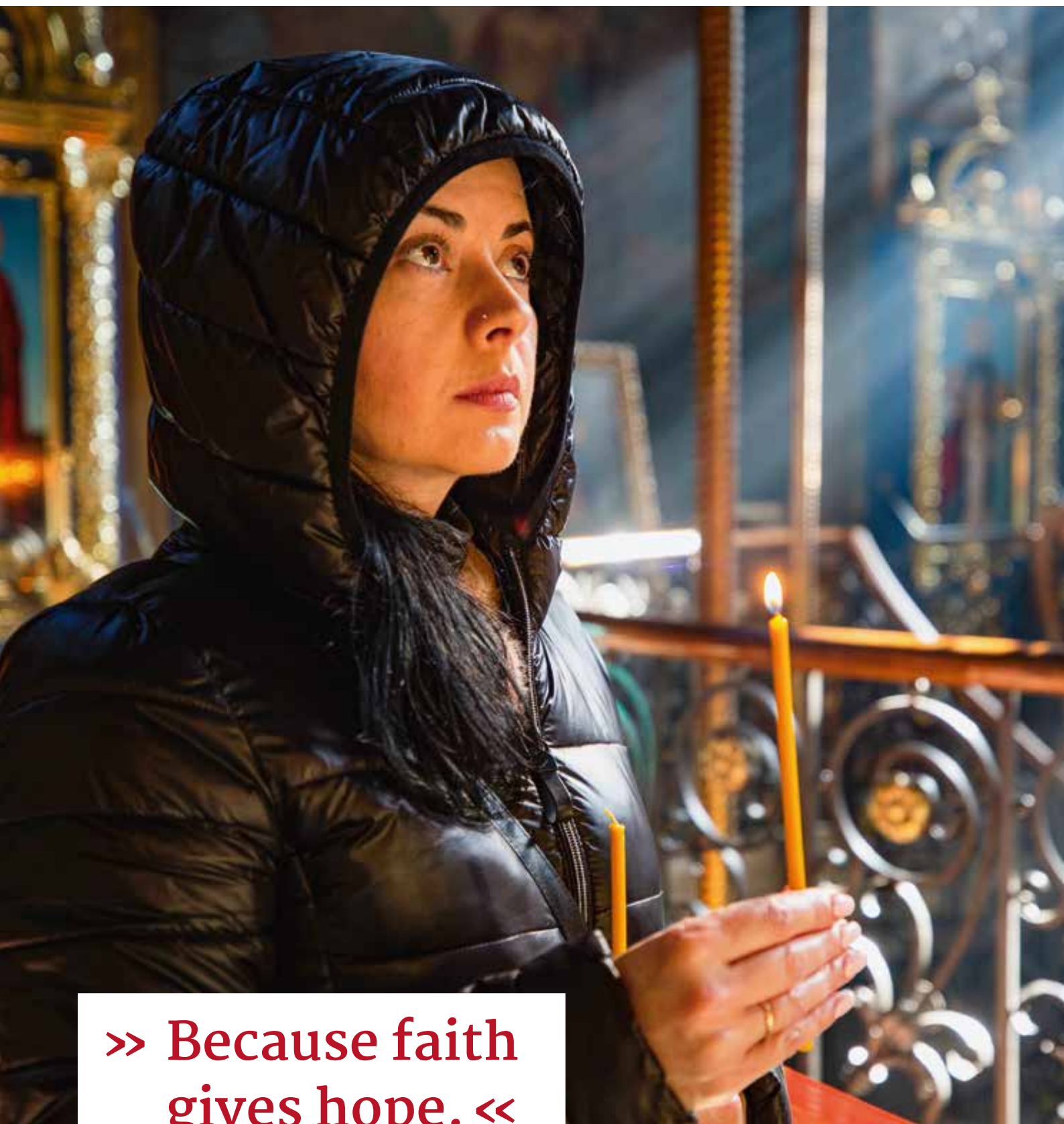




Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL



»» Because faith  
gives hope. ««

Activity Report 2023

PONTIFICAL  
FOUNDATION



**Imprint**

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First edition.

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ACN Aid to the Church in Need International

Title: In St Michael's Cathedral in Kiev, Ukraine.



**Dear friends,**

“Lord, save us, for we are perishing!”  
(Mt 8:25): This plea of the disciples on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee could also be our cry for help amidst the turmoil of newly ignited wars and crises.

In the year 2023, we have witnessed unspeakable suffering: the misery and desolate situation in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine, increasing jihadist terror in Africa, the hardship and distress of many Christians under totalitarian regimes, but also the religious, social and economic problems in our home countries.

One thing is becoming increasingly obvious: without the Lord, we shall truly perish.

The expression of His presence and help for many hard-pressed sisters and brothers in 138 countries is the support that we have been able to offer through your generosity. Despite high inflation, the donations have not diminished. We are

grateful to see how God moves the hearts of our donors to be good Samaritans. Many reports show us that priests, religious, bishops and faithful, who receive help, pray faithfully for their benefactors and for their intentions.

I offer my heartfelt blessing to all of you who are contributing to the success of this good work, which carries the love of God to people in need, and I commend you and your families and intentions to the protection of the Blessed Mother Mary.

Kind regards,

*Mauro Card. Piacenza*



*Mauro Cardinal Piacenza  
President of the Papal  
Foundation Aid to the Church  
in Need*

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**» I cordially  
bless you all. «**

Dear friends, may the Lord make your prayers and your commitment to the mission of the Church always nurture more fruit throughout the world, especially where it is suffering from spiritual and material needs or is discriminated against and persecuted.

I cordially bless you all.

Pope Francis  
to the members and benefactors  
of Aid to the Church in Need  
at the general audience on  
2 October 2013, in Rome

As a Pontifical Foundation,  
Aid to the Church in Need has  
the mandate to act on behalf  
of the Church.





# About us and our mission.

Get to know Aid to the Church in Need. Our mission, what we are committed to and our funding priorities in 2023.

» I am so grateful for all that you are doing to help our suffering people. May our Lord bless you, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. «

Sr Annie Demerjian,  
project partner, Syria





Aid to the Church in Need was initially established in 1947 as a Catholic aid organisation for war refugees and has been recognised as a Pontifical Foundation since 2011. Under our guiding principle of “information, prayer and action”, today we are committed to helping Christians across the globe, wherever they are persecuted or oppressed or suffer material hardships.

In addition, we are committed to religious freedom and reconciliation across all faiths. Our foundation does not accept any support from government agencies. However, thanks to hundreds of thou-

sands of benefactors who donate to Aid to the Church in Need, we are now active worldwide with an annual donation volume of 143,7 million euros. This story shows, once again, how practical charity arises from proclaiming one's faith.



## In many countries, Christians are discriminated against and persecuted.

» Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me. « Mt 25:40

From its beginnings, the Church has always provided care for those in need. However, the Church often finds itself in urgent need of assistance, particularly in developing countries and in states where it faces displacement, persecution or disasters.

According to our calculations, 62% of the world's population live in countries

where their faith cannot be practised freely, and half of the world's population live in countries with outright persecution. The fundamental right to religious freedom is not guaranteed in at least 61 countries. Christians bear a disproportionate brunt of the impact.

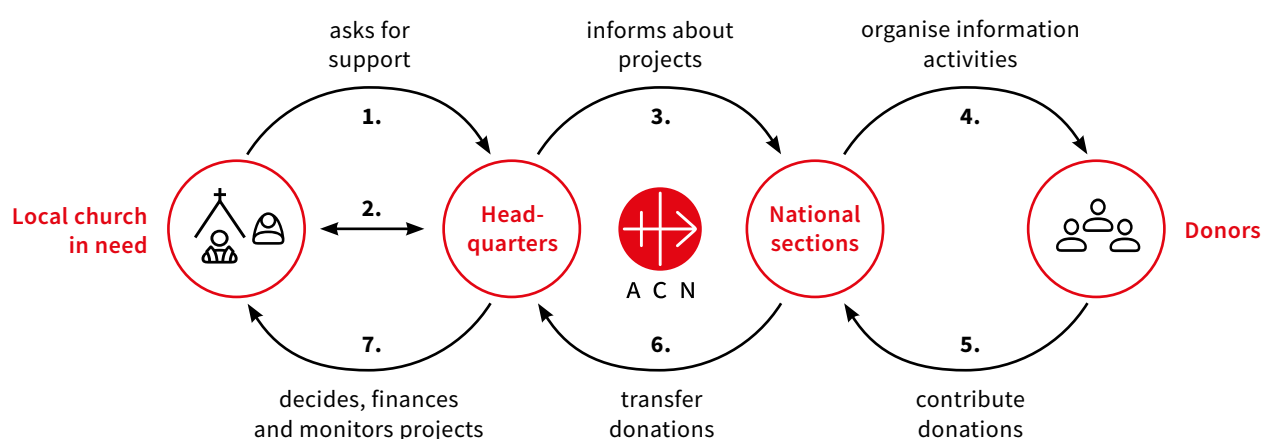
Where Church life and pastoral care for the faithful are difficult to maintain on their own, the Church is dependent on donations from abroad. Unlike most charities working to alleviate social needs, Aid to the Church in Need – formerly known as Church in Need – concentrates on supporting pastoral care.

For 77 years, our professionalism, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency have ensured that our benefactors' donations have the best possible effect precisely where they are most urgently needed: among local churches in need.





**This is how donations become concrete aid for Christians in need.**



**1.** The need for project aid arises in a place where the Church suffers from poverty or persecution. The diocese or parish forwards the project to ACN (Aid to the Church in Need) headquarters in Königstein, Germany, with a recommendation from the local bishop or supervisor.

**2.** The head of section for the region analyses the project. If necessary, he or she then asks for further information. Within a maximum of three months,

ACN headquarters confirms whether the project has been approved or not.

**3.** ACN headquarters informs the national offices about local fundraising projects and financing through benefactors.

**4.** The offices organise information and awareness-raising measures so that donors support the projects.

**5.** Benefactors feel called on to join in and donate.

**6.** ACN's national offices transfer the charitable contributions to ACN headquarters.

**7.** ACN decides on projects and their funding, tracks and monitors their implementation.

Between one and six months after the approval of the project has been granted, ACN assumes the costs for the approved project. In emergencies, ACN headquarters provides immediate funds.



# In 2023, we were able to support 5,573 projects worldwide.

In 2023, we received 7,689 applications for aid from all over the world. Thanks to the generosity of our benefactors, we collected donations of 143.7 million euros. By adding reserves of 0.8 million euros from previous years we have been able to fund activities amounting to 144.5 million euros. As can be seen in the diagram, by far the largest share of our expenditure was devoted to mission-related expenses, i.e. concrete project work, information and prayer activities.

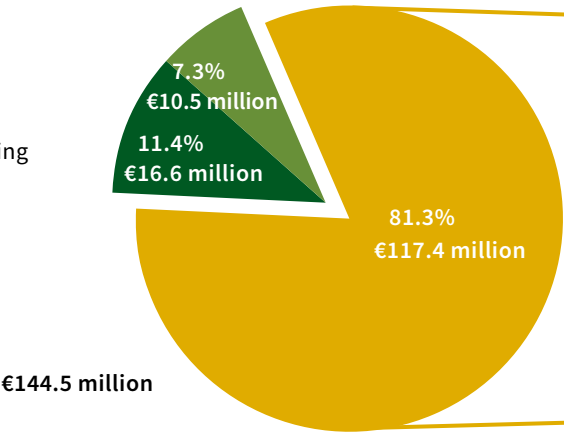
As always, the proportion of necessary expenditures for administration and fundraising was

comparatively low, so that as many funds as possible could reach local Christians. In 2023, we supported a total of 5,573 projects in 138 countries with approximately 100.8 million euros. 16.6 million euros were used for proclamation of the faith, information work and advocacy for disadvantaged and persecuted Christians worldwide.

At 33.6 million euros, or 23.3% of our revenues, bequests made up a significant part of our support for the Church in 2023. Together with our brothers and sisters in need, we therefore not only thank our living benefactors, but also gratefully remember those who support us beyond death.

### Total expenditure (2023)

- Mission-related expenditure
- Administration
- Donor relations and fundraising





## Facts and figures\*

Offices in **23** countries

**359,920** donors worldwide

**143,737,504** euros in donations and legacies

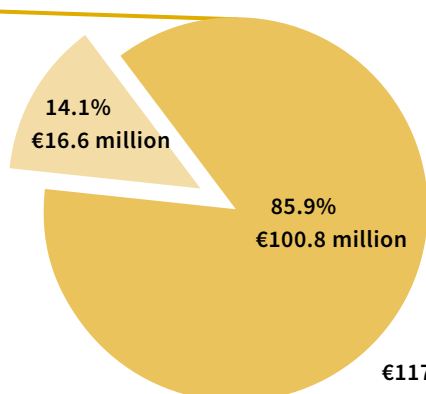
Project partners in **138** countries

**5,573** projects supported worldwide

**81.3** per cent of the funds used are allocated to mission-related expenses

All financial figures are audited by the independent auditing firm PwC.

### Mission-related expenditure (2023)



- Project work (→ p. 12ff.)
- Information, proclamation of faith and advocacy for discriminated and persecuted Christians (→ p. 24ff.)

€117.4 million

\*Valid as of 2023



## Our focal points in the 2023 reporting year.









In 2023, we further amplified our aid for the formation of priests, religious and the laity, which has always been one of our priorities, to 26.7%, and thus to more than a quarter of our total aid.

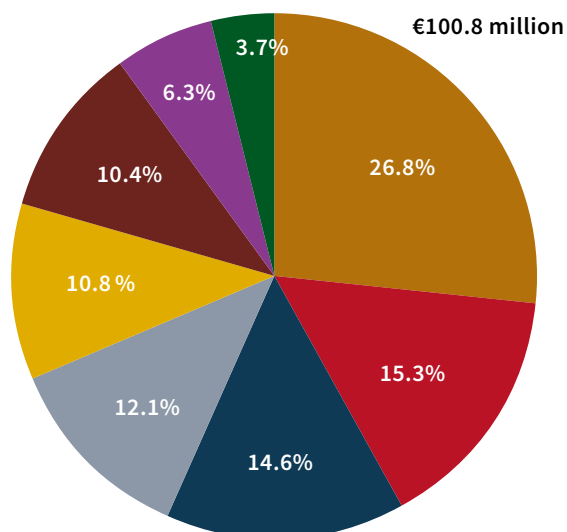
At 26.8%, projects for the construction, reconstruction or renovation of churches and church buildings also accounted for more than a quarter of our funding.

By providing Mass stipends for priests and subsistence aid for religious sisters, we were once again able to help secure their livelihoods in 2023. A total of 21.6% of our funding was earmarked for these projects.

In addition, we are active in acute crises with emergency aid measures for the suffering population. In 2023, such emergency aid in areas where Christians are threatened by violence and displacement accounted for 10.8% of our total aid.

### Aid granted by type of help (2023)

Construction and reconstruction (→ p. 20)	
Mass stipends (→ p. 14)	
Training of priests and religious (→ p. 16)	
Faith formation of laity (→ p. 19)	
Emergency relief aid (→ p. 22)	
Means of transport for pastoral care (→ p. 21)	
Subsistence aid for religious sisters (→ p. 18)	
Distribution of Bibles, religious books and media (→ p. 23)	





» The starting point for our aid is a close dialogue with local churches. «

At 31.4%, Africa was once again the priority region for our aid projects in 2023. The situation is particularly dramatic in places where Islamist terror is spreading and Christians are victims of persecution and displacement, such as in Mozambique, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. At the same time, the number of faithful and vocations to the priesthood and religious orders continues to rise.

