

Breaking down barriers

Reconciliation in the Holy Land



Working with young Christians to build a better future in the lands of the Bible.

Pope Francis' long-awaited visit to the Holy Land represents a crucial milestone in the journey to bring healing and hope to a region where Christianity is on the verge of disappearing.

The Holy Father's priority for the trip is advancing reconciliation with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and his visit commemorates the historic 1964 meeting of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem – a turning point in ecumenical relations after more than 900 years of division.

50 years after the heads of these historic Churches met, Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew once more renew the commitment to break down the walls that separate us, meeting in Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre – where Our Lord rose from the dead.

In this report, Aid to the Church in Need highlights some of the projects bringing people closer together in the lands where Jesus and the Apostles lived and taught.

In the Palestinian Territories, summer camps for Catholic and Orthodox youth are promoting unity among members of these two ancient Christian traditions

– and in Lebanon the Churches are working together to help refugees fleeing Syria.

ACN is also helping overcome the divisions that result from misunderstanding between different religious and ethnic groups.

Such initiatives chime with the words Pope Francis wrote to Patriarch Bartholomew in November 2013: **“Let us be unceasing in our prayer to the all-powerful and merciful God for peace in [the Holy Land], and let us continue to work for reconciliation and the just recognition of peoples' rights.”** ●

Helping the suffering Church today



Aid to the Church in Need

Fr Elias in front of the new oratory (right) on the shores of Lake Galilee which was built with help from ACN.

Fr Elias smiled warmly as he welcomed ACN to the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and the Fishes, which marks the site of Jesus's miracle.

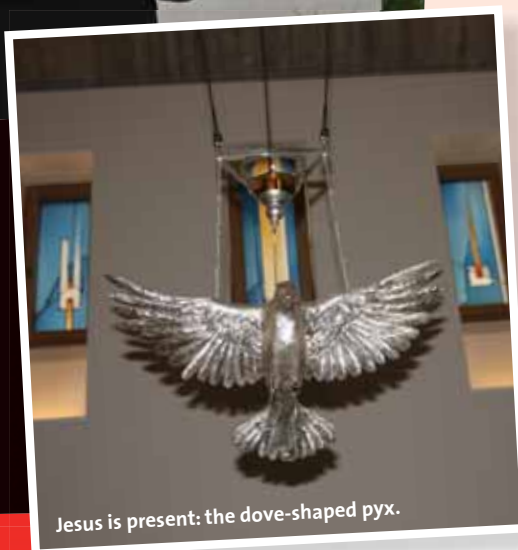
The German priest, the Prior of the Benedictine community living there, described their ongoing work with the region's youth from both Israel and the Palestinian Territories – particularly those with disabilities.

An important focal point for their activities with young people is the new oratory which ACN helped to build.

"We are very thankful to the benefactors to Aid to the Church in Need in the UK for their support and we keep you in our prayers," said Fr Elias.

The Benedictines turned to ACN for help with an earthquake-proof oratory after seismic tremors left their old monastery uninhabitable.

Broken bread for a broken world



Jesus is present: the dove-shaped pyx.

Seeds of unity

Catholic-run youth camps in the Bethlehem area are bringing Catholic and Orthodox students closer together.

Fr Iyad Twal, parish priest of Beit Sahour, told ACN: "As a Catholic Church we never limited our pastoral work to Catholics – it's just Christians."

Every summer 500 youngsters from age eight upwards attend the camps.

Helping the young people to live out their Faith, activities include

catechesis, helping elderly people and various sports. All this helps to "provide them with an inward joy that comes from serving and glorifying God".

The future of the Christian communities in the region depends on them being able to live and work together – and these camps are a good place to start building bridges.

According to Fr Twal, the meeting of the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch could signal a new era in ecumenical relations: "We hope that it might bring us together in a very practical way". ●



Building bridges

Aid to the Church in Need is supporting a number of different projects designed to encourage reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups:

- The Jerusalem Centre for Jewish Christian Relations, which runs courses about Christianity for teachers, military personnel and other opinion formers in Israel, is helping to break down misconceptions.
- The Al Lika' Centre promoting dialogue between Muslim and Christian communities and organising important inter-faith conferences.
- A pastoral centre in Tel Aviv, Israel to spiritually support Catholic migrant workers from the Philippines, India, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.
- The new library for Bethlehem University – where the Christian Brothers provide Higher Education for Christian and Muslim students alike – after the old one was destroyed by shelling. ●

Fr Elias stressed that the new chapel is “not just for the Catholic community but also for ecumenical and interfaith work” and related how on one occasion handicapped Jewish youngsters were deeply moved to hear psalms chanted there.

Stressing the importance of the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory, he pointed out a pyx in the shape of a Dove hanging over the altar and explained its significance.

Fr Elias said: “The dove is shown in the process of coming down – so the Holy Spirit descends on the bread and wine to make them the Body and Blood.”

