



Lebanon: The family that prays together, stays together.

Dear Friends,

Over many years, whether as a priest and pastor or as the rector of a seminary, my esteem for marriage and family has continued to grow. I have frequently been able to see how families shape us as human beings. What an irreplaceable gift it is to grow up in a truly faith-filled, and joy-filled family atmosphere! Families lay the foundations for our most fundamental human qualities and abilities, our self-understanding and our relationship with God, which are built upon throughout our lives. Within the family the virtues that make us capable of living, loving and being lovable can be nurtured. There is no doubt that in every culture, “marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values”. (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, No 1)

On the other hand I have often seen the profound consequences of failed marriages and broken families: violence, coercion, exhaustion, bitterness – often leaving deep wounds and trauma, burdening children with anxiety or

heartbreak – these things have so often been the subject of my pastoral work.

Sister Lucy, the surviving seer of Fatima, once wrote in a letter to Cardinal Carlo Caffarra: “The final battle between the Lord and the kingdom of Satan will be over marriage and the family. Have no fear; everyone who works for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be attacked and vilified in every conceivable way, because this is the decisive issue.”



“So much suffering is healed and relieved within families.”

We are now in the middle of this battle: whether it is through gender ideology, which corrodes our social order, or the perversely reductionist way of looking on children as an expensive commodity and a burden – or indeed the wars, which inflict terrible trauma and brutalise people, often overwhelming couples and families. It is also reflected in the fact that only few people in the Church still have the courage to defend marriage and the family

and uncompromisingly proclaim the Church’s teachings in this area, or bear witness to the grace that is integral to the sacrament of matrimony.

How often have I seen how sound catechesis on marriage and the family, on the sacraments and prayer, strengthens marriages and families and sometimes even saves them. It can heal wounds, and make people more loving and more lovable. And at ACN we also see how much suffering is healed and relieved within families. Often the family seems to be the only institution where love can tangibly overcome suffering.

In gratitude to married couples, to mothers and fathers, for their faithfulness and hard work, I ask you all to pray with me at this time for married couples and families.

Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



A way out of hopelessness

Again and again, despairing couples and families turn to the Catholic Family Counselling Centre in Zouq Mousbeh, in Lebanon. Here they receive sensitive and loving support, and miracles often result...

“Please help my daughter!” – This was the desperate plea of the mother of 24-year-old Lama (not her real name) when she came to the centre. For over five years this young woman had been intimidated by a man who abused her and sexually exploited her. She had already attempted suicide a number of times. Somehow she still believed that it was her fate to marry him. It was some time before the young woman was able to open up. Rita El Khoury, one of the counsellors at the centre, explains how “for five months we kept telling her how much God loved her and how beautiful she was in His eyes. Finally, she broke free of the man and enrolled on a course for a Masters degree, and now she is able to get on confidently with her life.”

The centre was also able to help a seven-year-old boy whose parents had separated and quarrelled incessantly. His father, with whom he was living, had so turned him against his mother that he would scream and cry at the very sight of her. By speaking with both parents, the counsellors at the Family Centre were able to persuade the father that he was causing great psychological harm to his child, damage that would endure into his adult life. The father recognised his mistake and



Patriarch Béchara Boutros Rai (back, centre) opening the Family Centre.



Helping to see things in a new light.



Listening to each other and finding solutions together.

encouraged his son to resume contact with his mother and love her. His mother wept with joy and clutched her child to her heart, as he kept telling her “I love you very much, Mummy!”

One father, Toni Ibrahim, had a different problem: he was jeopardising his marriage by having a string of affairs. But he simply could not resist temptation. His

wife couldn’t bear the situation any longer and sought help. Thanks to counselling, Mr Ibrahim found faith and at last changed his life. He tells how “I finally succeeded in banishing the evil spirit within me, which was destroying my life, and in a long confession I begged God to forgive me and help me save my family. God embraced me like the prodigal son, forgave me, clothed me in a new garment, and transformed me into a totally new person, a believer who now never misses daily Mass. Now heaven has granted us a fourth child, to strengthen and bring new beauty to our united and happy family.”

Given the desperate situation in Lebanon, more and more families are being plunged into crisis: many can see no way out.

We are planning to support the Family Centre in Zouq Mousbeh with €72,000, so that more families can find a way out of their despair. Will you help more families find happiness again?



Happy again! The Ibrahim family.



Strength in unity.



Little Jérôme, born for heaven

Kinga von Schierstaedt, from ACN's Africa project team, recently visited South Sudan.



Kinga von Schierstaedt with priests and faithful, in Terekeka.

How would you describe the situation in the country?

South Sudan is a desperately poor country, torn apart by tribal conflict. The civil war is now officially over, but there is a fragile peace. The people still live in great fear, ready to flee at the sound of a bang. The Catholic Church is in the best position to work for peace, as Catholics are not first and foremost members of a particular tribal group, but rather faithful members of the one universal Church.