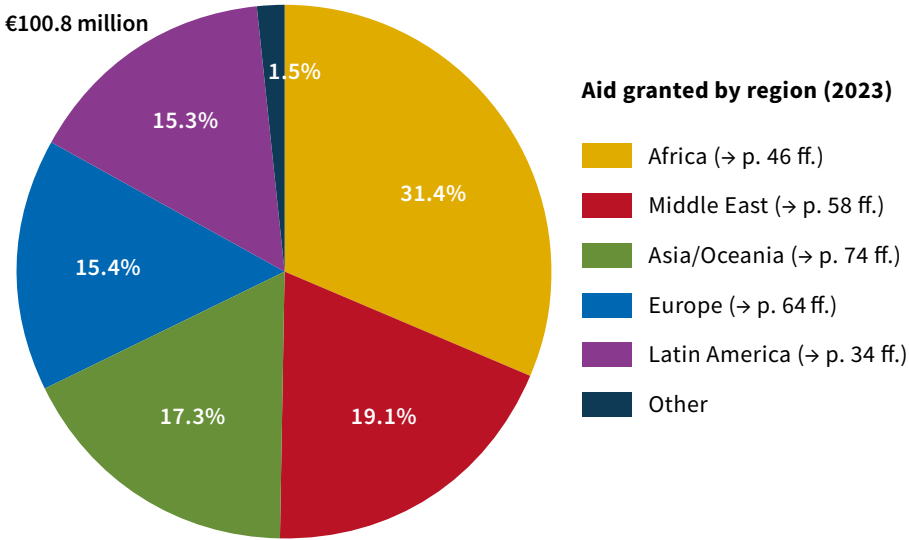
The funding volume for the Middle East represented 19.1% of our total aid. The focal points in 2023 continued to be Syria and Lebanon. By providing emergency aid and strengthening pastoral care, our aim is to help ensure the survival of Christian communities and counteract the massive exodus of Christians.

17.3% of our aid was devoted to Asia (including 0.9% for Oceania), where Christians form a minority in most countries and are discriminated against or even persecuted. For example, we increased the level of our aid to Pakistan.

In 2023, we continued to receive a large number of requests for support from Ukraine, where the Church, in the midst of war, is trying to alleviate the spiritual, psychological and material needs of those who have fled and are in need. Therefore, in 2023, 7.4% of our funds went to Ukraine. Our aid for Europe totalled 15.4%.

Latin America accounted for 15.3% of our total aid, as rural exodus, migration, sects and governments hostile to the Church are major challenges here.

€100.8 million



Aid granted by region (2023)

- Africa (→ p. 46 ff.)
- Middle East (→ p. 58 ff.)
- Asia/Oceania (→ p. 74 ff.)
- Europe (→ p. 64 ff.)
- Latin America (→ p. 34 ff.)
- Other



## Our task areas

**Regardless of whether we are providing subsistence aid for priests and religious sisters, Mass stipends, training for seminarians, emergency aid during war and natural catastrophes or publicity work for the propagation of the faith, Aid to the Church in Need's task areas are as diverse as they are urgent. We lend assistance and fund activities where Christians are persecuted and the Church suffers hardships.**













## Church in Need – our name says it all

On the outskirts of Lviv, Ukraine.

Over the 77 years since its foundation, Aid to the Church in Need has developed into an aid organisation with a broad range of tasks. Today we can rightly claim: our name is our mission. We now support some 5,600 church projects each year in 138 countries – many of these over the long term. In this way, we frequently remain in crisis areas much longer than other aid organisations.

Of course, this requires not only personnel and logistical resources, but also the necessary financial means. Only through the donations of over 359,900 benefactors throughout the world are we able to fulfil and successfully drive our mission of providing pastoral assistance.

-  Mass stipends (→ p. 15)
-  Training of priests and religious, safeguarding (→ p. 16)
-  Subsistence aid for religious sisters (→ p. 18)
-  Faith formation of laity (→ p. 19)
-  Construction and reconstruction of church facilities (→ p. 20)
-  Means of transport for pastoral care (→ p. 21)
-  Emergency assistance in cases of war, displacement, violence and natural catastrophes (→ p. 22)
-  Distribution of Bibles, religious books and media (→ p. 23)
-  Advocacy, public relations (→ p. 24)
-  Media support for the propagation of faith (→ p. 30)



» Putting the plight of the people before God is part of our mission. «

Fr Anton Lässer, CP, Ecclesiastical Assistant of ACN International

In Ukraine.

**Helping persecuted Christians and the needy Church is of the utmost priority to Aid to the Church in Need. Whether through Mass stipends, the funding of priestly formation, subsistence aid for religious sisters or the faith formation of the laity – we sponsor thousands of brothers and sisters every year so that they, in turn, can support the faithful.**



In the Diocese of Sokoto, Nigeria.



In Huánaco in the Andes, Peru.



## Mass stipends



In many regions, the faith-ful are so poor that they cannot support their priests. Even the bishops often lack the financial means to provide their priests with a regular wage. In these areas, Mass stipends are often their only means of existential help. Mass stipends are monetary donations connected with the request to celebrate Holy Mass for the deceased and the sick or other concerns of the benefactors.

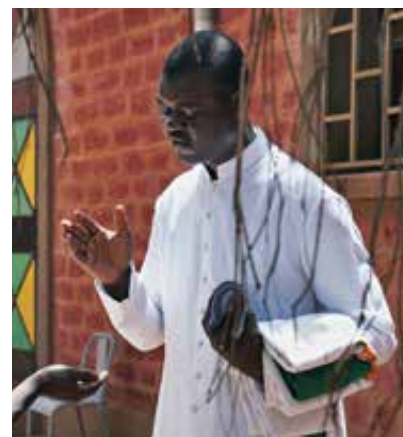
In 2023, a total of 1,744,410 Holy Masses were celebrated in the intentions of our benefactors. In this way, we were able to support a total of 40,767 priests – on average, about every tenth priest – worldwide.

The distribution of the Mass stipends reflects the conditions of poverty on the continents. In the reporting year, 37,3% of the Mass stipends went to Africa,

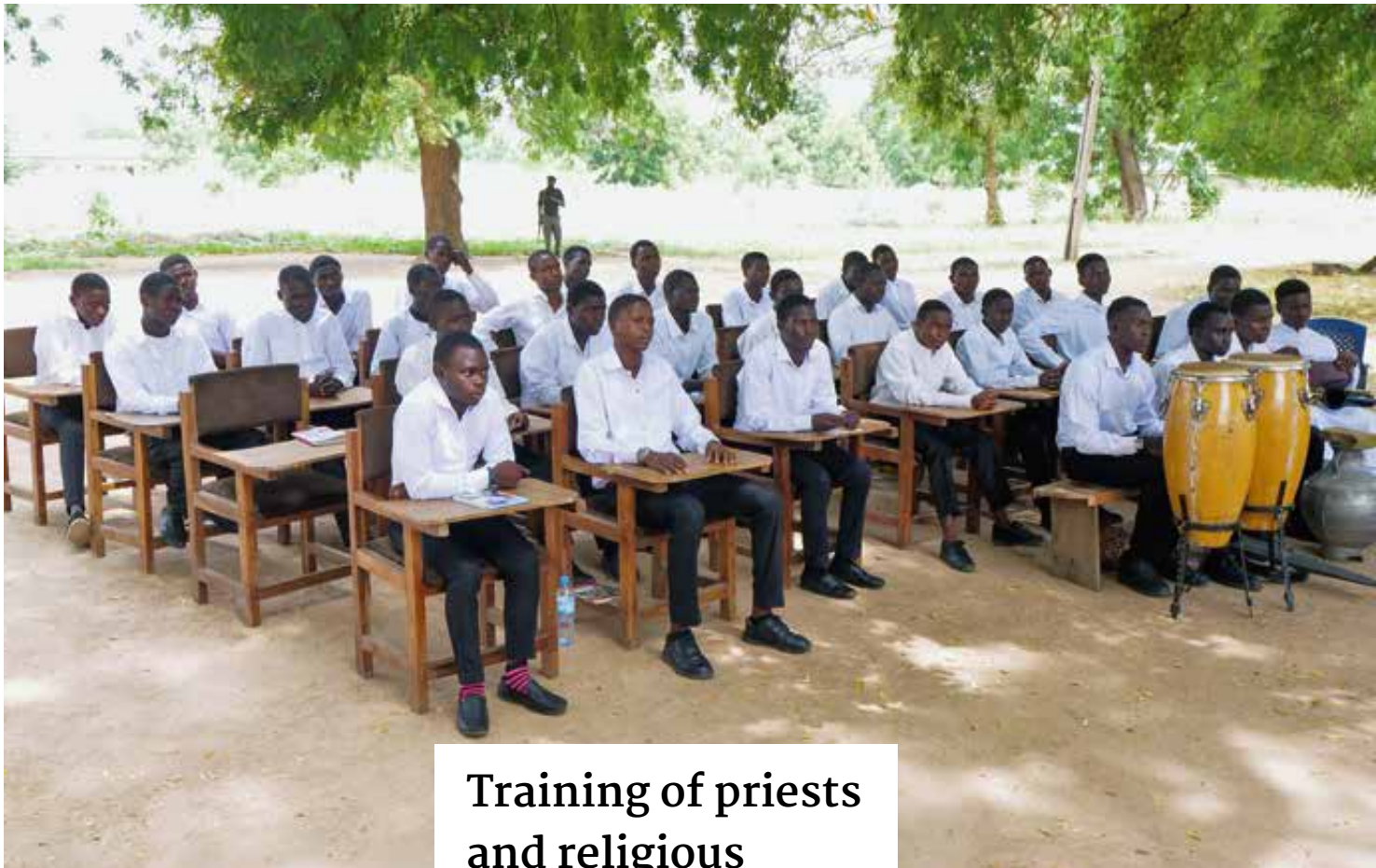
**» For some priests, Mass stipends are the only source of income. «**

32,1% to Asia and the Near and Middle East, 16,6% to Latin America and 14% to Central and Eastern Europe. By focusing Mass prayers on deceased or sick relatives, on people who are experiencing life crises or on certain issues our donors may be facing, they take part in the Eucharistic celebration in a very special way. With this kind of donation, many of our benefactors recognise the profound spiritual purpose of uniting their charity with Church prayers.

As a basic principle, 100% of the Mass stipends are forwarded to the intended recipients. On average, a Holy Mass is held every 18 seconds for the intentions of ACN benefactors somewhere in the world.



In the Diocese of Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso.



## Training of priests and religious

Seminarians in Bare, Nigeria.



The theological training and qualification of seminarians has always been an important focus of our aid. After all, future priests will ultimately be spiritual pillars and safeguard sacramental life. Therefore, our educational assistance mainly flows into countries where the suitable and continuous training of future priests is endangered or is not adequately ensured due to poverty, war or persecution. Thanks

to the generosity of our benefactors, we were able to fund a total of 10,991 seminarians in 2023. The continuing education of God's servants is also an important concern to us. During the reporting year, we sponsored the continuing education of 132 priests, who themselves will train seminarians and thus maintain the qualitative level of priestly formation in their home countries over the long term.

» Scholarships are the seed which we hope will yield ripe fruit for the Church. «

In the Andes near Cusco, Peru.



In 2023, we were also able to award 240 scholarships to priests who, for example, are pursuing a doctorate or an additional course of study. In terms of continental distribution, 44,6% of our scholarship holders came from Africa, 39,6% from Asia, 15% from Latin America and 0,8% from Eastern Europe.



## Safeguarding

ACN supports the Church in its abuse prevention efforts. For example, we promote courses around the world on the topic of safeguarding, in which priests and religious are trained to recognise and prevent sexual abuse and other forms of abuse of minors and wards.

To this end, we work closely with the leading Institute of Anthropology – Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, among others. A main focus of these courses is the detection of abuse, so that it can be identified as early as possible. The aim is to learn effective measures for prevention and to apply various strategies for dealing with suspected cases.

Our project partners only receive aid from ACN after submitting a written commitment to safeguarding. This aid is withdrawn if possible or actual cases of abuse are not adequately pursued.

In the Diocese of  
Bukavu, Democratic  
Republic of Congo.

Safeguarding requirements also apply to ACN's own employees, who are required to comply with ACN's safeguarding guidelines and also receive regular training on them.

The full Safeguarding Policy can be viewed at [www.acninternational.org/safeguarding](http://www.acninternational.org/safeguarding).



» We are working worldwide to improve the protection of minors and other wards. «

Regina Lynch, Executive President





## Subsistence aid for religious sisters

In the Diocese of Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo.



In the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.



Especially in areas with a great shortage of priests, sisters literally look after everyone in the name of God: children and adults, orphans, the sick and dying, those who have failed and those who are searching, as well as traumatised people. These sisters often work under the most difficult conditions. Contemplative sisters, on the other hand, help the suffering through their prayers.

In 2023 alone, with 930 projects, we supported religious sisters from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe in their valuable work.

**» We recognise a successful aid project when people are once again free to live their faith. «**

Marco Mencaglia, Director of Projects



## Faith formation of laity

In Caluyo, Peru.

There is a lack of priests in many of the world's poorest countries. Here, the formation of the laity to serve as catechists is an essential element of preserving faith in daily life. On the completion of a basic course in theology, women and men are empowered to share their faith and to prepare the faithful for the reception of the sacraments.

In 2023, through 327 projects, we supported the faith formation of laypersons.

» It is our duty to support our brothers and sisters in faith. «

Dolores Soroa Suárez de Tangil, benefactress, Spain



In the Archdiocese of Lahore, Pakistan.



## >> Faith and a good organisation together can move mountains. <<

The Sanctuary of the Lord of Imarrucos, Peru.

Philipp Ozores, Secretary General

**Supporting the local Church is the key task of Aid to the Church in Need. This also includes measures such as the construction, reconstruction or maintenance of church buildings. We also finance vehicles for priests, sisters and catechists so that they can reach the faithful even in the most isolated areas. Wherever believers are victims of displacement, violence and persecution, we provide emergency relief to alleviate the worst suffering.**



## Construction and reconstruction of church facilities



Especially in crisis areas, churches and ecclesiastical institutions are often destroyed by violence. We support reconstruction in these areas, as the Church is the centre of the life of faith and a sign of hope.

Where the Church is growing, for example in Africa, Asia and Latin America, help is often needed to build up a new infrastructure. Therefore, Aid to the Church in Need provides assistance for

the construction and reconstruction of churches, monasteries, pastoral centres and mission stations, thereby safeguarding and promoting the pastoral work of the Catholic Church worldwide. We know from 77 years of experience: in slums, even the smallest chapel can offer people a spiritual home.

969 such buildings were constructed or repaired with our help in 2023 alone.



## Means of transport for pastoral care

© As early as the beginning of the 1950s, ACN sent chapel trucks as mobile churches to displaced persons. Today, ensuring that assistance and pastoral care are available to areas in need continues to be an important concern of Aid to the Church in Need.

We receive applications to fund vehicular purchases from every continent. Whether trucks, cars, motorcycles, bicycles, boats, or in particularly difficult mountain regions, mules – in 2023 alone, 521 motor vehicles, 340 motorcycles, 175 bicycles and 5 boats were financed with our help.




In the Diocese of Fada N'Gourma, Burkina Faso.

In the Diocese of Buta, Democratic Republic of Congo.



Victims of attacks by Fulani herdsmen on the village of Yeluwata in Nigeria.

## Emergency assistance in cases of war, displacement, violence and natural catastrophes

 Emergency assistance for refugees is deeply rooted in the history of our relief organisation. At the beginning of the 1950s, ACN was already doing pioneering work in supporting displaced persons.

the wave of Christian emigration and thus ensure the continuity of Christianity in the region (for more information, see the Middle East chapter starting on page 58).

The bitter truth is: there are more refugees worldwide today than ever before. 110 million people are currently fleeing war and violence around the world; of these, several million alone are in the Middle East.

We also support Christians who have been persecuted and expelled for their beliefs in many other parts of the world. Whether in Mindanao in the Philippines or in northern Nigeria, where Islamist terrorist groups are perpetrating acts of violence against the Christian minority, we stand by those who have not been able to save anything but their bare lives.

Our great financial commitment to refugees and displaced persons in the Middle East is not only a response to their pressing need, but also a contribution to stop

**>> For us, the greatest conceivable catastrophe would be not to act. <<**

Guido Gröning,  
Director of Finance



In Aleppo, Syria.



## Distribution of Bibles, religious books and media

In the Amazon region, Brazil.



“Go out into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation,” Jesus said. Aid to the Church in Need takes this assignment literally. For instance, since 1979, our organisation has been the publisher and global supplier of the Child’s Bible, which has been translated into 194 languages and has already been distributed 51.7 million times.

Often in poor countries, the Child’s Bible is the first book that children receive in

their own language; frequently, it is the only picture book that the little ones can get hold of in their entire lives.