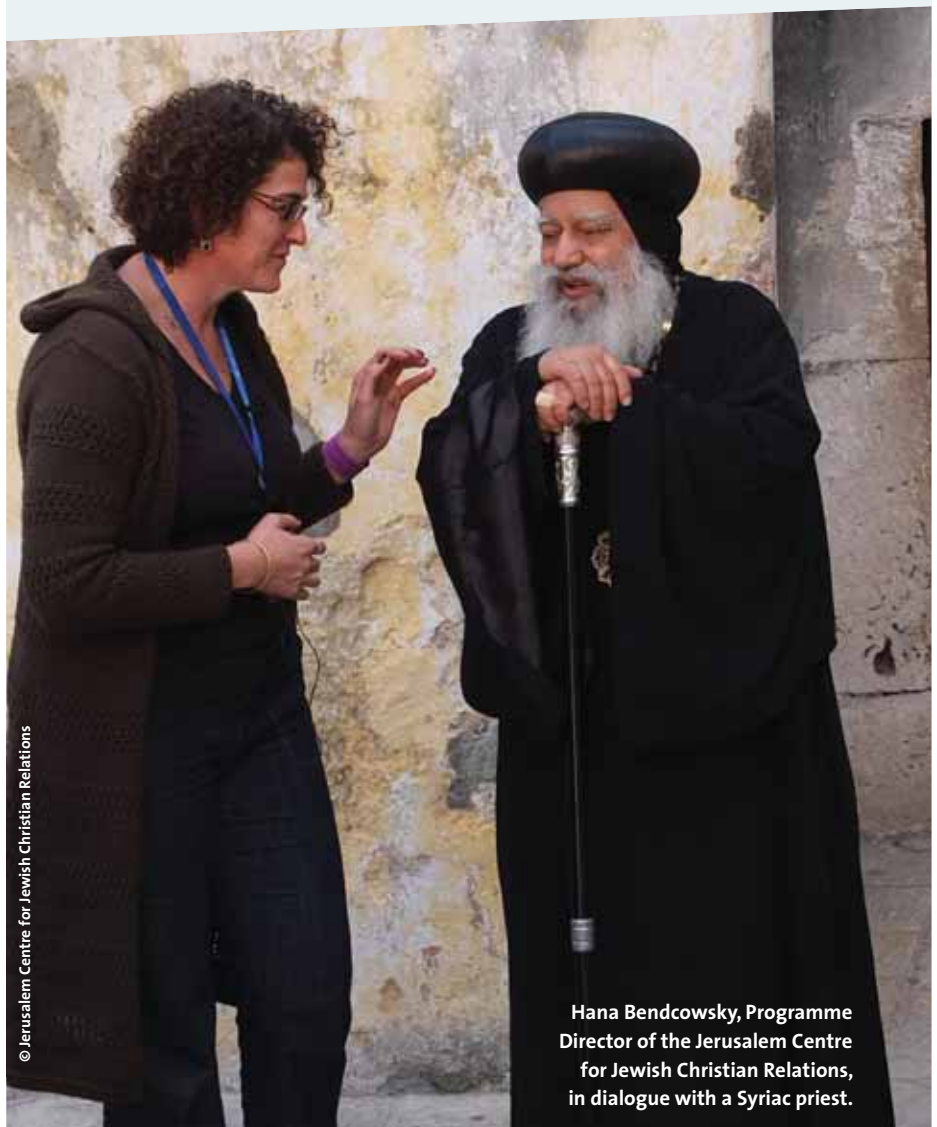
Pope Francis has taught that “the reference to the Eucharist is clear” in Our Lord’s multiplication of the loaves and fishes, so it is fitting to find the Blessed Sacrament adored at the site of the miracle.

The Holy Father also made links between Holy Communion and living out our Faith: “In the Eucharist the Lord makes us walk on his road, that of service, of sharing, of giving”.

Thank you for sharing and giving to the work of the Benedictines of the shores of Lake Galilee. ●



Learning about Faith through fun.



© Jerusalem Centre for Jewish Christian Relations

Hana Bendcowsky, Programme Director of the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish Christian Relations, in dialogue with a Syriac priest.

Young refugees who fled Syria – the Churches are working together to provide aid.



Metropolitan Yostinos Boulos Safar of Zahlé.

Working together to help refugees

Metropolitan Boulos of the Syriac Orthodox Church welcomed the ACN team visiting Lebanon and described how Orthodox Christians work closely with Catholics providing for Christian refugees from Syria.

“We are working together for the whole Church community,” the archbishop said.

Christians from across the denominational divide are providing assistance for Christian refugee families who cannot get aid from the UN.

“The UN don’t really help Christian families, they are cast out from their help.”

Christian families were too afraid to register at the border – fearing reprisal attacks on their families back in Syria – the Churches worked hard with the UN to get the Christians to register for aid.

But almost as soon as Christians started registering, the UN withdrew help for those not living in the camps.

Metropolitan Boulos said: “Many refugee families were cancelled from the list of help, as they were not fit for the standard of the UN.”

The Churches stepped in to help and are the sole source of help for Christian families who fled persecution, conflict and war.

Thanks to your support, ACN is helping with the ongoing outreach to Christian refugees in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley. ●

Called by the Lord

Akram from Jordan worked for a bank for three years before studying for the priesthood after finally responding to the call of Christ.

He told ACN about his passion for Jesus: “I was a salesman before working at the bank, and when you’re a salesman you sell anything, but now I’m selling something I actually believe in – I’m selling God.”

Having had the first stirrings of a vocation when he was 15, Akram was

advised by his parents to finish his studies first and he drifted away from the Church after secondary school.

But his burning desire to serve Jesus came back when he was a banker and now he trains at Beit Jala Seminary, just outside Bethlehem, with seminarians from across the region.

Training together builds bridges between different nationalities and cultures – and all students are united in their desire to follow Jesus.

“I’m here because I think it’s God’s will – I want to follow God’s will not my



Akram – responding to God’s call.

own – and being here I’m more and more sure this is my vocation.”

ACN is providing ongoing support for the seminary to ensure that more young men like Akram will be able to respond to the call of God. ●

