



## Media Release 5.05.2020

### **Aid to the Church in Need has received messages of prayer, thanks and hope from religious congregations during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Bishops, priests, brothers and religious sisters from developing countries and places where the Church cannot support herself, have written to *Aid to the Church in Need International* (ACN), with messages of sincere gratitude and thanks for all who were able to give (and are continuing to give) towards their subsistence aid, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The messages (including an audio message from a Syrian nun) can be read - or listened to - below and are full of gratitude, faith and hope, but also reveal concerns about the future.

National Director of ACN Australia, Mr Bernard Toutounji, explained that over the next few months fundraising for the living costs of religious communities will continue to be a high priority for the pontifical foundation, which in April announced a commitment of AUD \$8.5M for this specific need.

"As Masses to the public have been suspended and churches and monasteries closed - in order to slow the transmission of the coronavirus - in the regions where the Church struggles to support herself, the small donations given by local communities (often living in poverty themselves) to the Sunday collection, or to the poor boxes, are simply not coming in as they used to. This leaves the priests and religious communities wondering how they will survive. In order to ease this burden of anxiety we are asking those who are able, to consider making a small but recurring gift at this unprecedented time," said Mr Toutounji.

Offerings can be made online: [www.aidtochurch.org/covid-19](http://www.aidtochurch.org/covid-19) or by calling 1800 101 201 (AEST - Monday to Friday 8 am-5 pm).

### **Messages of thanks and prayer from the Church in need:**

#### **MADAGASCAR - Morondava:**

"In these times of global trial, we never stop asking the Lord to help His people, as He once did for His people in the desert. Our thoughts are with all benefactors who are sick and require assistance, as well as with all those who are affected by COVID-19. Our country is also plagued by this pandemic. There are strict curfews in place. Many people are now afraid that the terrorist militias will take advantage of the situation and carry out raids. The coronavirus terrorises us, but we also pray that the thieves will not contribute even more to the death toll." **Carmelite sisters from Morondava in Madagascar.**

### **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO - Diocese of Kabinda:**

“Allow me to express to you, on behalf of all the priests benefiting from this precious financial aid, and on my own behalf, my profound gratitude for your providential intervention. Indeed, with the latest measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19, our priests who live mainly on Sunday offerings are experiencing great difficulties and can no longer meet their basic needs. It is, therefore, to tell you that your financial assistance is welcomed as a heavenly intervention. Thank you for always being instruments of providence for our particular churches. May the Lord repay you a hundredfold. For our part, we will do everything within our power to ensure that all the Masses requested are regularly celebrated. With the assurance of our humble prayers for you, for all your collaborators, without forgetting all the benefactors of your work. Thank you once again for everything.

### **SYRIA - A message from Sister Annie Demerjian RJM:**

“It is very painful what the world is passing through at this time. In this situation of the coronavirus, do not panic about the news. Follow the instructions about healthcare. Our faith is not like pressing a magic button and expecting everything to be OK. The pain and suffering is there but we must also not forget the resurrection is there every day.

We need to help those who are most in need. We need to help each other, lift each other’s spirits and things will pass. In Aleppo, our groups of volunteers are continuing, visiting homes (where it is safe to do so) and taking great care. We are helping the old people, especially because so many of them have no other support, and in Damascus our Sisters are helping some old people, buying what they need so they will not have to go out. People have nothing to rely on. How will they survive?

To all our ACN benefactors, we say very sincerely: Thank you for your enormous generosity. You have helped us for so many years and continue to do so. May God continue to bless you and keep you and your families safe and well." **Listen to Sister Annie's audio message here:**

<https://bit.ly/2Uz57JG>.

### **BRAZIL - Parnaíba - ENGLISH translation:**

“I express, on behalf of myself and the priests who celebrated, our gratitude for your solicitude through Mass stipends.

Here at the moment, we are apprehensive about COVID-19. There is a lot of disinformation and a lack of care in prevention. That's why we fear we may have a high outbreak of infections.

We are celebrating Mass in private to avoid crowds, broadcasting through social media, informing people that they should stay at home, and campaigning to help the needy, without income for what is needed.