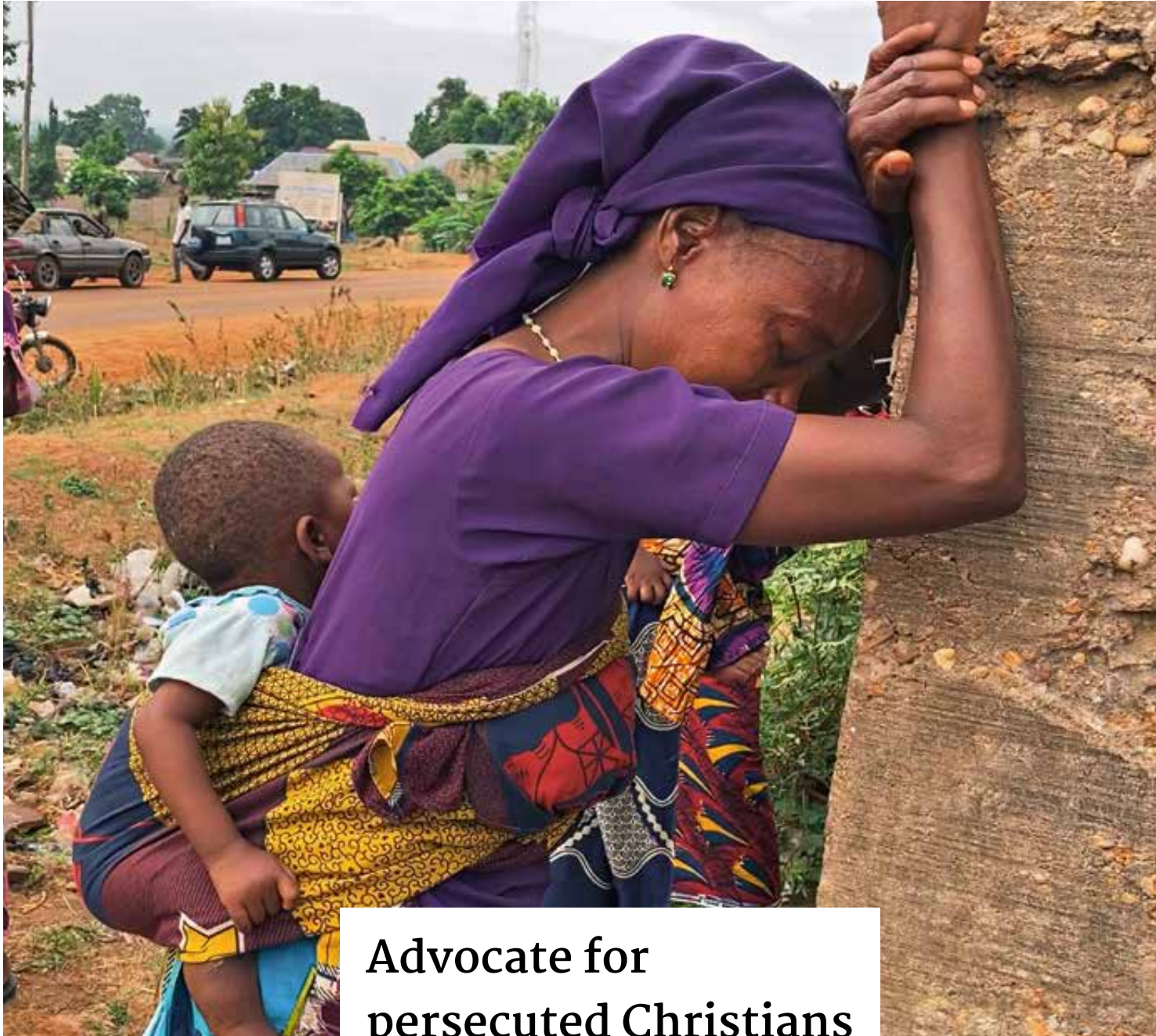
In 2023 alone, 700,000 million religious books were produced and distributed with the help of ACN. In addition, Aid to the Church in Need promotes YOUCAT, the illustrated Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church, which is available in 59 languages. Since 2016, DOCAT, a modern translation of the social teachings and doctrine of the Catholic Church, has also been published. You can find more information about YOUCAT and DOCAT on page 31.

**>> For some needy children, the Child’s Bible is the only picture book that they can get hold of. <<**

Fr Anton Lässer, CP,  
Ecclesiastical Assistant  
of ACN International




At the St John Bosco Youth Educational Centre in Lviv, Ukraine.



## Advocate for persecuted Christians

» We give persecuted Christians a voice. «

Mark von Riedemann,  
Director of Public Affairs  
and Religious Freedom

 Through global project work, ACN's aid reaches millions of suffering and persecuted Christians around the world. However, more is needed to improve their political environment. Our advocacy on behalf of these Christians consists primarily of promoting the exchange of information and organising visits by bishops, priests and religious sisters to Brussels, Washington and Geneva, where they meet with political decision-makers.

In this way, politicians receive first-hand reports on the situation of Christians in conflict areas where the government has largely collapsed and from which the

United Nations, diplomats and NGOs have withdrawn for security reasons.

In 2023, in addition to presenting the Religious Freedom Report, which was published in numerous countries (see also page 26), we once again dedicated a large part of our advocacy activities to Nigeria. At the request of our local project partners, ACN had already begun to shed more light on the situation in the "Middle Belt" of the West African country in 2022. Our focus is particularly on the state of Benue, where egregious atrocities are increasingly being committed. We intend to further expand our commitment here in 2024–25.



Fiona Bruce, the British Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and John Pontifex from ACN UK (centre back) at Red Wednesday in London.

### January

ACN achieved a major success with its advocacy efforts for persecuted Christians in collaboration with like-minded political decision-makers and experts. On 31 January 2023, a bipartisan U.S. Congressional resolution was introduced acknowledging the atrocities committed against Nigerian Christians. The resolution called on the U.S. State Department to place Nigeria back on the list of Countries of Particular Concern and to appoint a special envoy for the Lake Chad region.

### July

Resulting from a resolution proposed by ACN on the situation of internally displaced persons there, a UN delegation visited Makurdi, the capital of the Nigerian state of Benue. Previously, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress had contacted representatives of the United Nations and demanded accountability for the lack of support for internally displaced persons in Benue. The delegate was shocked by the situation and assured that the UN was prepared to support church projects for internally displaced persons.

### October

At the suggestion of ACN, the Czech Parliament requested the establishment of a government programme to support persecuted Christians and other religious communities. The decision is still pending.

### November

An important ministerial conference on the freedom of religion and belief took place in the Czech Republic during RedWeek 2023. The Czech Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Federation of Jewish Councils and Protestant churches jointly hosted the conference, which was attended by some 400 people from over 50 countries. ACN representatives presented the Religious Freedom Report and moderated important events. RedWeek 2023 was also celebrated in the Croatian Parliament. High-ranking representatives from academia and the media were present, as well as the Apostolic Nuncio and the Israeli ambassador. The Croatian Parliament also presented the Bishop of Ondo, Jude Arogundade, with a donation for Christian families whose relatives were killed in a massacre at Pentecost 2022.



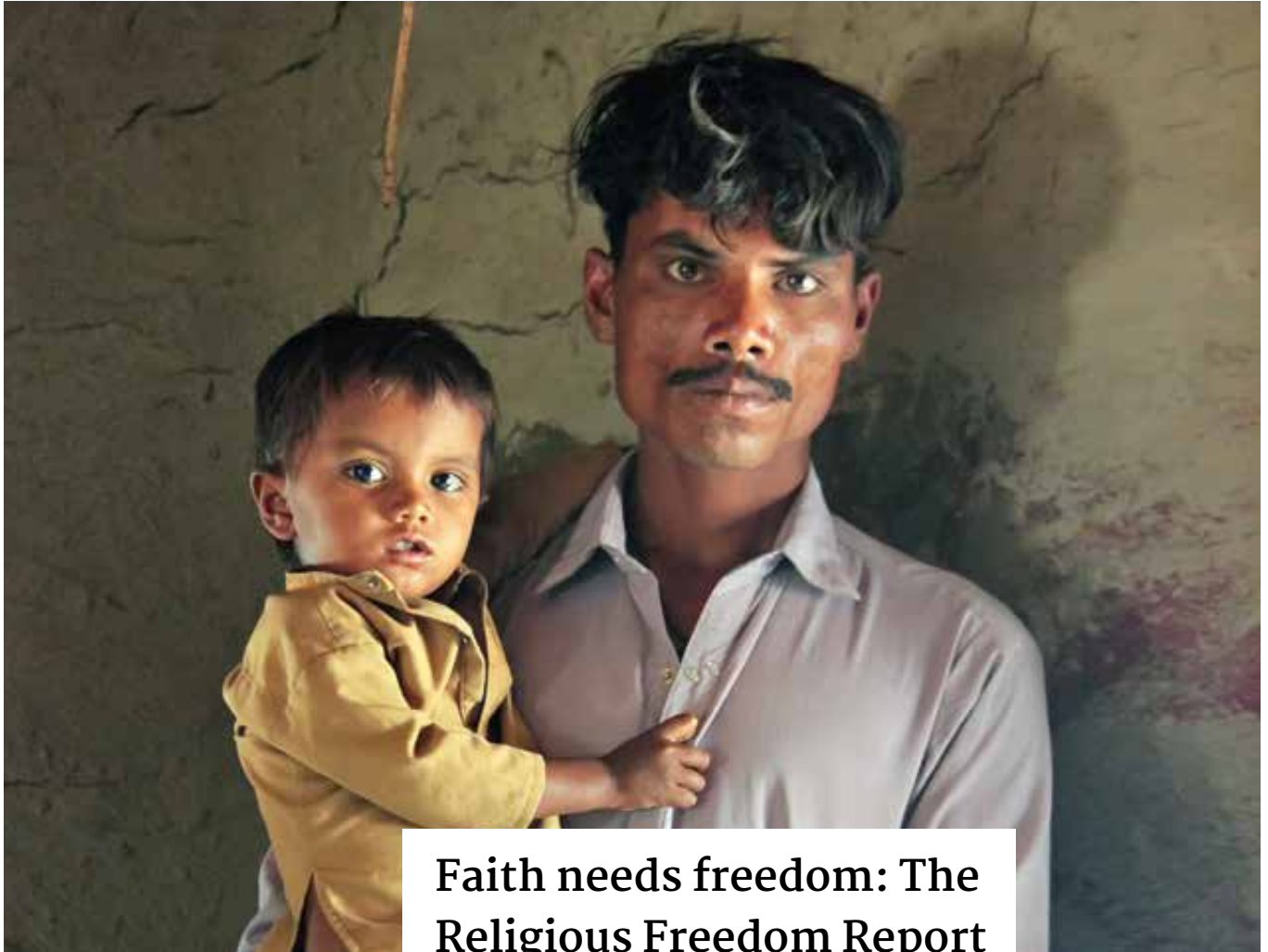
Fr Bernard Adukwu at the presentation of the Religious Freedom Report in the Portuguese Parliament.



Florian Ripka from ACN Germany hands over the Religious Freedom Report to the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Nikola Eterović.



Victims of Boko Haram terror in a dialogue with Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani and representatives of ACN in Rome.



## Faith needs freedom: The Religious Freedom Report

In the reporting year, ACN published the new edition of the “Religious Freedom in the World Report”, which has been printed every two years since 1999. The report analyses the situation of religious freedom in 196 countries, taking into account all world religions. The ACN report, which is over 900 pages long and published in seven languages, is one of only four reports on the state of religious freedom worldwide. In 2023, the report reached an online readership of over 600 million.

The 2023 report from ACN states that religious freedom is completely or severely restricted in 61 out of 196 countries. Sixty-two percent of humankind live in countries where people cannot freely practice, display or change their religion. In 47 of these countries, the situation has worsened since the last report, while there are only signs of improvement in nine countries.

Armed terrorist groups or authoritarian governments are usually responsible for

the violation of religious freedom. The greatest restrictions on religious freedom are in Africa, where jihadist activities continue to increase, particularly in the Sahel region.

But the situation is also critical in Asia: China, for example, is attempting to extend its totalitarian control to religious life, and in India, ethnic-religious nationalism manifests itself in the form of harsh anti-conversion laws, among other things.

In many Western countries, there are also alarming signs of the spread of what is known as “polite persecution” and an increase in social and political pressure to follow ideological trends.

[www.religious-freedom-report.org](http://www.religious-freedom-report.org)





## Public relations

Whether media relations, events, conferences or campaigns – ACN’s activities and public relations work in 2023 were once again highly diverse. Here we present some of the events organised by the ACN headquarters or some of our 23 national offices.



## One million children praying the rosary

The initiative “One Million Children Praying the Rosary” was born in 2005 in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. The aim of this ACN-sponsored prayer campaign is to urge for peace and unity in the world, while encouraging children and young people to trust in God during difficult times. In 2023 more than one million children from over 90 countries took part in the campaign. These included countries such as Nicaragua, Nigeria, Qatar, Iran, Pakistan and Vietnam.

In Portugal, the children’s prayer from the Chapel of the Apparitions in the Marian Shrine of Fatima was broadcast live on the internet, radio and television. In Poland, around 70,000 children also took part in the rosary prayer, including in the National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Zakopane.

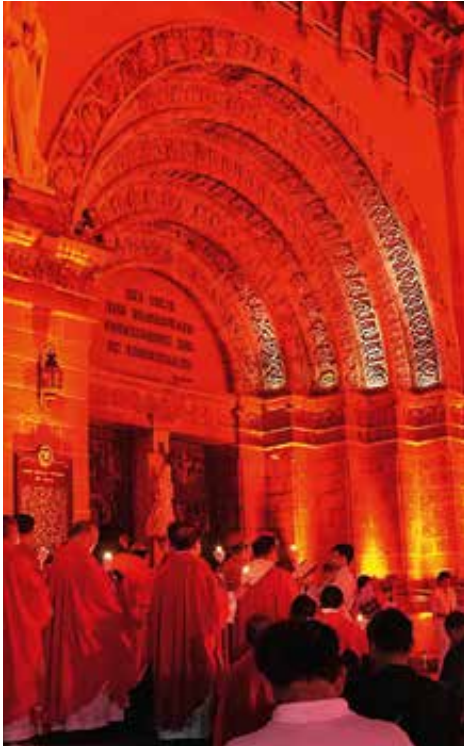
Children also prayed the rosary live on two Brazilian television



channels. In the Cathedral of Maringá in southern Brazil, some 1,000 children gathered to pray together.

In Germany, Radio Horeb broadcast an international rosary in which groups of children from Rwanda, Brazil, Lebanon, Portugal and Germany organised the prayer session.

ACN provides parishes, children’s groups and families with a free brochure and posters on praying the rosary in 18 languages.



The Cathedral of Manila, Philippines.



#RedWeek



The Cristo Rei monument in Lisbon.

**#RedWeek, also called “Red Wednesday” in some countries, is an initiative that was launched by ACN in 2015 to draw public attention to the plight of persecuted and disadvantaged Christians. Christians are the most persecuted religious community in the world. They often live in an environment in which they are violently oppressed, discriminated against or prevented from freely practising their faith.**

#RedWeek 2023 took place from 19 to 26 November in more than a dozen countries. Several hundred churches and other symbolic buildings were illuminated in red to draw attention to the persecution of Christians.

The action was recognised by leading politicians, including Rishi Sunak, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who described #RedWeek in Parliament as “an important moment to demonstrate our solidarity with Christians and all those persecuted around the world for their religion or beliefs”. And he added: “I’m pleased that we will

light up Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office buildings in the U.K. in red in support.”

In Rome, several government buildings, including the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were also illuminated in red, as were several embassies to the Holy See. Several cathedrals in France were also lit up in red. Prayer and information events were held in Paris, including a prayer vigil in Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre and another for young people in La Trinité.

But even in countries in which ACN does not have a national office, governments have taken up #RedWeek. The Hungarian government, for example, organised a conference on religious persecution and invited Bishop Wilfred Anagbe from Makurdi, Nigeria. The Czech and Croatian governments also took part in the campaign in a similar way.

The Portuguese ACN national office used #RedWeek in several dioceses



Dijon Cathedral.



The parliament building in Vienna.

of the country to further disseminate ACN's "Religious Freedom in the World Report".

In 2023, ACN Germany invited guest speakers from Pakistan and Syria. Around 100 churches across the country were illuminated in red. Over 100 parishes also took part in Austria. Here, many churches and public buildings were lit up in red, including the Austrian parliament building.

