



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND

Press Release 12.09.2025

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Vatican gathers the stories of 1,624 Christians murdered for their faith since the year 2000

An ecumenical tribute will be held in Rome, but names will not be published for now

A Vatican commission comprising historians, theologians and other experts has documented the stories of over 1,600 men and women who were killed over the past 25 years for being Christian. Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) supported the commission's work, which is in line with its charism. The meticulous research now presented completes that which was carried out for the year 2000 Jubilee, at the request of then Pope John Paul II.

Pope Leo XIV has invited representatives from all Christian denominations to take part in a Liturgy of the Word in the Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Wall on Sunday 14 September, to pay tribute to these "witnesses of the Faith".

The commission members have been working since July 2023, when Pope Francis asked them to "gather the testimonies of life, up to the shedding of blood, of these sisters and brothers of ours, so that their memory can stand as a treasure cherished by the Christian community". At the time he made it clear that this research should not be limited to the Catholic Church, but should "extend to all Christian denominations", adding "to all of them we owe a great debt, and we cannot forget them".

The head of the commission, Archbishop Fabio Fabene, noted during the presentation of the results that "martyrdom has existed in every age of the Church, but perhaps now more than in the past, many surrender their lives in order not to betray the message of Christ". His Deputy, Sant'Egidio Community founder, Andrea Riccardi, noted that the point of this work is "to remember them so that their memory is not diluted and the names of those who have fallen for the faith are not lost."

In order to complete the list, the commission requested the assistance of bishops' conferences, religious institutes and other Church entities. It also consulted carefully verified media accounts. Over a year and a half of work, the commission identified and confirmed 1,624 cases of Christians, from all denominations, murdered because of their faith between the year 2000 and 2025. Of these, 643 were killed in Sub-Saharan Africa, 357 in Asia and Oceania, 304 in the Americas, 277 in the Middle East and the Maghreb, and 43 in Europe.

According to Andrea Riccardi, "this is not a closed number, as martyrdom cannot be fully counted, especially in remote areas".



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The circumstances surrounding these deaths vary according to geography. “Many of the witnesses of faith in the Americas died at the hands of criminal organisations, drug traffickers, or because they prevented deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources. The presence of the Christian as an honest person who respects the law and the common good disturbs those who want to carry out criminal activities,” Riccardi explains, adding that the number of 357 killed in Asia and Oceania includes the 200 killed on Easter Sunday 2019 in the bombing attacks against Catholic and Protestant churches in Sri Lanka, and that the martyrs in Africa “were mostly killed by jihadists or for the role they played in ethnic-political conflicts”.

The commission opted not to publish a full list of names, “until it is prudent to do so”, although some are mentioned, such as the seven Anglican religious from the Melanesian Brotherhood, who were tortured and killed by the head of a militia while they were trying to mediate a local conflict in the Solomon Islands in 2003; Iraqi Fr Ragheed Ganni, who refused to close his parish in Mosul, and was killed by ISIS terrorists on 3 June 2007; Abish Masih, a 10-year-old boy killed in 2015 during a bomb attack against a church in Youhanabad, Pakistan; the 21 Coptic martyrs who were murdered in February 2015 on the coast of Libya and who were added by Pope Francis to the Roman Martyrology; the four Missionaries of Charity who were killed in their convent in Aden, Yemen, by masked men who attacked the home for the elderly where they worked; and Paul McAuley, a La Salle brother missionary in the Peruvian Amazon, who was active in the defence of indigenous and the environment, and who was found dead and burned in 2019 in the school where he taught.

According to Riccardi, “the work of this commission and the ecumenical ceremony on Sunday 14 September show that our Church is still a Church of martyrs and that they have much to teach us. We are contemporaries of these people whom we could have met and known personally in our lifetime.” In the context of the Jubilee of Hope, he recognises that these are “men and women who believed in a God who was faithful to them even in adverse circumstances. The Church regards the memory of the martyrs not as a moment of sorrow but as hope for the future.”

ACN’s executive president Regina Lynch highlighted the importance of these findings, saying “they reflect the experience of our work on the ground, helping communities that face constant existential threats. ACN is very proud to stand with and support these Christians, but above all we are grateful to learn from their testimony, which strengthens our faith, and that of our benefactors every day.”

When Pope Francis created the commission in 2023, he explained that “Christians continue to show, in contexts of great risk, the vitality of Baptism that unites us. A not insignificant number, indeed, are those who, despite being aware of the dangers they face, manifest their faith or participate in the Sunday Eucharist. Others are killed in the effort to assist in charity the lives



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of the poor, in caring for those rejected by society, in cherishing and promoting the gift of peace and the power of forgiveness. Still others are silent victims, as individuals or in groups, of the upheavals of history.”

The ecumenical commemoration, which ACN’s executive president Regina Lynch was invited to, coincides with the Catholic Church’s liturgical celebration of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.