



Sr Anna: "Being willing to suffer just as Christ suffered"

JERUSALEM'S SISTER ANNA has a difficult mission.

Men masquerading as maintenance engineers climbed the convent chapel and took away the cross. Later, she was told the cross was offensive to nearby Jews.

The sisters need help. Undaunted, Sister Anna has taken in five girls from a troubled home, offering them shelter and support.

Sister Anna, the Sister-in-Charge at the Mamilla convent, said: "I am a nun for the people here in Jerusalem. We must be prepared to suffer – and we mustn't forget that Christ's Way of the Cross took place not far from here."



Courageous Father Yousef Saadeh, Nablus

AID to the Church in Need has offered key support for churches affected by violence in the West Bank.

Among them is the Greek Catholic Church of St John the Baptist, Nablus, which was targeted after Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg speech.

Armed men burst into the church compound but the deacon refused to hand over the keys.

His bravery did much to save the church. The men set the church doors ablaze after dousing them in petrol. Molotov cocktails were thrown at the church and the altar and sanctuary area received damage.

ACN is helping parish priest Father Yousef Saadeh, who besides repairing the church wants to build a new parish centre, presbytery and lecture hall.

Speaking to ACN, he said he wanted to renew hope among the Christian community: "Thank you for offering to help us," he said. "Life here is hard. We are afraid we will suffer in the future. Please keep us in your prayers."

The Holy Land: Breaking down the barriers of despair

CHRISTIANS in Israel/Palestine are turning in hope to ACN as the survival of the Church hangs in the balance amid increased religious extremism and state-sponsored oppression.

A polarisation of some Muslims and Jews towards extremism has created a situation in which, paradoxically, Orthodox and Catholics feel like aliens in the very place Christ made his own.

Frightened, isolated and powerless, Christians in the Holy Land have fled abroad.

Within just 40 years, the proportion of Christians in Israel/Palestine has plummeted from 20 percent to as little as 1.4 percent.

Church leaders and international observers continue to denounce the widespread oppression of Arabs, the ethnic origin of most Christians in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

In an interview with ACN, Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem described Christians in

the West Bank – and others – as living in "a large prison".

He hit out against the ongoing construction of a 8-metre-high (more than 26 feet) wall within the West Bank which, combined with

a network of road-blocks, earthworks etc, has almost completely cut off many towns and villages.

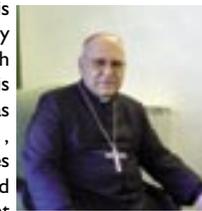
With the wall half complete and its current length running to more than 230 miles,

movement is already extremely limited, and with the economic crisis facing the Hamas government, essential services have been crippled and unemployment is soaring.

Meanwhile, pressure from Muslim extremists is intensifying with attacks on at least five churches in the West Bank and Gaza in the wake of Pope Benedict XVI's speech in Regensburg, Germany, in September.

Churches of many denominations were targeted including three in the town of Nablus.

Patriarch Sabbah stressed the importance the faithful attached to protecting their churches. He said: **"Everywhere you go, people feel deprived of their dignity. The only place in which they can feel dignified is the Church."**



Patriarch Michel Sabbah



Walls of hate: Beit Hanina in north Jerusalem

Iraq: Faith is Stronger than Fear

AID to the Church in Need has offered emergency assistance to Christians desperate to flee the religious conflict and dire poverty engulfing Iraq.

Bombing, kidnapping, mysterious disappearances and a savage process of ethnic cleansing has traumatised the Christian community who as a tiny minority are powerless to protect themselves.

The mass emigration sparked by the crisis has led Bishop Andreas Abouna of Baghdad to report that up to half of Iraq's Christians have fled for their lives.

With more than 35,000 Christian refugees flooding into Syria, Church leaders are trying to provide shelter, food and medical support for people who are homeless and afraid.

ACN is working closely with Bishop Antoine Audo who, as leader of Chaldean Christians across Syria, has initiated a humanitarian aid programme for refugees, especially in the capital, Damascus. The scheme includes food parcels and funding for



The bombed church of St George in Doura

emergency hospital operations.

He said: "There is a big need to help the people and we are doing whatever we can. "We are very grateful to Aid to the Church in Need for all your help."

The bishop underlined the increasing dangers for Christians still in Iraq. He said the refugees in

Syria had reported on how Christians – and others – had received death threats and how women including girls were being forced to wear the veil in accordance with Islamic law.

ACN is also helping in Iraq itself, supporting sisters, priests and seminarians who are witnessing to their faith despite many church attacks and kidnapping of priests.

The faithful are devastated at the forced closure of up to a dozen churches, monasteries and other church buildings in the Al Dora district of Baghdad.

Islamists bent on ethnic cleansing have flushed Christians out of Al Dora, formerly known as 'the Vatican of Iraq'.

Paying tribute to the faithful's courage, Bishop Abouna told ACN: "Of course the people are frightened. But there is something stronger than the fear – it is their faith."

