



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

## Dear Friends,

*“Transeamus usque Betlehem!”* – “Let us go to Bethlehem!” In this season of Advent, I would like to extend this invitation from the shepherds to you (cf. Luke 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.

And so: *“Transeamus usque Betlehem!”* 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,

And 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 – this Child in the manger, our God, the Saviour of the whole world.



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

to whom, we are well assured, “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given (Mt 28:18). It matters how and with what mindset we approach the manger. Let us do so with unshakeable 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: *“Transeamus usque Betlehem!”*

And so: *“Transeamus usque Betlehem!”* – 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



# Life-saving gifts



*Still celebrating Christmas – despite the suffering and violence.*

**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 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 21<sup>st</sup> century?

No, today it is our hearts that must bend in pity 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 palms” for these people today?**

**For €85**  
You can save a family from starvation for a month.

**For €25**  
You can save a small child from malnutrition for a full month.

**For €77**  
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, the sects fill the void. Which 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. There is good news from here, as three young men were ordained

to the diaconate this year 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 12,400 feet (3,800m). 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 €83 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”?**





# Gifts to bring warmth and hope

Writing in the fourth century, Saint John Chrysostom speaks movingly of the birth of the Redeemer. “What shall I say about this mystery? I see a worker, a hay manger, a Child in swaddling clothes, born of a Virgin, who is lacking in all the most basic necessities, with every indication of need, the whole burden of poverty. How could He, infinitely rich, become so poor for our sake that He now lies, without cradle or coverings, in a hard feeding trough?” This is the way in which the Christ Child has already shared in the poverty of countless numbers of people – including the children of the Middle East today.

Winter in **Syria** is bitterly cold. Yet even a simple pair of trousers, or a pullover, is now a luxury item that many families can no longer afford. And children quickly grow out of their clothes. Meanwhile, mothers weep silent tears and fathers feel ashamed that they cannot even earn enough to cover the most basic needs of their families. And prices continue to rise. Items of clothing cost more than some people earn in a month, so that they cannot even contemplate buying new clothes.



*Local craftspeople, and a host of volunteers, have spent months in preparatory work so that the children's wishes can become reality.*

This year Sister Annie Demerjian of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary is asking us, once again, for help to enable 25,000 children in various parts of Syria to feel God's love at Christmas by giving them a pair of trousers and a hoodie, and organising an unforgettable little Christmas party for them. The war started almost 14 years ago, and its effects continue to be felt. None of these children has ever celebrated the feast of the Nativity of Christ in a time of true peace. But you can bring joy to the eyes of one of these children and help lift a heavy load from the hearts of their parents.



*A Christmas to remember, with their own Nativity play.*

And in **Lebanon** too, the need is growing ever greater. But now it is intensified by fear and the spread of the conflict in the region. A sense of hopelessness is entering many hearts: families have become impoverished, even among what was once the middle class. Those who are able to are leaving the country, while others can only dream of doing so.

Here too clothes for children have become unaffordable for most parents. So the Sisters of Saint Joseph are also asking our help so that they can give presents of

essential clothing to some 11,000 children in various towns and villages at Christmas parties which they have organised. They have already asked the parents in advance what they most need. Sister Raymond Saade explains:

***“These gatherings are meant to give joy and hope to the children. We hope to be able to inspire them to believe in a better future. Every second of these celebrations will be filled with the spirit of Christmas and symbolise the hope and light that still shine, even in the darkest times.”***



*“Baby Jesus, we love you!”*

**For just €15**

**You can make a Christmas dream come true for a child in Syria or Lebanon.**





# Our Christmas wish: Peace!

Christians in **Ukraine** are celebrating their third Christmas in wartime. “Will the Christ Child bring us peace?”, they ask in trepidation. Meanwhile, religious sisters all over the country are working tirelessly to ease the people’s plight, for example in the diocese of Odessa-Simferopol in the south of the country, which has been severely affected by the war. And yet they never know if they will live to see the next day...

Sister Jonasza, of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth in Shornomorsk, recently lived through a rocket attack. “The explosion was so powerful that our whole house shook, and I covered in terror on the floor. Every one of these many incidents we have experienced leaves painful scars on the psyche, but we are still convinced that God is protecting us. We’ve learned to treasure the gift of life, infinitely, and we thank God with tears in our eyes for each new morning we are permitted to experience.”

