

Devotion at a church in rural China



DRIVING past factories belching out thick, black smoke, the roadsides teeming with people, we arrive in one of China's poorest regions.

Here, a small band of priests is working to bring people back to God.

One of the priests, who worked in a former labour camp, has been asked to stay because he is so loved by the community.

A more senior priest, now in his 70s and himself a survivor of the labour camps, begged for help to support his clergy.

The priest, who travels everywhere by bus to visit his flock, added: "It is difficult because Catholics here are so very poor.

"In many places out in the villages, there is so much work to do but our financial situation means we can do so little.

"Please pray for us," he added.



Thanks to you, last year ACN provided more than 70 grants offering help for seminarians, Sisters and catechists in formation across China.

Spreading the Gospel of Hope



"TO be ordained priest would be a wonderful thing. I have waited so long for this."

The seminarian from central China said he had been training for nearly 15 years.

Years of persecution had postponed his ordination again and again. Early on, Chinese officials would chase seminarians like him. He remembered once leaping over a wall to escape.

But now, his training is almost over and a date for his ordination has been set.

He said: "So many benefactors have supported me along the way. I know that when I am ordained I will never forget them when I say Mass."



Thanks to you, ACN last year supported some of China's poorest priests after bishops all over the country appealed for aid. More help is urgently needed.

Reverence: Seminarians from eastern China



CALLING the regime's bluff is an essential part of Fr Han's mission in eastern China.

"The authorities kept trying to stop me from building my church," he said, "but in the end I just went ahead with it anyway."

Within just a few years in the parish, Fr Han has increased the number of youth groups from six to 24 - each with 15 young people learning the Faith and praying together.

His parish boasts 500 baptisms every year. Weekday Mass attendance is 1,000.

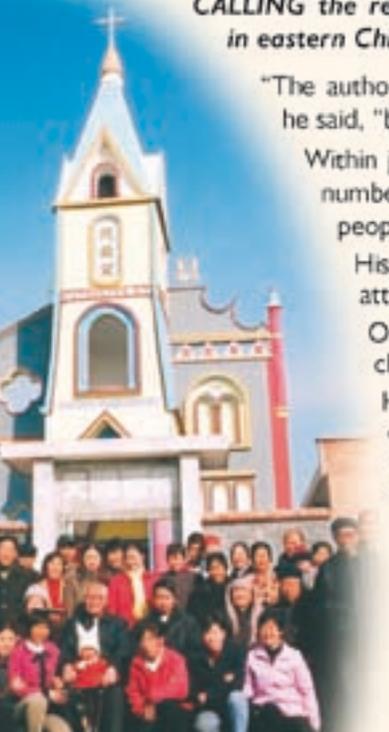
One priest defied the restrictions to build at least five churches - thanks to help from ACN.

He told the authorities: "I am not going to pull down the church - if you insist on it being done, you'll have to do it yourselves and face the consequences from many angry people."



Thanks to you, last year alone, 12 key church projects were supported by ACN - part of a growing number of applications for aid sent by Church leaders.

From the archives - Catholics after Mass in northern China



"OUR villages are like Africa, our cities are like Europe."

Thus spoke the bishop.

Millions upon millions of Chinese are emigrating from the countryside to the cities in what has been described as the largest migration in history.

"The Church desperately needs to respond to this massive change in society," said the bishop.

ACN is helping the Church grow during this time of upheaval, supporting Sisters and catechists in very poor regions.

They look after the old, the sick and the disabled in



Thanks to you, ACN supported more than 100 projects for the Church in China in 2007. China is a priority for ACN. The charity has promised bishops and religious superiors vital assistance. Supporting the faithful is critical at this time of massive upheaval.

areas where people of working age - especially men - have left to find better jobs in the cities.

These regions are starved of young people. Rural China has one of the world's worst suicide rates among women.

The problems are worsened by the effects of the One Child Policy. Meantime, in the massively expanding cities, ACN is helping with new churches, convents and presbyteries.

Any help that you can give will go towards these and other similar projects in China and throughout the world.

RESPONSE FORM



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Ph/Fax No: (02) 9679-1929
e-mail: info@aidtochurch.org Web: www.aidtochurch.org

BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Sr/Rev:.....

Address:

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I/We enclose \$..... to support the work of the Aid to the Church in Need in China.

I enclose a cheque/money order payable to Aid to the Church in Need

OR please debit my Visa or Mastercard:



Expiry date:/.....

Signature:

Once again we are delighted to offer a beautiful hand made Rosary from the Holy Land free of charge to all those who give a donation and tick this box.