In Canada, events were held at various locations, including Holy Masses celebrated in the cathedrals of Montreal and Toronto. In Latin America, the ACN national office in Colombia organised talks by missionaries working there. In the Philippines, the Bishops' Conference invited people to take part in the campaign. In Australia, the Night of the Witnesses was organised in the presence of the Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Comensoli, in the local cathedral.



### "Courage to be a Christian"

As part of #RedWeek, on 22 November 2023 at St George's Cathedral in London, the ACN national office of the United Kingdom presented the "Courage to be a Christian" award for the first time. Margaret Attah, who survived an attack on a church

in Owo in the Nigerian state of Ondo on Pentecost Sunday 2022 in which 41 Christians were killed, was honoured. Attah lost both legs in the attack. The award ceremony honoured her bravery and faith in the face of the violence and persecution she suffered.



» In 2023,  
we produced  
192 television  
programmes  
to spread  
the faith. «

Mark von Riedemann, Director of  
Public Affairs and Religious Freedom



**Behind the Catholic Radio & Television Network (CRTN) is a modern production studio specialising in reports and documentaries on the Catholic Church in remote areas. The broadcasts primarily serve to support evangelisation efforts and promote solidarity with the suffering Church. Additionally, they further publicise the work of Aid to the Church in Need. Through our network, we provide our productions to TV stations around the world.**

In 2023, the studio produced a total of 192 TV programmes in all language versions, which were then broadcast on 185 channels. With documentaries, interviews and short films, the programmes reach an audience of tens of millions worldwide. In addition to production and distribution, CRTN also supports a number of worldwide TV distribution initiatives through consulting and programming services.

What's more, CRTN established the global Catholic television resource network [crtn.org](http://crtn.org) 20 years ago, which gives Catholic producers and television stations the opportunity to facilitate the presentation, exchange and distribution of Catholic programmes worldwide. In addition, we have compiled a web catalogue containing 597 productions. In 2023, 327 producers and 178 television stations used this service, which is unique in the Church. A CRTN newsletter, a CRTN Facebook page and the CRTN YouTube channel with 15,800 followers round out our media service.



The CRTN YouTube channel, which currently has more than 3.2 million views.



## YOUCAT

The YOUCAT Foundation is a subsidiary of ACN. YOUCAT provides a broad portfolio of media that contributes to the re-evangelisation and deepening of faith among young Catholics. The offer ranges from catechism editions and attractively designed Bible editions to digital offers, including teaching materials, apps and social media channels.

So far, 59 translations of YOUCAT, the Catholic Church's youth catechism, have been published, with a further 20 in the pipeline. A total of 6.5 million books from the YOUCAT series have now been sold.

2023 was another eventful year for YOUCAT. In early August, for instance, the YOUCAT Foundation took part in

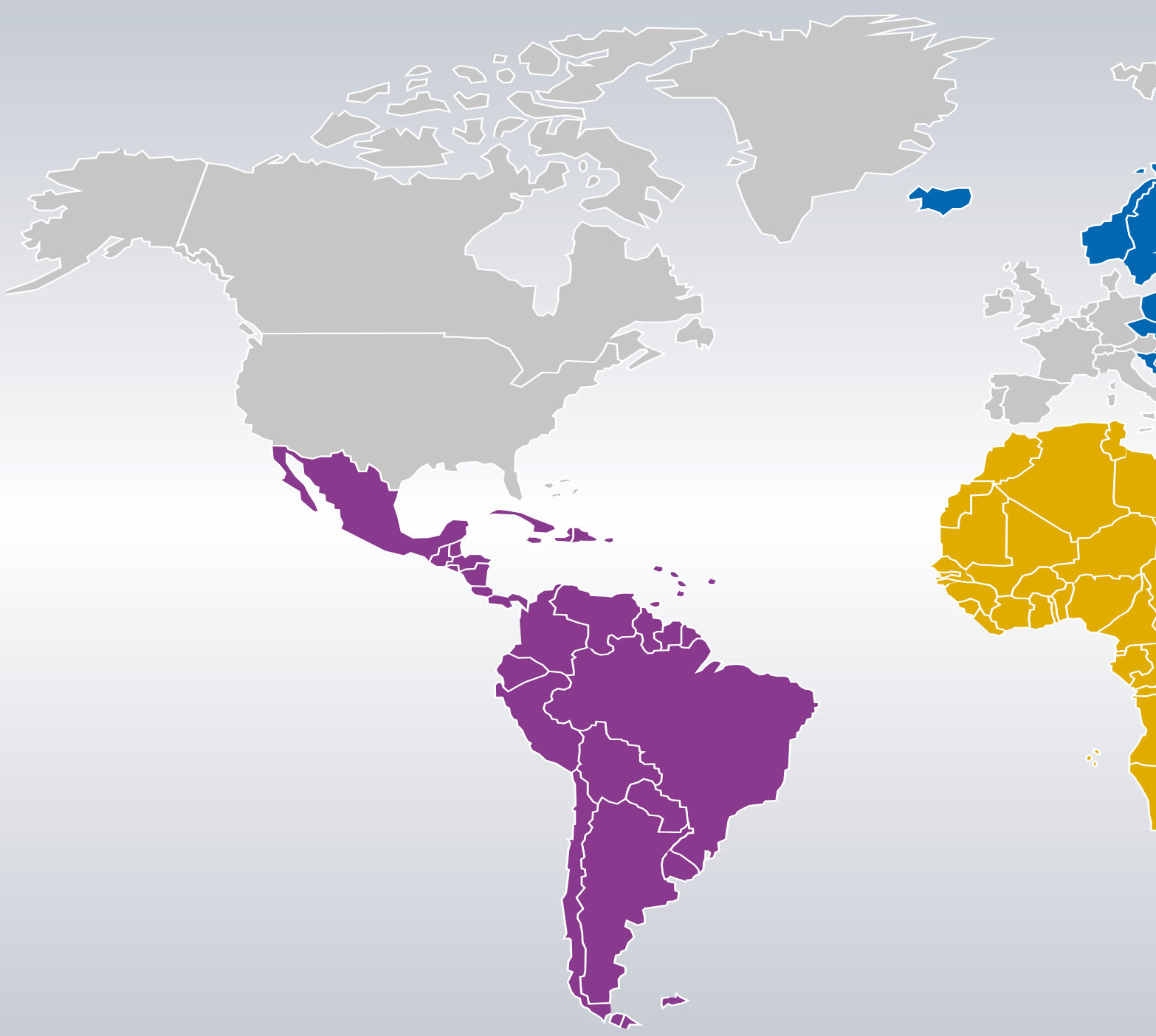
World Youth Day in Lisbon, where it successfully promoted the "YOUCAT Missionary Network". Over 1,000 missionaries and catechists from all over the world have now joined forces in this network.

There is also news from the YOUCAT media programme. September 2023 saw the publication of "Dialogical Catechesis – An Innovative Concept for Practice", which to date has only been available in German and is now to be produced in 12 other languages. In addition, the new publication "YOUCAT Love Forever" is due to be published this year. The book deals with the sacrament of marriage and, in the usual question-and-answer style, handles all the important aspects of personality, love, relationships and marriage.



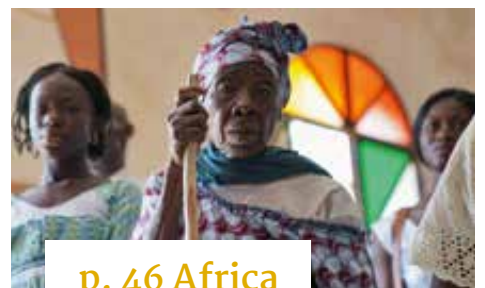
» I entrust you with the YOUCAT for Kids. Never grow tired of asking questions and talking about your faith. « Pope Francis





### p. 34 Latin America

- pp. 36–37 Haiti
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### p. 46 Africa

- pp. 48–49 Burkina Faso
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- pp. 56–57 Madagascar



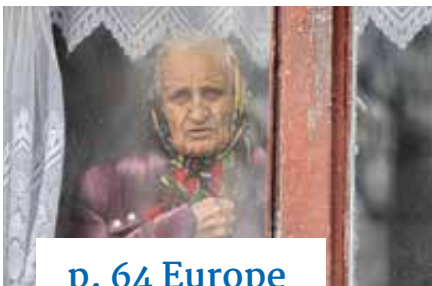
# Our regional activities in 2023

In 2023, ACN received 7,689 project applications and was able to provide assistance in 138 countries. On the following pages, we would like to provide you with an overview of our regional funding priorities. We were particularly committed to the African continent, where the suffering of Christians is exceptionally great due to Islamist violence and persistent poverty. Another focus of our aid was the Church in Ukraine, which stands by the suffering population, as well as support for Christians in the Middle East, many of whom face a bleak future in their homeland due to ongoing war and crises.



## p. 58 Middle East

pp. 60–61 Lebanon  
pp. 62–63 Syria



## p. 64 Europe

pp. 66–67 Northern Europe/  
Baltic States  
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pp. 70–71 Bosnia-Herzegovina  
pp. 72–73 Albania



## p. 74 Asia/Oceania

pp. 76–77 Mongolia  
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pp. 80–81 India  
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pp. 84–85 Papua New Guinea





**The Catholic Church in Latin America has around 500 million believers. More Catholics reside on this continent than on any other. However, social inequality, low income levels and corruption pose major challenges for both the population and the Church. Of particular concern to the local churches is an increasingly aggressive secularism that seeks to silence the voice of the Church in many countries, especially on issues regarding the protection of life and the family. ACN is aware of the challenging circumstances faced by the Church in Latin America and stands by its side in coping with its tasks.**

In addition to the strong polarisation of society, increasing migration is one of the greatest challenges facing the Church. Many people from Venezuela, Haiti, Ecuador and Cuba, and now also from Nicaragua, are emigrating abroad, primarily due to the catastrophic economic conditions. The influx of migrants and the exodus of the rural population to urban centres are leading to rapid urban growth.

cially for those who are poor and uprooted. But at the same time, there is often a shortage of resources to boost pastoral care.



**>> Many Latin American countries are trying to silence the voice of the Church through aggressive means. <<**

Rafael d'Aqui, Head of Section  
for Latin America

Therefore, in many places, there is a growing demand for pastoral care to attend to the needs of the increasing number of believers. Spiritual care is of immense importance, as the Church is the last refuge of hope for many, espe-

Another problem for the Church: the lack of priests and the weaker presence of the Catholic Church have enabled evangelical groups and sects to increasingly spread in many areas of the continent. In order to comprehensively expand pastoral care for the faithful, ACN particularly promotes vocational pastoral work and the training of priests, religious and catechists. Promoting Catholic media and expanding the digital proclamation of faith are also among our important concerns.



## Haiti

### Number of projects

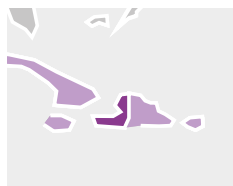
 55  
Funded projects

### Type of projects

 3 Construction/ reconstruction	 0 Means of transport	 7 Mass stipends
 0 Emergency aid	 3 Media help	 0 Bibles & books
 18 Training of priests	 4 Subsistence aid	 18 Formation of faith

### Head of Section

Veronica Katz



**Haiti, located on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean, is the poorest country in Latin**

**America. The population has suffered from devastating natural disasters in recent years and from a deep social, economic and political crisis, which has only worsened since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. For many, the Church is the last sign of hope. ACN has been an indispensable pillar of support for the local Church for many years.**

Violence and insecurity also increased dramatically in Haiti during the reporting year: armed gangs, robberies, kidnappings, drug and arms trafficking, as well as violent riots during demonstrations affect the daily lives of the people, who are already struggling to cope with the consequences of earthquakes, hurricanes, drought and inflation. Due to all these problems, many Haitians are emigrating to Central America, the USA and, above all, to the neighbouring Dominican Republic, which has erected a border wall to slow down the tide of migration.



Formation of faith  
at the Centre Emmaüs  
in Papaye.

ACN provided assistance for the  
purchase of an off-road vehicle for the  
Salesian Sisters in Gommiers.



The Church has not been spared from the violence either. For instance, two Catholic priests were kidnapped during the reporting year: Claretian Father Antoine Christian Noah, a native of Cameroon who was kidnapped in February 2023, managed to escape after ten days. Father Jean-Yves Médidor from the Viatorian Order was kidnapped on 11 March and released almost two weeks later.

Despite its own dramatic situation, the Church in Haiti continues to stand by the suffering population and help wherever it can. In order to meet this challenge, qualified young people are now needed more than ever. For this reason, ACN once again supported the training of prospective priests during the reporting year and, against the backdrop of the all-encompassing crisis, increasingly supported religious sisters with subsistence aid and priests with Mass stipends. Further funds were used to promote the faith formation of young people and the pastoral care of Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic.

» When will  
this wave  
of violence  
finally stop? «

Father Dudley Pierre,  
Viatorian Order





## Venezuela

### Number of projects

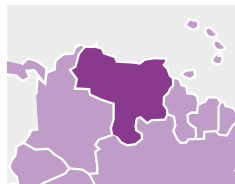
✓ 127

### Type of projects

🔔 20	🎯 6	👤 29
📌 2	🎤 3	📖 9
👥 20	👤 15	👤 23

### Head of Section

Luis Vildoso



**Venezuela has been in an unprecedented crisis for several years. About half of the population lives in poverty. The average monthly income of the poor is 7.40 euros per person. Hunger and malnutrition are now part of daily life. Given their hardship and lack of prospects, faith is the only source of hope for many people. Our foundation recognises the Herculean task facing the local Church in this situation and supports it to the best of its ability.**

**Venezuela has been in an unprecedented crisis for several years. About half of the population lives in**

Economic hardship is now forcing many people to finance their livelihoods through illegal activities, if not through remittances from abroad. As a result, organised crime and drug trafficking have increased significantly in recent years. Meanwhile, according to the United Nations, more than seven million Venezuelans have left the country, reducing the population to 26 million. As many young people are emigrating, the average age of the population is rising.

In Venezuela, the Church is practically the only force standing by the suffering

Seminarians at the seminary in La Guaira.



>> The Church in Venezuela is struggling, but it is very lively, united and joyful. <<

Luis Vildoso,  
Head of Section  
for Venezuela

ACN provides subsistence aid for the religious sisters in La Guaira to secure their basic living needs.



population. And there is hope, church life is still very lively. ACN supports the Church in training seminarians throughout the country. Also, by providing Mass stipends and subsistence aid, we help to ensure that priests and religious have the basic necessities of life and can continue to proclaim the Gospel. In addition, we have been able to strengthen pastoral care in the parishes by providing vehicles and religious material.