May we, with the joy of the Risen Lord, find the strength and willingness to face with serenity and action the turbulence imposed on all of us by COVID-19.”

### **MALI: Diocese of Ségou, ENGLISH translation:**

"Everyone is aware of what is happening around the world today. How will end 2020? Who can answer? GOD ALONE. Yes, God alone can answer. Coronavirus disease is very real in Mali today. 144 cases have been reported, 13 have died (press release from the Ministry of Health on April 16)... I think that the impact on the population will be enormous, especially in poor countries. Here,

churches are closed, unnecessary travel is prohibited. The curfew is too heavy for small traders. Money is increasingly scarce, income-generating activities are reduced. I think it's hard all over the world. At Easter, we were unable to baptize our catechumens. We will do it when the churches will be open again. However, the triduum was celebrated in small groups. I celebrated at the postulate of the Sisters Servants of the Sacred Heart in Ségou. At each celebration, we were about twenty people. We hope that coronavirus disease will soon be overcome." **A priest from the Diocese of Segoe, Mali.**

**CAMEROON - Buea:**

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, since the start of this pandemic we have been praying for you...You have touched humanity in very unique and powerful ways. And we as beneficiaries of your generosity, we are very grateful. We are praying comfortably in the chapel during this trying moment day and night, thanks to you. When I look at some sisters lying on the floor for hours, praying to God, I give thanks to Him for all of you.

Here, in Buea we are indoors, a few cases have been identified here and taken to Douala. One died already. We the students will begin with e-learning next week. Thank you so much for all you did for us. We will forever be grateful to you. May the good Lord reward you all from his abundance and unite you all in his love. Sorry, we couldn't write before now for we have not had electricity for months. It was yesterday that we got lights." **Tertiary Sisters of Saint Francis at Bulu village.**

**GHANA - Bishop of Navrongo-Bolgatanga:**

"Continue to pray for us. We are very much concerned about the situation of our country where our health system is quite weak. We need to do all we can to prevent the spread of the disease. Our diocese has put a response plan in place and we are trying to mobilize resources to provide our health workers with protective equipment such as face masks and hand gloves. These are the people who are risking their lives to ensure that the disease does not spread.

We also need to get closer to God at this time of difficulty, which is also a good time for us to renew our relationship with one another. It is truly a time of grace and I believe our world may never be the same after COVID-19." **Bishop Alfred Agyenta.**

**UGANDA - Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales**

"Today everyone talks about the coronavirus because it has touched everyone's life somehow...No one is to go out unless for food, medicine and for farming. Unfortunately, this banning has produced a lot of poor people as they cannot go to work. People have nothing to eat. So we decided to feed 100 families with necessities. We can provide a hearty meal for a family of six to ten members with about 15 USD. We are also providing them with some sanitizers and vitamin C tablets. In Iyolwa, so far we have not heard of any corona cases. All the villages are closed. All public transport is banned. So the village heads will know if any stranger or guest comes to the village.

...When we see that thousands of people fall in Europe and U.S, where the medical systems are far more advanced (seemingly), we thought, what will be the situation if corona embraces Uganda - one of the poorest countries in the world - where there may not be hardly 100 functioning ventilators in the whole country? It could be disastrous. But most people are not so fearful and anxious here as in the west. I came here prepared to stay for a week and now I may have to stay for more than two

months. In our daily small talks among confreres, we already talk joyfully about our own earthly end. It gives me again the awareness to be joyfully ready to leave when the call comes, until then to be loving and caring.

“For many of us, this may be the first time in our lives that we have felt so little control over our own destiny and the destiny of those we love. This lack of control initially feels like a loss, a humiliation, a stepping backward, an undesired vulnerability. However, recognizing our lack of control is a universal starting point for a serious spiritual walk towards wisdom and truth.”

**Fr. Richard Rohr OFM Cap.**

*ACN has many projects with this congregation in Cameroon, Mozambique, Chad and other countries.*

**CHILE: Diocese San Bernardo - ENGLISH translation:**

"The spirit of prayer and solidarity has been expressed in a very strong way in actions that favour the neediest, offering the facilities of the Church to the authorities. The contact with the government authority is very fluid and good. We have regular meetings with the government minister who handles relations with the Church and with local authorities.