What are the biggest challenges facing families?

A large section of the population have been fleeing the violence for decades now. These people are unable to settle anywhere, or build up a proper family life.

Besides, there are also cultural factors at play. The largest ethnic group in South Sudan are the Dinka, an overwhelmingly nomadic, pastoral people, who practise



Father Francis and Father Joseph are themselves refugees.

polygamy. The value of a woman is measured in cattle. If a family cannot afford the number of cattle demanded as the bride price for their son, they will sell one of their daughters in exchange for the cattle they need.

This custom causes great suffering, as we saw on our visit. There was a very young woman, who had been married off to a man who could have been her grandfather. Although she was already pregnant, she refused to eat, determined to starve herself to death. Her baby – a young boy – was born and taken in by the local religious sisters. He was baptised and given the name Jérôme. We were there when it happened. Two hours later, he died.

What does the Church mean to the people?

The Church is the first place they all turn to, in every need, and she is trying to bring a spark of hope – including, for example, in one of the dreadful refugee camps in Malakal, where vast numbers of people

have been subsisting since 2016, without seeing any improvement in their desperate situation. On seeing the “Happy New Year” sign at the entrance of the camp, it brought a lump to my throat. How could there possibly be any happiness here? But this is exactly where the bishop wants to send a priest.

What can we do for the Church in South Sudan?

The priests and religious are true shepherds to their suffering people. It is their vocation to bring people to holiness and so heal the deep wounds that this country has suffered. We want to support and strengthen them with our help, since they themselves often suffer burnout as a result of this never-ending crisis. And we also want to promote the family apostolate and support the training of future priests.

If we can help now and really focus our energies on the country, many things can change for the better.



The value of a woman is measured in cattle.

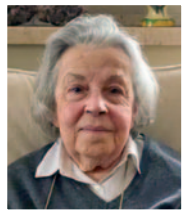


A tribute to our benefactors...

Every year, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, which this year fell on 7th June, we give thanks for our faithful benefactors, whose generous support never ceases to move us and fill us with gratitude.

One of these faithful supporters is 97-year-old Maria Antónia Cabral in Portugal. In order to help Christians in need, she produces holy pictures of the saints adorned with artistic decorations and sells them, giving all the proceeds to ACN.

Again and again we hear of such beautiful testimonies – filled with imagination and fuelled by love.



Dear benefactors, we could do nothing without you! May Our Lord bless and reward you all!

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Thank you for the Masses

Would you please personally thank the missionaries who said the Gregorian Masses in January. I was so touched and thankful to Jesus for these Masses, which mean so much to me. In 2023 I lost my eldest brother, and my mother five months later, and I had the Gregorian Masses offered for them both. May God bless you!

A benefactor in Australia

Our mission as Christians

Congratulations on the wonderful work you have been doing for so many years with such great commitment! I always read the Mirror with great interest and delight full of admiration for all the help you are bringing to those who are suffering or in dire need. United with you in prayer, in our mission as Christians.

A friend and benefactor in Belgium

Dialogue and hope

Father Kamil Samaan from Egypt visited our parish and spoke to us about the situation of the Christians in the land of the Nile. Although Christians in his country are discriminated against and abused in the media as “Kuffar”, or “unbelievers” he nevertheless pleaded for dialogue, radiated hope and impressed our young people. Thank you, ACN, for these moving encounters!

A benefactor in Switzerland

The first charity I go to

ACN is the first charity I go to when I want – and am able – to help. I want to thank you and all your wonderful staff for your work. May God bless ACN’s work abundantly, and may everything you do bring no end of joy!

A friend and benefactor in Germany



Regina Lynch

Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

I was very lucky to grow up in a Catholic family that could practise its faith freely and pass on a faith to me that had already been passed down through countless generations.

In many of our societies today we can no longer take this for granted. In the secularised world, there is often an indifference towards religion that makes it hard for parents to convince their children that going to Mass on Sunday is still one of the most rewarding activities that they can do.

In the countries where ACN provides help to the suffering Church, we see societies where religion is important and where the notion of family is still much valued. Yet, many of these families face enormous challenges. Some members of the family might be separated by war such as in Myanmar or Ukraine. Or some parents live with the continual threat of their daughters being kidnapped and forced into a marriage with a Muslim such as in Pakistan. Other families live as refugees in a foreign land in the same way that the Holy Family had to flee Herod shortly after Jesus’ birth.

What they all have in common, is a belief that God protects their family. Let them be an inspiration to us.

Regina Lynch

How to make your contribution to the Church in Need:

1. Go to our Head Office website: www.acninternational.org
2. Click the **DONATE** button
3. Either: Go to the National Office of *Aid to the Church in Need* in your country.
4. Or: Make an online donation (if you live in a country without an ACN National Office).



A C N

Responsible Publisher:
ACN International, Postfach 1209,
D-61452 Königstein

De licentia competentis
auctoritatis ecclesiasticae

www.acninternational.org