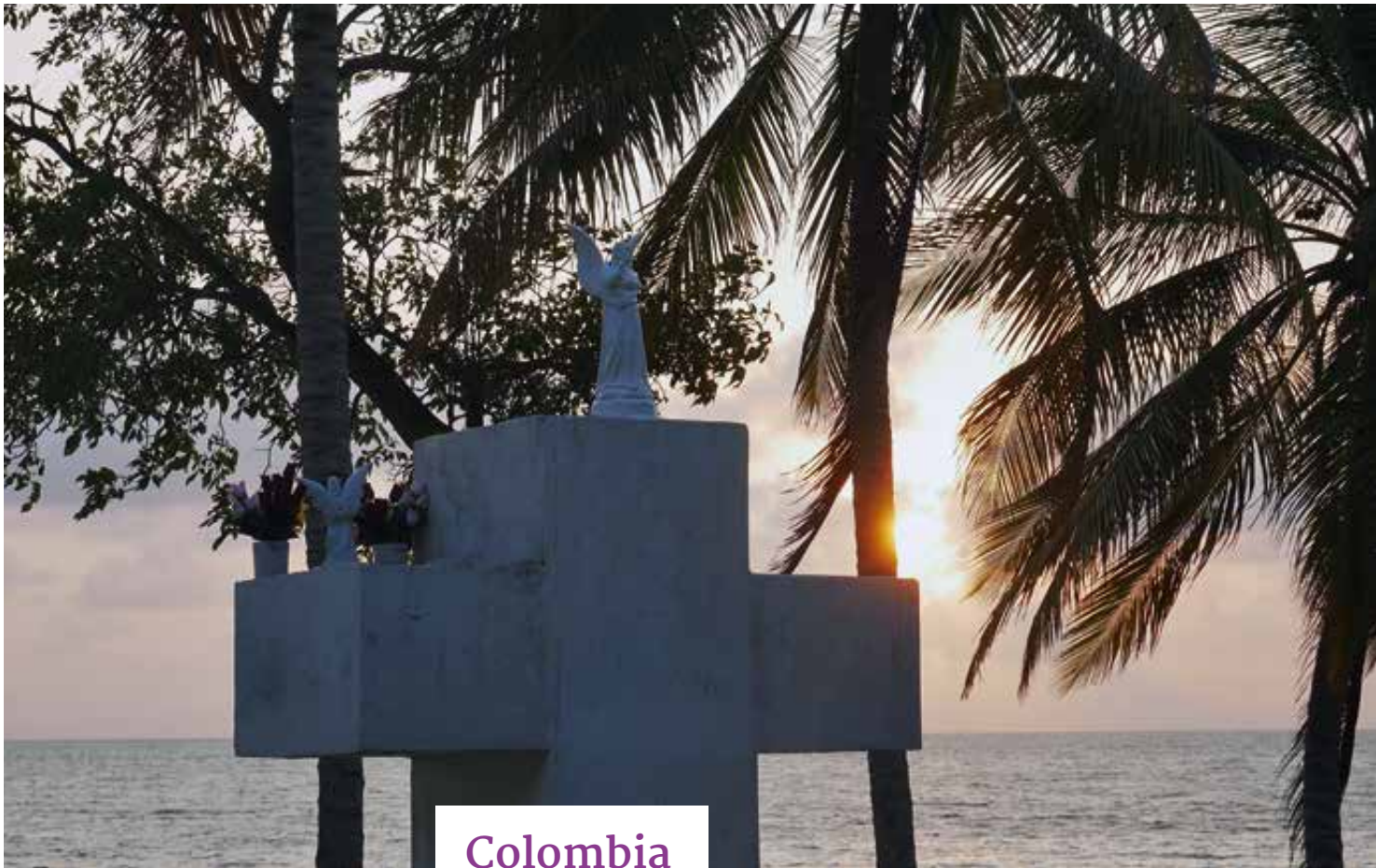


### A new place of worship for 20,000 believers



Ciudad Chávez is a housing estate near the Venezuelan capital Caracas. It was built in 2013 as part of the social programme of then Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. A total of 6,000 flats for more than 20,000 people were constructed here. Although the settlement was originally planned without a church, the

residents campaigned for a church to be built. Ten years after the housing estate was founded, the parish church, which was built with the assistance of ACN, was finally consecrated in November 2023. It is the first parish church in Venezuela to have been built in a state housing estate.



## Colombia

### Number of projects

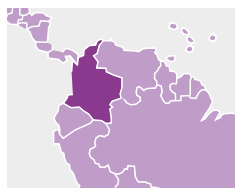
75

### Type of projects

15	7	18
1	0	1
16	4	13

### Head of Section

Luis Vildoso



**Colombia is located at the northern tip of South America and currently has a population of approximately 50 million. 73% of them are Catholic. For decades, the country has been marked by societal strife, guerilla warfare and the drug mafia. The Church has a difficult time here. The rampant violence, increasing secularism and care of suffering migrants are among its greatest challenges. But the local Church knows that it can count on ACN's help.**

**Colombia is located at the northern tip of South America and currently has a population of approximately**

For many years, the Colombian population suffered under the terror of FARC, the largest guerilla movement in Latin America. Despite the signing of a peace treaty between FARC and the government in late 2016, the country remains in a state of tension due to ongoing violence and the presence of drug cartels.

The Catholic faith has a long tradition in Colombia, but the great social inequality and ongoing violence make life difficult for the local Church. In addition, an aggressive, hostile secularism that is incompatible with Catholic values has recently emerged, including

Franciscan sister Diana Sanchez serving food to the needy.





» If the Church  
were not there,  
there would be  
no one else. «

Sister Diana Sanchez,  
project partner

the authorisation of euthanasia in 2014 and the legalisation of abortion up to the 24th week of pregnancy.

But there are also positive developments. The Colombian Church continues to be blessed with many vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We regularly support the training of prospective priests, as well as lay people who are active in parish life. We also help priests with Mass stipends and religious sisters with subsidies towards their living expenses.



### ACN provides help for migrants in need

Hundreds of migrants arrive in the coastal town of Necoclí in north-west Colombia every day. Most of them are refugees from Venezuela hoping to reach the USA via Colombia. Religious sisters look after these people, who face significant material and emotional challenges. Pastoral care of the migrants is supported by ACN.

The significance of this assistance is underscored by the regular reports we receive. For example, our project partner Sister Diana Sanchez wrote to us: “The Church provides first aid here and is the point of contact for the migrants. Our help is there for everyone. We don’t discriminate against anyone, regardless of whether they are Catholic or not.”



## Peru

### Number of projects

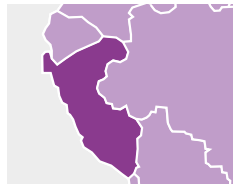
✓ 92

### Type of projects

🔔 8	📍 17	👤 13
📖 0	🎤 0	📄 13
👥 21	👤 8	👤 12

### Head of Section

Luis Vildoso



**Peru is the third largest country in South America in terms of surface area. A vast majority of the**

**33 million Peruvians belong to indigenous tribes. 76% of the population are avowed members of the Catholic Church. Due to the often abject poverty in rural areas, many migrate to the cities, where a modest level of prosperity has developed. One of the main problems that the Church in Peru faces is that there are too few priests. ACN therefore prioritises the training of priests in Peru.**

The strong population growth in the cities presents the Church with major challenges, as more pastors are needed for a growing number of believers. Many of the new arrivals find it difficult to cope with their new life. They often

feel uprooted and slip into drug addiction and crime, and it is not uncommon for entire families to break apart as a result of their living conditions.

More priests are also urgently needed in the inaccessible, expansive parishes in the mountains and in the vast Amazon region. If the faithful do not receive enough pastoral care, hopelessness quickly spreads, which sects often capitalise on to recruit new followers.

ACN therefore supports the training of priests in about 20 seminaries in the country. As catechists also play an important role in preaching the faith, our aid organisation also supports their training. In addition, we support religious sisters who help the poor and weak, usually under the most difficult conditions, and provide the communities with catechetical material.

**» We are there for those in need and accompany them. «**

Bishop Marco Antonio Cortez  
of Tacna y Moquegua

The Diocese of Ayaviri in the Andean region of Cusco at an altitude of 3,907 metres.

Confession in the parish of San Pedro de Moho at an altitude of 3,900 metres on Lake Titicaca.



Catechetical children’s and youth literature for remote Andean villages

The Diocese of Sicuani lies at an altitude of more than 3,500 metres in the south-east of the Peruvian Andes. The majority of the population lives in widely scattered small mountain villages, where faith plays a major role. However, due to the long distances involved, most people are unable to participate in Church life as extensively as they would

like. During the reporting year, we were able to provide the diocese with 1,250 copies of the YOUCAT Children’s and Youth Catechism and 2,500 copies of the YOUCAT Youth Bible. The books are intended for 50 evangelisation groups in which children and young people learn to shape their lives based on their faith.





## Brazil

### Number of projects

244

### Type of projects

52	35	32
0	4	9
49	41	22

### Head of Section

Rafael d'Aqui



10% of the world's tropical rainforest and is the country with the most Catholics in the world. However, their

Brazil has almost 214 million inhabitants and is the largest country in South America. It has

number is dwindling: The proportion of Catholics is now only about 60% of the population and, according to forecasts, it could drop to 40% in the near future. The spread of sects is a major concern for the local Church. Promoting the next generation of priests is therefore a key focus of our commitment in Brazil.



Ticuna girls in Belém do Solimões with children's Bibles in their native language.

Brazil is not only a country of extremes geographically, but also in social, political and economic terms: the population suffers from corruption, unemployment, economic crisis and environmental degradation. Despite the abundant wealth of fertile land and natural resources, significant portions of society experience poverty, impoverishment and a lack of opportunities.

The need is particularly great in the Amazon region. Although the area is rich in resources, the local population hardly benefits from them. The Church therefore plays a key role in helping the

Capuchin Father Paolo Braghini helps the population to grow manioc.

» We need to strengthen the presence of the Church in order to counter the spread of sects. «

Rafael d'Aqui,  
Head of Section for Brazil



ACN helps by providing fuel for the visits of believers from the indigenous communities in Belém do Solimões.

poor and neglected. However, many of our project partners complain that hopelessness is driving many into the arms of sects that are extremely active in Brazil with their deceptive promises of salvation; they also have a good deal of money at their disposal. This makes it all the more important to strengthen the presence of the local Church in the Amazon region.

During the reporting year, ACN therefore continued to support the training of aspiring priests, religious and lay people, with a specific emphasis on securing future pastoral care. Maintaining pastoral care is particularly difficult in the impassable areas of the Amazon, as many communities in the jungle can only be reached by water. These dangerous journeys take many hours and often even days. Here, ACN helped to procure efficient boats so that priests can reach the faithful more quickly and safely. Catechetical material was also provided to promote evangelisation.

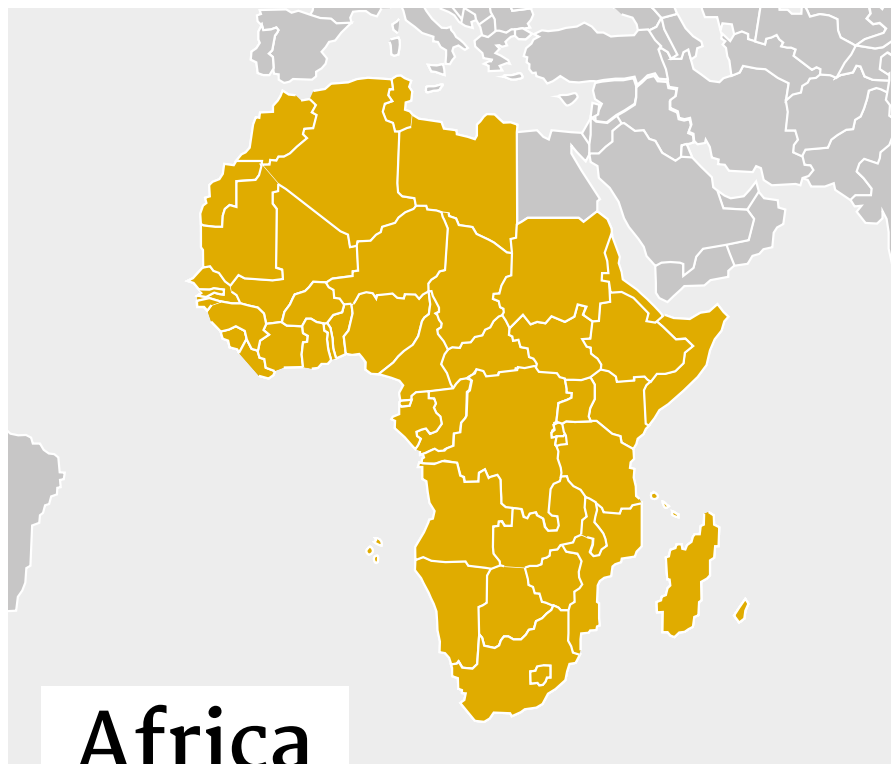


### A pastoral centre for young indigenous people

Capuchins have been looking after the parish of Belém do Solimões in the Amazon region since 2005. The parish consists of 72 communities inhabited by indigenous people, which can only be reached by water. The Capuchin house has now become, among other things,

a centre for nurturing pastoral vocations among young indigenous individuals aspiring to join a religious order or become priests. However, as the building is too small and completely dilapidated and therefore poses health risks, ACN is supporting its expansion and renovation.





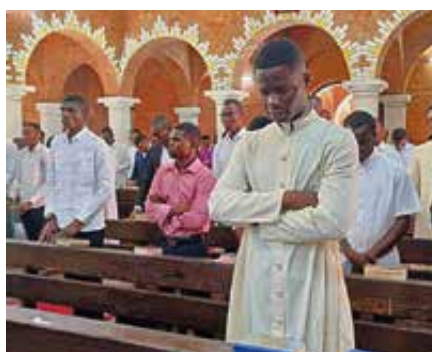
# Africa

**The African continent continued to face major challenges in 2023. For example, Jihadists were able to further consolidate their presence in the sub-Saharan region. These include splinter groups affiliated with IS and Al-Qaeda, propagating violence and terror. Millions of people have already fled the conflict regions. ACN therefore supports the Church in Africa, not only in its pastoral activities within parishes but also in assisting refugees.**

There are valid reasons why Africa remains a priority region for ACN: of all the continents, Africa once again suffered the highest number of murdered priests, religious and church workers during the reporting year. In many African countries, kidnappings of priests and religious have become a daily occurrence and a perfidious means of exerting pressure. Nigeria, in particular, experienced another year of horror, with at least 28 priests, religious and seminarians kidnapped. However, in November 2023, a glimmer of hope emerged with the release of Fr Hans-Joachim Lohre. The German missionary had been abducted in Mali a year earlier and was a long-standing project collaborator with ACN.

## >> Africa remains a continent of hope for the Catholic Church. <<

Despite the huge challenges, Africa remains a continent of hope, as the Church is young and growing. Almost one in five Catholics around the globe, more than one in eight priests, almost one in seven religious sisters and almost a third of all seminarians worldwide live on the continent. It is also the Church that stands by the population in the face of hunger, violence and political instability and assists wherever states fail.



Seminarians at the Mayidi Seminary, Democratic Republic of Congo.

In Africa, ACN focusses on the training and further education of priests, religious and lay people, helps with the purchase of off-road vehicles for pastoral care, provides financial aid for the construction of churches and chapels and promotes initiatives to strengthen the family. Our aid organisation also supports the Church in areas affected by terrorism, by caring for internally displaced persons.



## Burkina Faso

### Number of projects

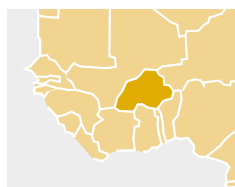
 76  
Funded projects

### Type of projects

 14 Construction/ reconstruction	 14 Means of transport	 14 Mass stipends
 4 Emergency aid	 0 Media help	 0 Bibles & books
 19 Training of priests	 7 Subsistence aid	 4 Formation of faith

### Head of Section

Kinga von Schierstaedt



**West African  
Burkina Faso  
has long been  
considered a  
positive example  
of tolerance and**

**respect in interfaith coexistence. About a quarter of the country's 21 million inhabitants are Christians and approximately 55% are Muslims. Since 2015, however, the north and east, and now also the west, have become hotspots for violent extremists. With ACN's help, the Catholic Church is standing by the long-suffering population.**

Burkina Faso is now the main theatre of jihadist terror in the Sahel. In 2019, Christian believers and churches were attacked for the first time. Since then, the jihadists – predominantly Fulani – have apparently shifted their focus to fuelling religious and ethnic conflicts. The situation has deteriorated further during the reporting year. About two million people have fled. Our local project partners report that priests, religious and believers are increasingly



Carollers with a nativity scene in a suburb of Ouagadougou.

**>> We believe that evil does not  
have the last word. <<**

Father Wenceslao Belem, project partner



Christians displaced  
from Rollo in emergency  
accommodations.

targeted by jihadists. During the reporting year, a priest and a friar were murdered. The Dioceses of Nouna and Dori, along with several parishes, are cut off from the outside world and can only be reached by helicopter.

Although security forces have achieved some success, the situation is far from satisfactory. In many places, the majority of roads are blocked by terrorists. Around 2,000 schools have already been closed. Christians are being killed or abducted, frequently driven by the presence of a Christian name or the wearing of a necklace adorned with a cross pendant. Especially catechists, priests and committed lay people are among the preferred victims. In addition, women and girls are forced to wear full veils regardless of their religious affiliation, otherwise they face the threat of violent attacks and abduction.

In 2023, through Mass stipends, we were able to support numerous priests in regions of the country particularly affected by violence. During the reporting year, we additionally provided aid for acquiring vehicles dedicated to pastoral care and facilitating the training of religious and aspiring priests. We were also able to support our project partners in providing emergency aid for Christians who were forced to flee under the pressure of terrorists.



Church service with displaced  
individuals on the "World Day  
of Migrants and Refugees" in  
Bobo-Dioulasso.



