Our Lord in search of a better life for their families. They are caught between two warring parties and sometimes become scapegoats in a never-ending conflict.

As we pray before the manger during this Advent and Christmas season, I commend all persecuted and suffering Christians to your prayers, and particularly those living in the Holy Land. Thank you for your endless support for them and for ACN.

Regina Lynch

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