Simple in design and yet profound in its symbolic significance, this rosary is made by Christian families who have carefully crafted olive wood grown in the Holy Land. Many Christians in Bethlehem live by making rosaries. The rosary is your invitation to pray for the suffering church.



Full length of the Rosary: 33cm (13 1/2 inches)

Please tick the box above if you would like to receive this rosary

A08/5/12/10



A Special Message from China's Cardinal Zen

"People in the West are still largely unaware of the suffering and oppression that continues to go on in China.

The Church is a real sign of hope for the future.

I offer my thanks to the benefactors and friends of Aid to the Church in Need for all you've done and are continuing to do for the Church in China. We count on your continuing prayers"

CHINA: FACTS AND FIGURES

Total population	1.3 billion
Christian population	40 million
Catholic population ('Official' and 'Underground')	12 million
Churches and chapels	6,000
'Official' bishops	67
'Underground' bishops	44
Proportion of bishops recognised by the Holy See	More than 90 percent
Seminarians	1,500
Sisters in formation	550

Source: Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong

United in Prayer



Benediction at a seminary in Hebei Province

THE torch of faith is burning bright in China – thwarting the efforts of those determined to snuff it out.

Although the oppression continues, few of the enthusiastic, younger generation of faithful could imagine how much Christians – and others like them – suffered in former years.

At the height of the persecution in the late 1960s, during the Cultural Revolution, vast numbers of faithful were sent off to labour camps and many more were killed, often brutally.

Even those caught murmuring a prayer in private risked arrest, and possession of religious articles such as rosaries was very dangerous.

By the 1970s, every church had been closed, many of them demolished by the Red Guards. All religious activity ceased.

As ACN witnessed during a recent fact-finding trip across China, the memory of this painful period is still very vivid.

One bishop recalled how he was publicly taunted and shouted at, all the while being forced to wear a 'Dunce's cap' as punishment for his disloyalty to the regime.

"With sincere gratitude, I thank God for the deeply-felt witness of faithfulness offered by the Chinese Catholic community in truly difficult circumstances. At the same time, I sense the urgent need to confirm the faith of Chinese Catholics and favour their unity with the means proper to the Church."

Extract from Pope Benedict XVI's Letter to China 27th May 2007

Starting in the early 1980s, tolerance of religion began to grow but a government Church policy of divide and rule dating back to the 1950s has continued to overshadow the development of the Catholic Church.

In 1957, communist China established the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association to control the faithful, a move which led to the emergence of a state-recognised 'Official' Church and the 'Underground' Church, refusing to cooperate with the State.

Today, the vast majority of bishops are in communion with Rome.

Of particular concern has been the appointment of bishops, which the CCPA has sought to control without reference to the Pope.

Determined to break the deadlock created by these problems, Pope Benedict XVI's summer 2007 Letter to China sought to promote reconciliation within the Church following misunderstandings of the past.

Already hope is on the horizon with increased cooperation between 'Official' and 'Underground' Church communities.



Aid to the Church in Need

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Reports and Photographs by John Pontifex (2008)

Note: The identity of certain individuals included in this report has been kept secret in order to protect them.



CHINA

The Torch of Faith

passed on through miracle and mission

Aid to the Church in Need Report 2008

THE survival of Christianity in China is a miracle of modern times – surpassed only by its seemingly unstoppable growth today.

Sunday morning Mass at a church in Hebei Province

With new churches springing up all over the country, overflowing congregations and thousands of conversions, it is almost impossible to imagine how brutally it was crushed during the height of communist persecution. As the religious clampdown climaxed, almost all religious activity was stopped.

Now it is totally different. Reports say there are at least 40 million Christians – a third of them Catholics.

According to some clergy in China there are up to 100,000 adult converts every year.

And yet the persecution continues. Up to 12 bishops are incarcerated – under house arrest, in prison, held in police detention, or forced to go into hiding.

Forcibly prevented from using their churches, Catholics in key parts of the country go to Mass in secret – in barns, courtyards, a backroom in a friend's home.

Through good times and bad, the benefactors of Aid to

the Church in Need have stood by the suffering Church of China.

This report celebrates the hope of the Church in China as witnessed during an ACN trip in which we criss-crossed the country to meet those in need of the charity's support.

In this year of the Beijing Olympics, problems both old and new threaten the Church in China – ongoing state oppression and growing materialism.

Determined to weather these storms – and rise to new opportunities – bishops, priests, sisters and lay have again and again turned in hope to Aid to the Church in Need.

I asked one 'Underground' priest what kept him going through the hardship.

He gave a beaming smile. Gently prodding the air above our heads, he said simply: "God. It is God who sees me through."