## Nigeria

### Number of projects

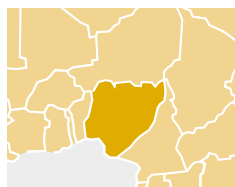
✓ 131

### Type of projects

🔔 19	🌀 6	📡 29
📍 3	🎤 1	📖 0
👥 62	👤 5	👤 6

### Head of Section

Kinga von Schierstaedt



**With currently 206 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. Muslims and Christians each make up 40% of the population, although the proportion varies greatly from region to region. For years, the population has suffered from violence caused by various terrorist groups. The Church is also affected. With the help of ACN, it is still able to fulfil its mission in these difficult times.**

**With currently 206 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. Muslims**

The situation in northern Nigeria is particularly worrying. Here, Christians and moderate Muslims have been persecuted by the terrorist group Boko Haram for years. Although the situation there has eased somewhat recently, Christians now suffer from violent attacks in other areas of the country, mainly perpetrated by nomadic Muslim cattle herders, the Fulani. There are radicalised and heavily armed groups among them.

The Church is one of the terrorists' preferred targets. Priests and religious are particularly at risk – on the one hand, due

Fr Morris with a woman who was driven out of her village by Boko Haram.



## >> Nigerian citizens receive hardly any help from the security forces. <<

Bishop Julius Kundi  
of Kafanchan



Msepera Ujam is now a widow after armed Fulani herdsmen murdered her husband.

to hatred against Christians, but also due to bandits who have discovered kidnapping as a “business model” for extorting ransom money. The sad bottom line: during the reporting year, at least 28 priests, religious and seminarians were victims of kidnappings. Two priests, one novice and one seminarian were murdered.

Despite the challenges facing the Church in Nigeria, the number of priestly vocations is encouraging. In 2023, ACN therefore focused on promoting the training of priests and supporting priests in need with Mass stipends. In view of the high number of severely traumatised victims of violence, ACN also supports the further education of priests and nuns, enabling them to gain psychotherapeutic skills and offer specialised assistance to those in need. Where the security situation has improved, we are helping the Church to rebuild destroyed buildings. Other funds go towards required security measures, including the construction of protective walls and fences or the installation of technical equipment to protect monasteries and seminaries from attacks.



### Violence shatters Christmas celebrations

The largest outbreak of violence against Nigerian Christians to date occurred at Christmas 2023. Almost 200 Christians were killed in 26 communities in Plateau State. Houses and harvested crops were set ablaze and churches and clinics were burnt down. Many of the survivors fled to the cities,

where hundreds sought refuge in various church parishes. Radical Fulani groups are believed to be responsible for the attacks. Bishop Matthew Kukah from the Sokoto Diocese in northern Nigeria called on the government to take immediate action to protect Christians.



## Democratic Republic of the Congo

### Number of projects

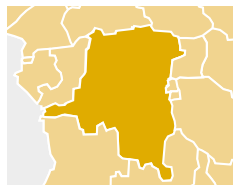
✓ 251

### Type of projects

🔔 32    📍 22    🏠 66  
 💎 0    🎤 3    📖 4  
 👤 102    👤 7    👤 15

### Head of Section

Maxime François-Marsal



resources such as gold, diamonds, ores

The Democratic Republic of Congo is four times the size of France. Although the country has rich natural

and oil, the majority of its 89.5 million inhabitants live in deep poverty. Moreover, extensive regions of the country are witnessing armed conflicts. The situation is particularly dramatic in the east of the country, which is why ACN is focussing its aid on this region.



Altar boys at Holy Mass in South Kivu, Bukavu Diocese.

Children in a village chapel.

**>> Our aid is focused on the needy in the east of the country. <<**

Regina Lynch,  
Executive President

The constant violence involving various rebel groups continues to terrorise the country. According to the UN, the number of internally displaced persons rose to 6.2 million in 2023. The Catholic Church keeps raising its voice for peace and reconciliation. From 31 January to 3 February 2023, Pope Francis visited the Democratic Republic of Congo and appealed for peace to all those responsible. Among other things, he met with victims of violence from the crisis-ridden east of the country. The territory of Beni in the province of North Kivu is considered the epicentre of the violence. According to human rights organisations, the longest-running humanitarian crisis in Africa is taking place in eastern Congo.

Priests and religious are working tirelessly and without regard for their own lives to help the suffering population. ACN regularly supports numerous projects in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This primarily includes promoting the training of priests and securing the livelihoods of religious sisters who care for the needy and traumatised in the region.



### Mass stipends for priests in need

The Diocese of Lolo is located in a very poor, rural area in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The priests there are forced to struggle with extreme conditions when carrying out their pastoral work, as the parishes cover large areas with villages that are difficult to reach. Consequently, further

parishes are to be established in order to reduce the size of the areas and strengthen pastoral care. For where the faithful cannot be looked after regularly, sects are increasingly spreading. As the priests do not receive a salary, ACN supports them with Mass stipends so that at least their basic needs are covered.



Franciscan sisters in the Diocese of Lubumbashi at work in a self-sufficiency project.



## Mozambique

### Number of projects

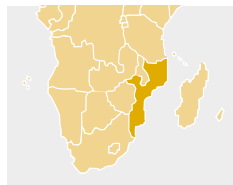
67

### Type of projects

14	13	8
1	1	3
13	8	6

### Head of Section

Ulrich Kny



**Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world. The repercussions of the civil war that**

**ravaged and bled the south-eastern African country dry between 1977 and 1992 are still evident today. Since 2017, the population has been suffering increasingly from Islamist terror. Christians endure particularly severe hardships. ACN supports the local Church in its effort to maintain regular pastoral and spiritual care for the suffering population.**

Just over 55% of Mozambique's approximately 32 million inhabitants are Christians. Muslims make up just over 17% of the population, but in the northernmost province of Cabo Delgado, they form a majority.

While coexistence in Mozambique was peaceful until a few years ago, a jihadist group known as "Al-Shabaab" has been active since 2017. Christians are increasingly being targeted. In September 2023 in the province of Cabo Delgado, for example, terrorists linked to the Islamic State murdered eleven Christians who had returned to their village after having fled. According to the United Nations, the number of internally displaced persons in the reporting year was 830,000.

Another burden is the great poverty suffered by a large proportion of the population, particularly in northern Mozambique. The people have virtually no access to the region's wealth of resources.

**>> The Church of Mozambique is committed to peace negotiations. <<**

Father Eduardo Roca, project partner

Needy people in Cabo Delgado, Pemba Diocese.

A small group of religious sisters return to one of the most remote areas of Mozambique after 40 years.



ACN provides assistance for displaced people in Montepuez.



es. Young people, in particular, have hardly any prospects for a better future. Many of ACN’s project partners are very concerned about a conflagration of violence throughout the north of the country, where the influence of Islamist extremists is on the rise. There are even fears that this development could spread throughout the entire country.

ACN supports the evangelisation and pastoral work of the Church in Mozambique with preventive measures, for example by providing all-terrain vehicles so that bishops, priests and religious sisters can regularly visit the congregations in the outback and show their presence. We also financed more than 43,000 Bibles in 2023 and supported the training of prospective priests.

ACN supported the Franciscan sisters in Nampula, Rapale with a vehicle.





## Madagascar

### Number of projects

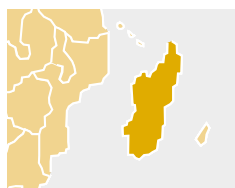
✓ 87

### Type of projects

🔔 17	🌀 6	👤 30
📐 0	🎤 3	📖 0
👥 25	👤 4	👤 2

### Head of Section

Maxime François-Marsal



**Madagascar, a country off the coast of south-east Africa, is the second largest island state in the**

**world after Indonesia. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world. In recent years, numerous natural disasters have severely affected the population and infrastructure. As in many regions of Africa, the Church in Madagascar is also very concerned about increasingly radical Islamism. Our foundation supports the local Church, from promoting the training of priests to financing Catholic media.**

Around 58% of Madagascar's population is Christian, with the rest belonging predominantly to indigenous religions. The social situation in the country is particularly precarious. More than three-quarters of the 27.6 million inhabitants still





» If faith is truly lived,  
then we can experience  
positive development. «

Cardinal Désiré Tsarahazana,  
Archbishop of Toamasina



Annual retreat for the sisters and novices  
of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

live in poverty, which is exacerbated by frequent natural disasters such as cyclones and floods, but also by corruption and the misappropriation of public funds.

Not least, due to its geographical location, the people of Madagascar often feel cut off from the rest of the world. A source of hope for many is their faith. However, Islam is increasingly gaining influence. The local Church laments that the spread of radical Islam is being promoted primarily with funds from the Gulf States. As a result, more and more mosques are being built and there are increasing attacks on Christians and Christian institutions. The poverty of the people is often deliberately exploited. For example, non-Muslims are often persuaded to convert to Islam through financial incentives and women are paid

to wear the full veil. Politicians also massively promote immigration from Muslim countries, especially Turkey.

In order for the local Church to meet the current challenges, the promotion of evangelisation work to deepen people's faith is enormously important. During the reporting year, ACN supported priests in the country with Mass stipends, promoted the training of priests and religious and provided subsistence aid for contemplative sisters. Further funds were used to equip a Catholic radio station and to purchase new vehicles, as the distances within the parishes are very long.





**Aid for the Middle East remains a priority for ACN. Our goal is to give Christians hope and to support them in their efforts to remain in their homeland. After crises and wars, many people are finding it difficult to see any prospects for themselves. The escalation of the situation in Israel and the Gaza Strip has further exacerbated the situation in the Middle East. During the reporting year, ACN supported the Church in the region in more than 512 projects with a total budget of 19.2 million euros.**

Our aid focused on the two countries Syria and Lebanon. The years of war have demanded everything from Christians living in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties, destroyed homes and a life of deprivation in refugee shelters have left people deeply traumatised and insecure. The economic and political situation is so catastrophic that many are deliberating the idea of looking for a better future in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, pure despair prevails in many places.



Seminarian Mario Freiha in a dialogue with believers in Lebanon.

tropolis of Aleppo, with its population of around 1.8 million, and the areas of Hama, Latakia and Idlib were also affected. ACN provided emergency first aid to those affected in these areas and supported the reconstruction of Christian families' homes.

Other projects in both Syria and Lebanon included providing needy families with food and medicine, assistance for seniors and students, as well as subsistence aid for religious sisters and Mass stipends for priests. In addition, we support the reconstruction of church buildings and provide emergency aid for the operation of Catholic schools and hospitals.

**>> Many Christians no longer see prospects for themselves in the Middle East. <<**

Regina Lynch,  
Executive President

The need was exacerbated by the severe earthquake in February 2023, which caused serious damage, particularly in northern Syria. The me-



## Lebanon

### Number of projects



237

Funded projects

### Type of projects



39

Construction/  
reconstruction



6

Means of  
transport



19

Mass  
stipends



74

Emergency  
aid



0

Media  
help



2

Bibles &  
books



22

Training of  
priests



26

Subsistence  
aid

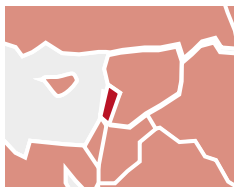


49

Formation  
of faith

### Head of Section

Xavier Stephen Bisits



Ever since the financial collapse of 2019 and the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020, Lebanon has been in ruins. The country was once considered the “Switzerland of the East”, but now has the highest inflation rate in the world. The war in neighbouring Syria

has also caused more than 1.5 million refugees to flock to the country, which until that point had only four million inhabitants. ACN supports the local Church in numerous projects, from emergency aid for the poor and refugees to the funding of holiday camps for children and young people.

For a long time, Lebanon was the only country in the Middle East with a Christian



At the school of the Sisters of Good Service.

majority. Today, Christians are in the minority here. Many are leaving the country or considering emigration. This is because the prices for food, energy and fuel are no longer affordable for many people. There is also hardly any medicine left, and the government often only provides electricity for a few hours a day.

To encourage Christian families to stay in their home country, ACN provides emergency aid to ensure that at least their basic needs are met. We also want to give hope to young people, who frequently no longer see any prospects for themselves. Here we are increasingly supporting the children's and youth work of the Church and helping to finance Christian holiday camps. We also regularly support univer-

sity chaplaincy programmes at public and church universities. One of the goals here is to prevent further young graduates from leaving the country.

During the reporting year, we were once again able to support priests with Mass stipends and religious sisters with subsistence aid. We also provided emergency aid to save church facilities from permanent closure. For example, were able to secure the operation of 180 Catholic schools during the reporting year. These schools are particularly close to our hearts, as they maintain a Christian presence, keep families in the villages and create jobs. They are also centres of catechesis and important meeting places for Christian and Muslim children and their parents.



## » The country is economically and politically at rock bottom. «

Xavier Bisits,  
Head of Section for Lebanon

New construction of the Carmelite convent in Qaouzah.





## Syria

### Number of projects

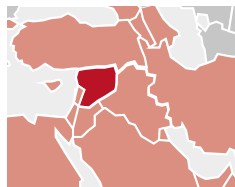
✓ 177

### Type of projects

🔔 28	📍 4	👤 14
📦 53	📞 0	📖 1
👥 1	👨 9	👩 67

### Head of Section

Xavier Stephen Bisits



**Twelve years after the outbreak of war in Syria, which left hundreds of thousands dead, millions displaced and cities destroyed, the economic and social crisis has been greater than ever during the reporting year. Although the security situation has improved somewhat, 90% of the population,**

**including many Christians, live in poverty. Syria therefore remained high on ACN's list of priorities in 2023.**

The people of Syria are suffering from a severe economic crisis following the war. The devastating earthquake in February 2023, which caused immense damage in the north of the country, made the situation even worse. In response to the disaster,

ACN's microcredit programme helps those in need in Damascus.



The earthquake in Aleppo  
left many people homeless.



ACN identified the needs of all 14 affected dioceses immediately after the earthquake and launched an emergency aid programme with 28 projects totalling 1.3 million euros.

Since the beginning of the war in March 2011, ACN has supported projects in Syria totalling over 53.5 million euros. One aim of our aid is to encourage Christians to stay by helping them to create a livelihood. It is estimated that no more than

one-third of the 1.5 million Christians who resided there before the war still live in the completely destroyed country. As an example, to give them a future in their homeland, we are once again supporting church microcredit programmes. These programmes provide needy families and young people with unbureaucratic financial assistance to start their own businesses or resume their professional projects, which had been brought to a standstill by the war.

We provided further aid in Syria during the reporting year by supporting pupils and students, as well as ensuring pastoral care for children and young people in church holiday camps. With 78,000 euros, we were also able to continue to support a church lunch table that provides old and needy people with a warm meal every day. And at Christmas, 30,000 Syrian children were once again given urgently needed items of clothing.



**>> Please do your best  
to help us get out of  
this situation. <<**

Magar Ashkarian,  
Armenian Orthodox  
Bishop of Aleppo





**For ACN, aid for the Church in Europe in 2023 was primarily focused on addressing the impacts of the war in Ukraine. In the second year of the war, our organisation continued to provide massive support to the local Church in caring for refugees and traumatised people and maintaining pastoral care. We were able to provide assistance with a total of 15.9 million euros. It is foreseeable that a good deal of help will still be needed in the coming years – not only for reconstruction, but also and above all for the spiritual healing of the people.**

But it is not only in Ukraine that the Church urgently needs help; other regions of Europe are also in need. Over the past few years of the pandemic, many religious communities were already increasingly reliant on financial support, but new burdens were added during the reporting year. In particular, the sharp price increases for energy and food pushed many monasteries to their limits.

The Catholic Church continues to rely on help from abroad, particularly in places where it is a minority – for example, in the northern European diaspora, where there are very few Catholics, most of whom are migrants. There, we continue to support religious with subsistence aid and priests with Mass stipends.

**>> After the years of the pandemic, high inflation is now putting a strain on the budgets of many monasteries. <<**

Magda Kaczmarek,  
Head of Section Europe

We also fund urgently needed renovations to church buildings. During the reporting year, we were once again able to help priests and religious sisters, who look after large areas, with the purchase of vehicles.



Seminarian at the seminary of the archdiocese in Sarajevo, Bosnia.