In the midst of an ocean of need, the sisters witness how divine providence fills their empty hands. It often happens that, just when they have so many people needing help that they don’t know where to turn, a food parcel arrives out of the



*Praying for peace  
– even with the little ones.*



*Basic necessities – tangible signs of hope.*

blue. In fact the Benedictine Missionary Sisters in Mykolayiv have managed to keep a whole village supplied with basic necessities in this way. Sister Faustyna, their superior, remembers:

***“In return, the villagers wanted to know more about our Church and our vocation. It was a wonderful opportunity for evangelisation. We felt a bit like the apostles when Jesus multiplied the loaves for the hungry crowd.”***

The Sisters of Mercy in the vast port city of Odessa who, among other things, care for the many homeless people who somehow subsist in the cemeteries, on the edge of the rubbish tips or even in the city drains, are equally astonished at the magnitude of God’s mercy. “He heals people through His presence and our physical contact. We have witnessed how grave injuries, which should really be treated in



*Sister Faustyna, comforting a desperate man.*

hospital, are somehow healed. But these people are not admitted there and in reality such serious wounds as these should not simply heal in these conditions. It is a gift from God to be able to share in the joy of one of these homeless people and to see the hope in their eyes.” Today the sisters are helping people who never knew poverty before the war, but are now suffering bitter hardship.

All these sisters, and many others like them, will be welcoming the newborn Prince of Peace this Christmas, along with the poor and lonely and the refugees. And hoping, together with them, that He will bring them the gift of peace at last.

**The sisters want to be able to offer help and consolation not just at Christmas, but all year round: so we are helping women religious all over Ukraine by providing them with basic subsistence support, at the rate of €84 per sister each month. Will you help them bring a ray of light and hope to those who are despairing?**





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



## “Many of the faithful are willing to die”

**“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 are living in constant fear”, says Father Bertin Namboho. “All of us know people who have been abducted or murdered. The terrorists in Burkina Faso are just as dangerous as Boko Haram in Nigeria. We get up in the morning not knowing if we will still be alive by the evening.” His brother priest, Father Jean-Pierre Keita, has already been abducted. “After they had taken me into the forest, they searched through my pockets and found priestly items, like an alb, a stole and liturgical vessels. I refused to lie and told them that I was a priest. However, they let

me go soon after.” But his parish was ransacked and everything was destroyed, even including the altar, the Tabernacle and every religious object. The people fled. Father Jean-Pierre continues:

**“There was one incident I can never forget. The terrorists burst into our clinic and tore all the drips off the patients, including a little baby whom I was just about to baptise. They even ripped his drip off, and he died. When you see things like that, as a priest, your heart bleeds.”**

And yet 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 traumatised, because goodwill and kind words on their



**Despite the danger, they still cling to God.**

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 €38,090 to fund a six-day course in trauma counselling for some 360 priests, religious and catechists.**



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

**In the passage quoted above, Saint Edith Stein continues: “The light is extinguished in the darkness of Good Friday, but rises still more radiant as the sunshine of grace on the morning of the Resurrection. Through Cross and Passion to the glory of the Resurrection – this is the journey of the Incarnate Son of God.” We must help to ensure that the journey of the faithful in Burkina Faso does not end at Golgotha!**



## “Pilgrims of Hope”

**On 24 December this year Pope Francis will open the Holy Door in 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 our task as well. Recently, a priest in India wrote to us, saying, “Your help is like a beacon of hope”. And so, together with you and with the whole Church, we want to make this Jubilee Year a true “Pilgrimage of Hope”.**

## Need, love and thanks – your letters

### **Making an ACN scrapbook**

*I hope this letter finds you and everyone else well. I don't know if I told you but I keep an ACN scrap book, and when my mother and father receive magazines from you, with their permission of course, I cut them out and glue the pictures into my scrap book.*

**A young friend of ACN in Australia**

### **Wonderful work!**

*At long last, I am getting around to sending you a small donation for your wonderful work of assisting the Church in need around the world. I have always admired and appreciated what you do, as I know what it is to be in need! God bless you in your great and generous work!!*

**A missionary priest in Ireland**

### **Helping all the needy**

*We are happy to support this charity because, although it is Catholic based, will help any homeless, destitute and persecuted person or groups who genuinely seek peace and security. It has no favourites. Giving Mass stipends to poor priests and those living in troubled areas needing support is an excellent idea.*

**A married couple in England**

### **Giving their lives for Jesus in the needy**

*I am happy to share what little I can with ACN for those giving their lives for Jesus in the poorest and most needy.*

**A friend and benefactress in Brazil**



**Regina Lynch**  
Executive President,  
ACN (International)

*Dear Friends,*

***As the feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December approaches, many of us will be preparing to set up our Christmas cribs 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 13<sup>th</sup> century.***

***My own Christmas crib was made by Christians living in Bethlehem, who carve cribs, rosaries etc. out of olive-wood as a means to 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 searching for 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 crib 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*

## Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Please use the envelope. Aid to the Church in Need, 39B Mdina Road, Attard ATD 9038; Tel: 21487818; Fax: 21586257

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