We foresee a very strong economic collapse. The government has taken very effective measures, but we don't know if they are sufficient to deal with the issue of unemployment and to revive the economy. In the life of the Church this collapse will be very strong, because in dioceses without goods or resources, like the two I have, the parishes live on the contribution of the faithful, on small rentals, and all this is in a moment of decline.

The seminary continues to function, with self-imposed quarantine, so that the 29 seminarians continue their studies via the internet. I believe that this crisis will bring us many more vocations. But it is clear that we are facing a very difficult time to maintain the seminary and hence the hope in the project presented to ACN."

**MYANMAR:**

“Greetings from our sisters. First of all, we wish you a very Happy Easter. Our Easter celebration was like the first Easter where the apostles were inside the house due to fear. Here we are also like them, but not due to fear but due to lockdown because of COVID-19. We attend Holy mass online. We hope you and your dear ones are fine and safe. As we could not go out, we are using the food items that we bought for the programme (the food had already been bought for a training course with women, which had to be canceled because of the coronavirus; these trainings are supported by ACN). By the grace of God so far, we are keeping fine. We spent our days inside in prayer and doing what we can. We shall continue to intercede for suffering humanity and for the virus to disappear from the world.”

**PAKISTAN - Lahore, Faisalabad:**

“I would like to thank you from the core of my heart for accepting our project for the Vehicle for Pastoral Work of OP Fathers in Holy Rosary Parish. It will be very helpful to reach to the people of the Holy Rosary Parish who are living far from the Parish House. We are still under lockdown due to the coronavirus. May the Lord take this disease away from this world so that people may live joyfully and peacefully. We are doing charity work for the poor and needy Christians confined in their houses due to lockdown. We are continuously praying for Aid to the Church in Need and all the benefactors.” **Prior Vice Provincial, Ibn-e-Mariam Dominican Order.**

## **INDIA, Tamil Nadu:**

“Greetings from the Emmaus spirituality centre, Villupuram, Tamilnadu, India. During this very difficult time of fear and uncertainty, we fathers, sisters and all the staff members pray for you, your benefactors and your entire team to face the challenges posed by the new coronavirus. Every day from 12 pm to 1 pm we conduct adoration exclusively for you, your entire team and your mission. Once again, we assure our prayers for you all.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble  
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives away and the  
mountains fall into the heart of the sea.” (Psalm 46: 1-2)  
Have mercy on me, my God have mercy on me for in you I take refuge.”

## **ECUADOR - Diocese of San Jacinto - ENGLISH TRANSLATION:**

At the moment we are sharing the crisis that affects the entire world, as a result of the pandemic by COVID-19. The Guayas province is the epicenter of the pandemic in Ecuador, with the highest number of infected and deceased per capita in all Latin America. This reality, together with the restrictions of the health and government authorities, has jeopardized the support of the diocese's charitable work through its parishes. In this sense, we are devising ways to continue helping these people who are unprotected without breaching current health restrictions.

To this is added that the main internal sources of income, both for the parishes and for the diocese, are closed. The shrines have been closed to the public for more than 18 days, and the available funds are enough to pay minimally the staff that support us full time and to help priests who are in parishes that are not self-sustaining. We do not know how much longer the situation will last.

In view of this, I would like to ask you if it is possible to make an extraordinary request for an emergency fund, which will help support priests who are in places unable to support themselves financially.”

Donations towards subsistence aid for our bishops, priests, religious brothers and sisters (serving in countries where the Church is unable to support herself) can be made online: [www.aidtochurch.org/covid-19](http://www.aidtochurch.org/covid-19). If you would like to make an offering over the phone you can do so by calling: **1800 101 201 AEST (Monday - Friday 8 am - 5 pm)**

To arrange a Mass to pray for the multitude of needs surrounding the coronavirus pandemic visit: [www.aidtochurch.org/coronavirus](http://www.aidtochurch.org/coronavirus).

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