## Northern Europe/Baltic States

### Number of projects

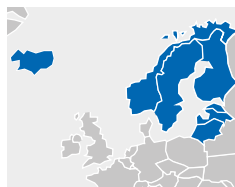
 21  
Funded projects

### Type of projects

 5 Construction/ reconstruction	 3 Means of transport	 1 Mass stipends
 0 Emergency aid	 1 Media help	 1 Bibles & books
 2 Training of priests	 3 Subsistence aid	 5 Formation of faith

### Head of Section

Marco Mencaglia



**With the exception of Lithuania, the Catholic Church has no historically established presence in Northern Europe and the Baltic states. In countries like Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden, most of the faithful come from abroad and are often scattered widely across the country. Although these are predominantly rich countries, the diaspora situation means that the local churches find it difficult**

**to fulfil their tasks on their own. But with ACN, they have a partner that has reliably supported them for many years.**

In Iceland, the situation of the Church is particularly challenging, only 14,700 Catholics live on the island, almost all of whom are immigrants and speak many different native languages. Of Iceland's approximately 357,000 inhabitants, they form a minority of 3.8%. However, the increasing number of immigrants also means there is a rise in the number of Catholics. Just 50 years ago, only



ACN helped the Sisters of St Joseph's Parish in Hafnarfjörður, Iceland to purchase a vehicle.

In Iceland, the parishes are scattered over vast areas.

Carmelite sister Selestine Gavric praying online with children in Akureyri, Iceland.



about 1,000 Catholics lived on the island. Their number has since risen more than 14 times.

However, the geographical location brings great burdens with it. The climate and the long periods of darkness in winter are hard on the priests and religious sisters, most of whom come from abroad. Pastoral care is difficult on the 100,000-square-kilometre island, as the parishes are spread over large areas. ACN therefore supported the Church once

again during the reporting year with procuring vehicles.

The Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were another focus of our aid for Northern Europe in 2023. We were also able to support local churches in these countries by providing subsistence aid for religious sisters and purchasing vehicles. In addition, we sponsored Christian holiday camps for young people, enabling them to experience community and a deepening of their faith at the same time.

**>> Despite the diaspora situation, the number of believers in Iceland is growing steadily. <<**

Marco Mencaglia,  
Director of Projects



Meeting at the school for youth evangelisation in Kėkštai, Lithuania.












## Ukraine

### Number of projects

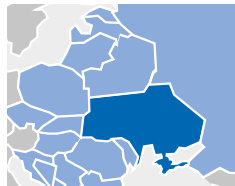
 305

### Type of projects

 66	 55	 58
 12	 1	 7
 34	 32	 40

### Head of Section

Magda Kaczmarek



For Ukraine, 2023 was already the second year of war. Pope Francis repeatedly emphasises the hardship and suffering in Ukraine. According to the United Nations, 6.7 million Ukrainians have now fled abroad, while a further 3.7 million are on the run within the country. Both the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches continued to tirelessly support the suffering population during the reporting year. From the

beginning of the war in February 2022 until the end of 2023, ACN supported the Catholic Church of both rites with altogether 600 projects totalling more than 16 million euros.

During the 2023 reporting year alone, our aid organisation was able to support 305 projects in Ukraine worth 7.5 million euros. Funding was mainly provided for church aid projects for internally displaced persons. In addition, more than 3,400 priests received Mass stipends and religious sisters from many dioceses received subsistence aid. We also sup-

» The population is terribly traumatised by the war. «

Sviatoslav Shevchuk,  
Major Archbishop of the  
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

Open-air confession in the  
archeparchy of Ivano-Frankivsk.



Benedictine sister Faustina comforts a victim of an attack in Kyselivka, Mykolaiv.



Sister Josafata with a refugee family.



Father Gregory Draus provides pastoral and social care to the Roma community stranded on the outskirts of Lviv.

ported the education of all seminarians in the country.

Due to the destruction of the power supply infrastructure in many places as a result of the war, projects to repair heating systems and to purchase generators and heat pumps were also on our funding list. In order to support the priests and religious in caring for refugees, we helped with the procurement of vehicles. We also stepped up our work with children and young people who have been particularly badly affected and traumatised by the war.

The head of the Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, emphasised to ACN the particular need for treating psychological wounds. He believes that 80% of the population is traumatised. For this reason, ACN maintains close contact with the representatives of the local Church and will continue to provide concentrated support to the Church in the future, in order to assist those who have been traumatised and displaced, addressing their spiritual and material needs.



## ACN supports “Holidays with God”

As a result of the war, children and young people, in particular, have been living under constant tension and fear for two years. Many have fled with their mothers to western or central Ukraine. Most of the fathers are at war. Under the motto “Holidays with God”, the Church therefore offers holiday camps

so that children can forget the horrors of war for a few days, experience joy and fellowship and recharge their souls through prayer. Since the beginning of the war, we have enabled more than 3,000 children and young individuals to take part in such holiday events.



## Bosnia-Herzegovina

### Number of projects

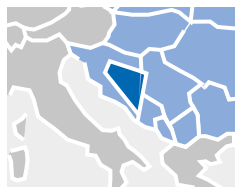
✓ 28

### Type of projects

🔔 9	🎯 9	📡 0
📍 0	🎤 2	📖 0
👥 2	👤 2	👤 4

### Head of Section

Magda Kaczmarek



**Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was once part of Yugoslavia, has around 3.5 million inhabitants. 47.5% profess**

**Islam. Although Christians make up 49% of the total population, only a small proportion of them are Catholic. Catholics often see themselves as a disadvantaged minority in society. ACN therefore supports the local Church with numerous projects to strengthen its presence in the country.**

Religious affiliation in the country is based on ethnicity: Bosniaks are Muslims, Serbs are Orthodox Christians and Croats are Catholics. Of the 820,000 Catholics who lived in Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war between 1992 and 1995, only 400,000 remain today. Many have fled abroad. The wave of emigration continues to this day, and most families do not return, as the situation for Catholics is becoming increasingly difficult.

The local Church is particularly concerned about the increasing Islamisation



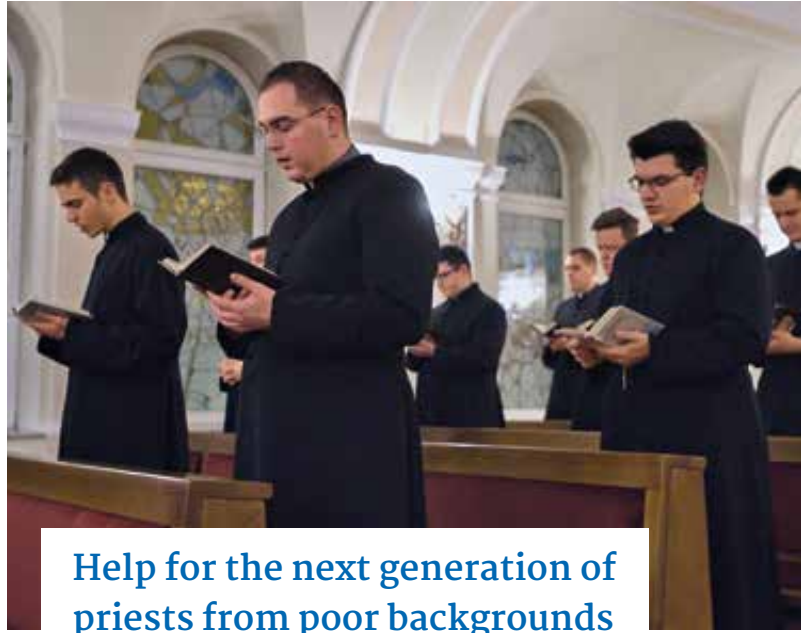
A Poor Clare sister from Brestovsko baking wafers.

**>> Bosnian Catholics are often systematically disadvantaged in society. <<**

Magda Kaczmarek,  
Head of Section for  
Bosnia-Herzegovina

of the country. With donors from Saudi Arabia, Muslim centres and mosques are being built in many places. Church representatives predominantly lament the systematic discrimination of Catholics in the labour market, in schools and in other areas of social life. Church land and buildings that were confiscated during the communist era are often not returned, and building permits for Christian churches are delayed for years.

For ACN, Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to be a priority country in south-eastern Europe. Above all, we support the necessary renovation of churches, monasteries and rectories. To ensure regular pastoral care, we are equipping priests with new vehicles so that they can better serve their large parishes. During the reporting year, we also promoted Catholic media projects, as well as the training of future priests, and supported contemplative orders of religious sisters with subsistence aid.



**Help for the next generation of priests from poor backgrounds**

Many Catholics from Bosnia-Herzegovina left their country during the war. Only when church life is rebuilt in their home villages do some of them find the courage to return. Priests play a key role here. But almost all young men who feel

called to the priesthood come from poor families – like the majority of Catholics in the country. ACN therefore regularly supports the training of prospective priests in Bosnia-Herzegovina.



ACN supports the Poor Clares in Brestovsko.



## Albania

### Number of projects

✓ 26

### Type of projects

🔔 12

🎯 5

👤 1

📌 0

🎤 0

📖 0

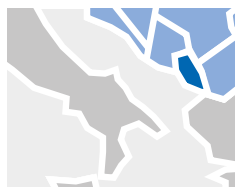
👥 2

👤 3

👤 3

### Head of Section

Marco Mencaglia



Of some three million inhabitants of Albania, Catholics form a small minority in the country with a share of 10%. The majority of the population is Muslim. Albania is currently experiencing a deep crisis characterised by corruption, a shadow economy and a wave of emigration, mostly of young people. Another

problem for the Church is that there are very few local vocations and most priests and religious still come from abroad. For this reason, ACN is increasingly committed to the training of future priests.

During the communist era, believers of all religions in Albania were persecuted even more cruelly than in most other communist-ruled countries. In 1967, Albania declared itself the “first atheist country in the world”. Although religious freedom has been restored since the political transition, there is still much to be done to socialise new generations in the faith.

The local Church particularly laments the loss of the younger generation, who are leaving the country due to a lack of future prospects. The Church is therefore particularly concerned about promoting youth counselling, so that

» The country is in danger of losing its young generation. «

Marco Mencaglia,  
Director of Projects

Bishop Gjergj Meta of  
Rrëshen at a Holy Mass in Perlat.



Holy Mass in the  
Cathedral of Shkodër.



young people can gain the confidence to play a constructive role in society.

During the reporting year, ACN was involved in aid projects in all six dioceses of the country's Church. For example,

we were able to aid in the training of aspiring priests and the provision of vehicles for pastoral care. In addition, we provided renovation assistance, Mass stipends for priests and subsistence aid for religious sisters.



The Franciscan Sisters  
of Bilisht at vespers.





**In many parts of Asia and Oceania, poverty and natural disasters complicate the lives of the population and thus also the work of the Church. Across the area, rural exodus and migration are major issues. In most countries in Asia, Christians are in the minority and frequently face disadvantages and discrimination. ACN helps the local churches to fulfil their diverse tasks and particularly supports the training of priests, religious and lay people.**

In many parts of Asia, Christianity is frequently seen as a harmful influence from abroad, threatening the dominance of the leading party or the perceived religious cohesion of the nation. Nationalist movements and authoritarian systems of government make life difficult for many Christians. Against this backdrop, the Church is often the only source of hope and confidence for the faithful.

**>> The situation for Christians in Asia has deteriorated in many places. <<**

Regina Lynch,  
Executive President

A major problem for the Church in the Asia-Oceania region is the disintegration of families and the uprooting and disorientation of young people.



Archbishop Joseph Arshad condemns the serious attacks in Jaranwala, Pakistan.

Family and youth pastoral care are therefore high on the Church's list of priorities and are regularly supported by ACN. We also help with financial support for the construction and renovation of church buildings and provide catechetical materials and vehicles for pastoral care. In addition, we make an important contribution to initiatives that promote interreligious dialogue.



## Mongolia

### Number of projects

 4  
Funded projects

### Type of projects

 1  
Construction/  
reconstruction


 0  
Means of  
transport


 0  
Mass  
stipends

 0  
Emergency  
aid

 0  
Media  
help

 0  
Bibles &  
books

 0  
Training of  
priests

 0  
Subsistence  
aid

 3  
Formation  
of faith

### Head of Section

Peter Humeniuk



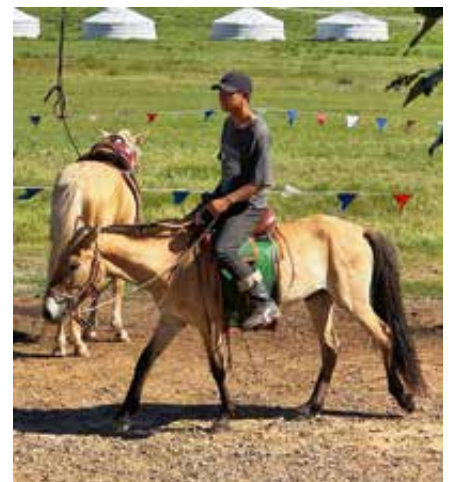
**Situated between the superpowers China and Russia, Mongolia's territory stretches over 1.5 million square kilometres. With a population of just 3.2 million, it is the most sparsely populated country in the world. For**

**the few Catholics in the country, the Pope's visit in September 2023 was a major identity-building event, which was also supported by ACN.**

Mongolia is one of the countries where archaic ways of life are still widespread. For example, around 40% of the population still live as nomads on the country's vast plateaus, while just under half



Yurts are the traditional dwellings of nomads.



» The Pope's visit has shown the Catholics in Mongolia that they are part of the universal Church. «

Peter Humeniuk,  
Head of Section  
for Mongolia



of the population lives in the capital Ulaanbaatar. 58% of the population are Buddhists, 18% practise indigenous shamanism and 5% are Muslims. Some 62,000 Christians make up less than 2% of the total population. Only 1,400 people belong to the Catholic Church, but their numbers are rising.

Russia, among other countries. At the same time, Pope Francis' visit provided the local Church with an important platform for interreligious dialogue between Mongolia's various faith communities. We are all the more pleased that we were able to help the local

Church prepare for this major event. In the future, we would also like to provide more support to priests, religious sisters and lay people in their ministries in order to uphold the Church's potential in Mongolia and ensure its significance for the broader universal Church.

Pope Francis' visit from 1 to 4 September 2023 was the major event of the year for the country's Catholics, as never before had a pope travelled to Mongolia. His sympathy for the country was already evident in 2022, when he appointed the Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, Bishop Giorgio Marengo from Italy, at the time just 48 years old, as Cardinal.

However, the Pope's visit was not only an event for Mongolian Catholics, but also for representatives of various Central and East Asian local churches, who had travelled from Vietnam, China, Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and





## Pakistan

### Number of projects

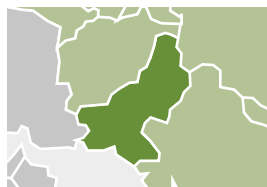
✓ 142

### Type of projects

🔔 47	🌐 28	👤 7
📍 15	🎤 2	📖 3
👥 8	👤 2	👤 30

### Head of Section

Reinhard Backes



**The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a population of 225 million. 96.4% of them**

**are Muslims. The religious minorities in the country suffer extreme discrimination, both from the state and from Islamist extremist groups. The majority of Pakistanis believe that only a Muslim can be a fully-fledged Pakistani citizen. Despite its difficult position in the country, the local Church is still able to fulfil its pastoral tasks with the help of ACN.**

The local Church is also very concerned about rising cases of abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion of Christian and Hindu girls. Although this is not a new phenomenon, it has been increasing recently because women and underage girls belonging to religious minorities are not adequately protected by the law. The perpetrators usually go unpunished.

Christians were not spared attacks during the reporting year either. As a result of false blasphemy accusations against two Christians, a mob of over 7,000 people destroyed 26 churches and chapels

**>> We feel threatened and insecure due to increasing terrorism in the country. <<**

Archbishop Joseph Arshad  
of Islamabad-Rawalpindi



Catholic farm labourers in the fields near Mirpur Khas.

Children in a settlement in the Karachi district.



Burned-down churches and houses after the attacks in Jaranwala.



and hundreds of Christian homes in Jaranwala in Punjab province on 16 August 2023. The bishops of Pakistan described these attacks as “the worst incident against Christians in the country’s history”. ACN helped the local Church to provide 464 affected families with much-needed relief supplies and to begin rebuilding destroyed homes. We were also able to provide vehicles for those who had lost their livelihoods as a result of the attacks.

But there are also positive developments to report: despite its difficult situation, the local Church is highly vibrant and developing dynamically. The churches are full of predominantly young believers. Catechists play an important role in proclaiming the faith. ACN not only supports their training, but also promotes various pastoral programmes to strengthen the faith, particularly in the youth ministry. In addition, we were able to help priests with Mass stipends and enable them to take part in spiritual retreats so that they can regain strength in the face of their myriad challenges.



## ACN promotes religious instruction for Christian children

67 widely scattered villages belong to the Holy Spirit Parish based in Sangla Hill. With the help of ACN, a Sunday school programme was launched in five villages of the parish. A total of

250 Christian children between the ages of seven and fifteen now have the opportunity to learn more about the Holy Scriptures and the faith of the Church.



India

#### Number of projects

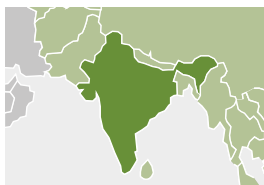
✓ 505

#### Type of projects

🔔 65    🎧 59    📡 124  
 ⬠ 2    🎤 3    📖 6  
 👥 159    👤 2    👤 85

#### Head of Section

Véronique Vogel  
Barbara Rettig



With 1.4 billion inhabitants, India has become the most populous country in

the world in 2023, overtaking China, according to data from the UN. Over 70% of Indians profess Hinduism. The population comprises 14.5% Muslims and 4.8% Christians. As religious minorities, they are often discriminated against and attacked by Hindu nationalist groups. ACN helps the local Church, particularly in the poor north and north-east of the country, so that it can continue its pastoral work.



» Pray for an end to the suffering! «

Archbishop Dominic Lumon of Imphal

After the arson attack on the parish of St Paul in Sangaiprou, Manipur.

Construction of a multi-purpose hall at the Karuna Mata Mandir Church in the parish of Dantri.



Church representatives have repeatedly called on the Indian government to protect Christians and other religious minorities from attacks. This is because time and again, churches have been vandalised and priests, religious and the faithful attacked. Strict anti-conversion laws are in place in several states, according to which any change of religion must first be reported to the authorities and authorised. Christians are accused of illegally proselytising members of other religious communities. As a result, they live under continuous stress and fear violent attacks.

Militant groups continued to intensify their hostile actions and acts of violence against Christians during the reporting year. In mid-2023, for example, there were weeks of serious riots in the north-east Indian state of Manipur, which claimed many lives and led to the displacement of some 50,000 people. While the conflict also had an ethnic component, local

sources reported that Christians were specifically targeted. Around 300 churches and church buildings were destroyed. ACN provided several emergency aid programmes to support those who had been displaced. At the end of the reporting year, the situation was still tense.

In general, the north and north-east of India are priority regions for our aid to the Indian Church – primarily because the faithful there belong to disadvantaged ethnic minorities. ACN supports priests and members of religious orders with Mass stipends and subsistence aid, finances vehicles for pastoral care and assists with the renovation and construction of church buildings. In addition, we promote the training of priestly and religious vocations, as well as the continuing education of priests, religious and lay people. We also strengthen marriage preparation in the Church and provide catechesis for children and young people.



## ACN improves mobile pastoral care

The parish of Saharsa is located on the border with Nepal in one of the poorest areas of India. The majority of the faithful there belong to the Santal tribe. Priests in the parish look after large areas and must visit numerous villages. However, poor roads, heavy rainfall and thick fog in winter make travelling by moped dangerous. ACN therefore enabled the purchase of an all-terrain vehicle, which has made pastoral work in the parish much easier.





## Philippines

### Number of projects

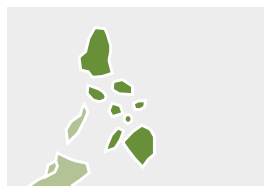
✓ 71

### Type of projects

🔔 14	🎯 2	👤 7
📍 0	🎤 1	📖 1
👥 26	👤 2	👤 18

### Head of Section

Véronique Vogel



**More than 80% of the 109 million inhabitants of the Philippines are**

**Catholic. This makes it the only country in Asia with a Christian majority. The local Church here has to contend with a multitude of problems and conflicts. These include violence, poverty, increasing materialism, the spread of sects and Islamist terror on the Mindanao archipelago. ACN therefore supports the Church in interreligious dialogue, among other things, so that preventative action can be taken against violence.**

Natural disasters such as typhoons, earthquakes and floods pose a permanent threat in the Philippines. In addition, there are massive problems in connection with prostitution, drugs, domestic violence and the abuse of minors. The Church is increasingly trying to counter these issues by deepening the faith and strengthening inner values.

Another serious problem in the country is the high migration rate; almost two million Filipinos live abroad. More than half of them are women, which has led to many families being broken up. In addition, material and intellectual poverty often favours a spirit-

Father Sebastiano D'Ambra conversing with a Muslim woman.



» Many people feel disorientated,  
frequently making them easy  
prey for sects. «

Véronique Vogel, Head of  
Section for the Philippines



uality that is characterised by animistic beliefs. Here, the Church is intensifying catechesis and pastoral care in order to root people more deeply in their faith and thus make them more resilient to the deceptive promises of sects.

seminarians, novices and catechists. In addition, we assisted the country's poorer dioceses with Mass stipends for priests and subsistence aid for religious sisters.

One centre of conflict in the Philippines is the Mindanao archipelago, where many Muslims live. Various Islamist terrorist groups want to establish an Islamic state there. Overall, an increasing radicalisation can be observed. On the first Sunday of Advent, for example, there was a bomb attack during a Catholic Mass at Mindanao State University in Marawi. A group linked to the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. Here the Church relies on dialogue with moderate Muslim groups. The Silsilah Centre, which was founded in 1984 by Father Sebastiano D'Ambra in Zamboanga on the island of Mindanao and is regularly supported by ACN, plays an important role in this process. Several thousand people have already been trained there for interreligious dialogue.

During the reporting year, we also supported youth and family pastoral work in particular, as well as the training of

Lessons for children in  
the parish of St Joseph.





## Papua New Guinea

### Number of projects

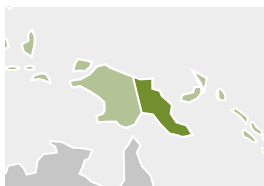
✓ 44

### Type of projects

🛎 6    🌀 13    🏠 6  
 📍 0    🎤 0    📖 0  
 👤 8    👤 1    👤 10

### Head of Section

Irene Eschmann



In some parts of Papua New Guinea, the Catholic Church has only been present for a

**few generations. Nevertheless, today, more than a quarter of the eight million inhabitants are Catholic. Due to the high cost of living, unemployment and poverty, social tensions prevail in many places in the country. Many families can barely afford schooling for their children. Here, the Church provides**

**orientation to the people, as well as pastoral care to address all their needs. Our aid organisation supports them to the best of its ability.**

Papua New Guinea is the largest and most populous country in Oceania in relation to area, where a myriad of different languages are spoken. But it is not only the language barriers that pose challenges for pastoral work; many areas are also very remote. The terrain in the rugged country is extremely impassable and there are few roads.



A parish in the Diocese of Wabag.

Children from the Kiriwina Islands at the opening of the primary school in Wapipi.

ACN helped finance the purchase of an off-road vehicle for a new jungle community in Sandaun Province.



» I thank God for your love and care for the priests among us who face difficult situations. <<

A priest from the Diocese of Alotau

The priests are confronted with immense problems, particularly in their social and pastoral work. Although rapid technological progress, digitalisation and globalisation have also reached Papua New Guinea, large sections of the population feel overwhelmed by the changes and experience a sense of being left behind socially. In addition, the prices for many goods are disproportionately high, as there is virtually no industry in the country and much has to be imported. Although most people can feed themselves through their own agricultural efforts, money is scarce, and obtaining education, for instance, is often only feasible for many through significant sacrifices, or may even remain unaffordable.

For the faithful, the Church is a place where they can find hope, guidance and comfort. It is therefore a particular concern of ours to support priests and religious through Mass stipends and subsistence aid. We also enable them to take part in spiritual retreats, fostering inner strength that enables them to sustain their demanding ministry.

Moreover, we regularly support the training of prospective priests and provide the local Church with funds to purchase vehicles for pastoral care.



## Indispensable: Mass stipends for priests in need

In several dioceses in Papua New Guinea, ACN was able to support priests once again in 2023 with Mass stipends, including in the Diocese of Alotau, whose parishes are often located on smaller islands and can only be reached by boat. Despite undergoing an amputation of his

foot, one of the priests is pleased to be able to continue serving the Church. In a letter, he offered thanks for the Mass stipends with the lines: "I thank God for your love and care for the priests among us who face difficult situations. Without your financial support, I would never be able to accomplish many things."



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## » For the love of Christ urges us on. «

2 Corinthians 5:14

### Our mission

As a Catholic charity, we support the faithful wherever they are persecuted, oppressed or in need, through prayer, information and action.

### Our vision

A world in which Christianity can thrive everywhere.

### Our guidelines

1. We are loyal to the Holy Father. As a Pontifical Foundation, we participate in the universal mission of the Church.
2. We serve the cause of evangelisation. We respond courageously to the challenges of the time following the teachings of the Church.
3. We are committed to the persecuted Church. By sharing testimonies of faith, we build a bridge of charity between our benefactors and beneficiaries.
4. We are custodians of our benefactors' generosity. We run modern, transparent and effective fundraising and administration.



## Our values



### Faith and Christian love

The foundation of all our activities is Christian faith and love. This includes our fidelity to the Holy Father and the adherence to both the teachings and institutions of the Catholic Church.



### Prayer

Regular prayer, personal and common, animates our daily work and strengthens our missionary spirit. It moves us to offer assistance to those who are suffering because of their loyalty to Christ and His Church – on whose prayers we rely as well.



### Pastoral commitment

We strive to proclaim the Gospel, be it “welcome or unwelcome” (2 Timothy 4:2), responding courageously to the challenges of the time. We do this when engaging our benefactors and by financing pastoral projects with their contributions.



### Unity

Conceived as a “bridge of love” from its origins, ACN serves for unity and reconciliation. We create communion with and between both our benefactors and beneficiaries through prayer, providing information and expressing gratitude.



### Service

We fulfil our mission through mercy and humble service, listening carefully to the needs of our partners. We aspire to be a personal source of comfort and strength to our beneficiaries and benefactors.



### Openness

Through our support of the Universal Church we promote a respectful dialogue with many cultures around the world. We live this openness ourselves in our manifold encounters both within and outside the Catholic Church.



### Accountability

We handle the funds we receive with the highest care, seeking efficiency and measuring impact both in our funding activities and within our internal organization. We work transparently, showing the sources, uses and achievements of the funds we receive.



### Trust

Our unshakeable trust in Divine Providence guides us into the future and enables us to place trust in others and, in turn, to be trusted by them. Consecrated to Our Lady of Fatima we are filled with hope and confidence.



**>> May the Lord make your prayers and commitment to the Church bear fruit throughout the world. <<**

Pope Francis to the benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need



**Ever since its earliest days, ACN has been geared towards charity and reconciliation, providing assistance to Christians in need. With the support of our bene-**

**factors, we will remain true to this spirit in future with a view to helping the Church where its believers are threatened most by persecution, discrimination and poverty.**



**1947** At Pope Pius XII's request, Father Werenfried van Straaten founds ACN (then "Aid to the Eastern Priests") at the Premonstratensian monastery in Tongerlo, Belgium. In a unique reconciliation campaign, donations are collected in Belgium and the Netherlands for displaced Germans, including 3,000 priests.

**1965** Petitions also reach us from the Church in Africa, which we proceed to assist with the same commitment as on other continents.

**1966** ACN is consecrated to Our Lady of Fatima. The following year, a large international pilgrimage takes place to mark the 50th anniversary of the apparitions.

**1950** To provide pastoral care to displaced Germans, 35 buses and trucks are converted into "chapels on wheels" as part of the highly original "chapel truck campaign".

**1970** We launch our aid campaign to assist the Church in Haiti, one of the world's poorest countries.

**1975** ACN relocates its international headquarters from Rome to Königstein/Taunus.

**1952** ACN comes to the aid of persecuted Christians behind the "Iron Curtain". The projects range from helping to renovate churches and train priests to funding radio broadcasts and the book apostolate.

**1979** With the Children's Bible, we launch a major project for boosting evangelisation efforts worldwide. To date, the book has been translated into 191 languages and printed and distributed over 51 million times.

**1956** After the bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising against the Stalinist system, ACN helps the local Church get through the crisis.

**1984** ACN is recognised by the Holy See as a Universal Public Association of Pontifical Right.

**1961** We launch our aid projects for the beleaguered Church in Asia. Following this, the first meeting between Father Werenfried and Mother Teresa takes place in the Home for the Dying in Calcutta.

**1989** Following the political turning point in Eastern Europe, ACN provides aid for reconstruction and new evangelisation in the former Eastern bloc countries.

**1962** We step up our aid for persecuted and threatened Catholics in the "Catholic continent" of Latin America.

**1992** By order of Pope John Paul II, our aid organisation begins to work towards a dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.





**1997** The 50th anniversary of ACN's efforts on behalf of the Church in need worldwide – an occasion that is celebrated fittingly.

**2003** Father Werenfried van Straaten, founder of our aid organisation, dies on 31 January at the age of 90 in his place of residence, Bad Soden/Taunus.

**2007** The Middle East conflict causes more and more difficulties for the Church in the region, prompting Pope Benedict XVI to ask ACN to intensify its activities for Christians in the Middle East.

**2011** An eventful year for ACN: our aid organisation is re-founded as a Foundation of Pontifical Right by Pope Benedict XVI and subsequently restructured. When the Syrian war breaks out, ACN begins extensive aid and solidarity campaigns, including the "Light a Candle for Peace in Syria" initiative.

**2014** ACN initiates an emergency campaign to allow Christians in Iraq to remain in their homeland. The project is still going strong to this day, with more than 5,000 houses having already been renovated. ACN also becomes the sole shareholder of the YUUCAT Foundation and therefore its publisher. The work is very popular in Catholic youth work all over the world, with translations into no fewer than 58 languages. ACN opens its first Asian office in South Korea. This is followed by further offices in Mexico, Malta, Colombia, Slovakia and the Philippines up until 2019.

**2017** To mark the 70th anniversary of our aid organisation, ACN invites benefactors from all over the world on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Fatima in Portugal. In the same year, Aid to the Church in Need assumes responsibility for the annual One Million Children Praying the Rosary campaign.

**2019** With the Safeguarding project, ACN is helping the church to introduce measures to prevent abuse and is encouraging safeguarding courses for priests and religious worldwide.

**2020** Our foundation helps the Church worldwide in their efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic and grants special assistance to cushion the impact of the coronavirus crisis for local churches. Following the explosion in Beirut's harbour, ACN is launching a major aid campaign for Lebanon.

**2022** Immediately after the start of the war in Ukraine, our aid organisation launches a large-scale relief operation to enable the local church to assist those who had fled their homes, suffering people and to continue pastoral care.





## Aid to the Church in Need and its organisational structure

**Mauro Cardinal  
Piacenza**  
President



The **Superior Council**, under the chairmanship of its **President**, is responsible for the basic content and guidelines of the charity.

On behalf of the Superior Council and under the chairmanship of the **Executive President**, the **Administrative Council** ensures the statutory management of the charity.

**Regina Lynch**  
Executive President



In the **General Council**, the presidents of the 23 National Sections advise the foundation and vote on all the significant decisions of the Superior Council.

In cooperation with the Ecclesiastical Assistants of the National Sections, the **International Ecclesiastical Assistant** is responsible for the spiritual life of the foundation.

**Philipp Ozores**  
Secretary General



The **General Secretariat** in Königstein/Ts. centrally manages the entire funding activities and the financial, technical and administrative needs of the foundation. It supports the National Sections in providing media material and produces press and social media content and sound and video productions.

**Guido Gröning**  
Director Finance  
and Administration



The **23 National Sections** inform the benefactors and the public on the situation and needs of suffering Christians. They initiate prayer campaigns, acquire new donors and are responsible for the foundation's relations with its benefactors.



**Father  
Anton Lässer, CP**  
International  
Ecclesiastical Assistant



**Marco Mencaglia**  
Director of Projects



**Mark von  
Riedemann**  
Director for  
Public Affairs and  
Religious Freedom

**Photo index** (page/photo)

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