ACN needs your help so more Christians can be helped in this Biblical land wracked by conflict and religious hatred.

LEBANON:

Christians "need to stay in land of Christ"

CHRISTIANITY was so strong in Lebanon that the country was seen as a sanctuary for the faithful.

Not any more.

Within just 25 years, the Christian community has dwindled by up to 40 percent.

In the two years after war broke out in 1983, 300 Christian villages were destroyed and in one diocese – Saida – in the south of the country, 50 parishes were razed to the ground.

The summer 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict sparked further emigration. But there is hope. Saida's new bishop, Elias Nasser, still in his 40s, is determined to rebuild the Church.

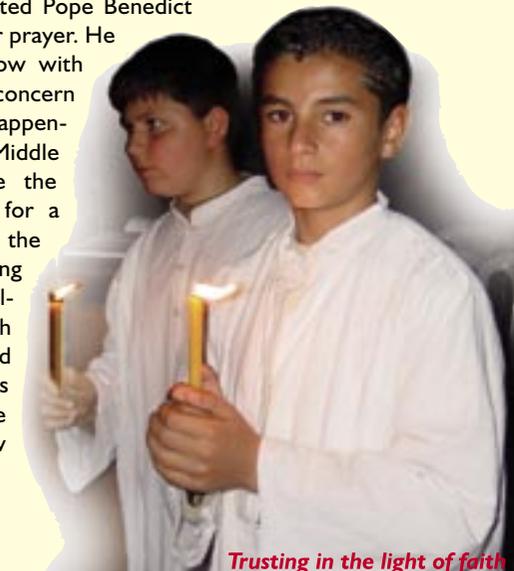
And he is turning to ACN. The charity has given emergency assistance for displaced Christians and there is ongoing support for priests, sisters and seminarians willing to risk their lives for the Gospel.

One especially urgent ACN project is support for a kitchen at a huge orphanage run by Melkiite Catholic sisters in the diocese of Jaboulé in Bekaa plain in the centre of Lebanon.

Speaking to ACN, Bishop Nasser said: "We need to stay in this region because Christ Our Lord performed his ministry in this area of Tyre and Sidon.

"Lebanon is a country where people of different religions need to learn to live together and the Christians are very important because of Our Lord's message of peace and forgiveness."

Growing concerns over increased tensions, especially in Lebanon, have prompted Pope Benedict to appeal for prayer. He said: "I follow with heartfelt concern all that is happening in the Middle East, where the possibilities for a solution to the crisis besetting the region alternate with tensions and difficulties that cause fears of new violence."



Trusting in the light of faith



RESPONSE FORM

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e-mail: info@aidtochurch.org Web: www.aidtochurch.org

BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Sr/Rev:

Address:

Postcode

I/We enclose \$..... to help keep Christianity alive in the Holy Land

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

OR please debit my Visa or Mastercard:



Expiry date:/.....

Signature:

A beautiful handmade crucifix from the Holy Land will be sent out to all those who give a donation of \$20 or more and tick this box

Simple in design and yet profound in its symbolic significance, this crucifix is made by Christian families who have carefully crafted olive wood grown in the Holy Land. Many Christians in Bethlehem live by making these crucifixes.



Confident of your support we have purchased thousands of crucifixes from them. The Christians in Bethlehem ask you to join them in prayer for peace in the Holy Land. The crucifix is your invitation to pray for the suffering Church. Full length of crucifix: 12cm x 7cm (4 3/4" x 2 3/4").

Bethlehem

THE 'little town of Bethlehem' of Christmas carol fame could not be more different to the one of modern day Palestine.

Increased security fears and a massive security wall inside the West Bank mean Bethlehem is largely cut off from its two life-lines: foreign tourists and Jerusalem, a mere five miles away.

The fact that Bethlehem is in effect shut off from the outside world affects everyone living there but Christians are suffering the most because it is they who have depended most on tourists.

According to UN statistics, the monthly average of tourists entering Bethlehem has slumped from nearly 100,000 to fewer than 10,000 – all in the space of just four years.

The 200 tourist buses that arrived every day have dwindled to barely a dozen.

This in turn has sparked a mass emigration of Christians from Bethlehem.

In 2000, half the population of urban Bethlehem was Christian but in the years since at least 10 percent fled abroad.



As one man said: "It is easier to leave for the United States than it is to go to Jerusalem."

In response, ACN has set up an initiative to help producers of olive wood crosses, cribs, rosaries and other devotional items by offering their goods to ACN benefactors across the world.

The scheme has offered a life-line to a growing community of olive wood carpenters and their helpers. ACN staff visiting Bethlehem met Jalal Jaraises and his family.

A 45-year-old widower with three young children, Jalal was thrilled when he was asked to produce Christmas cribs for ACN.

The orders flooded in so fast that Jalal drafted in five neighbouring families to help with the work.

6,000 cribs later, Jalal is now able to start rebuilding his modest home, where he lives with Elias, 12, Daniel, 10, and nine-year-old Mariana.

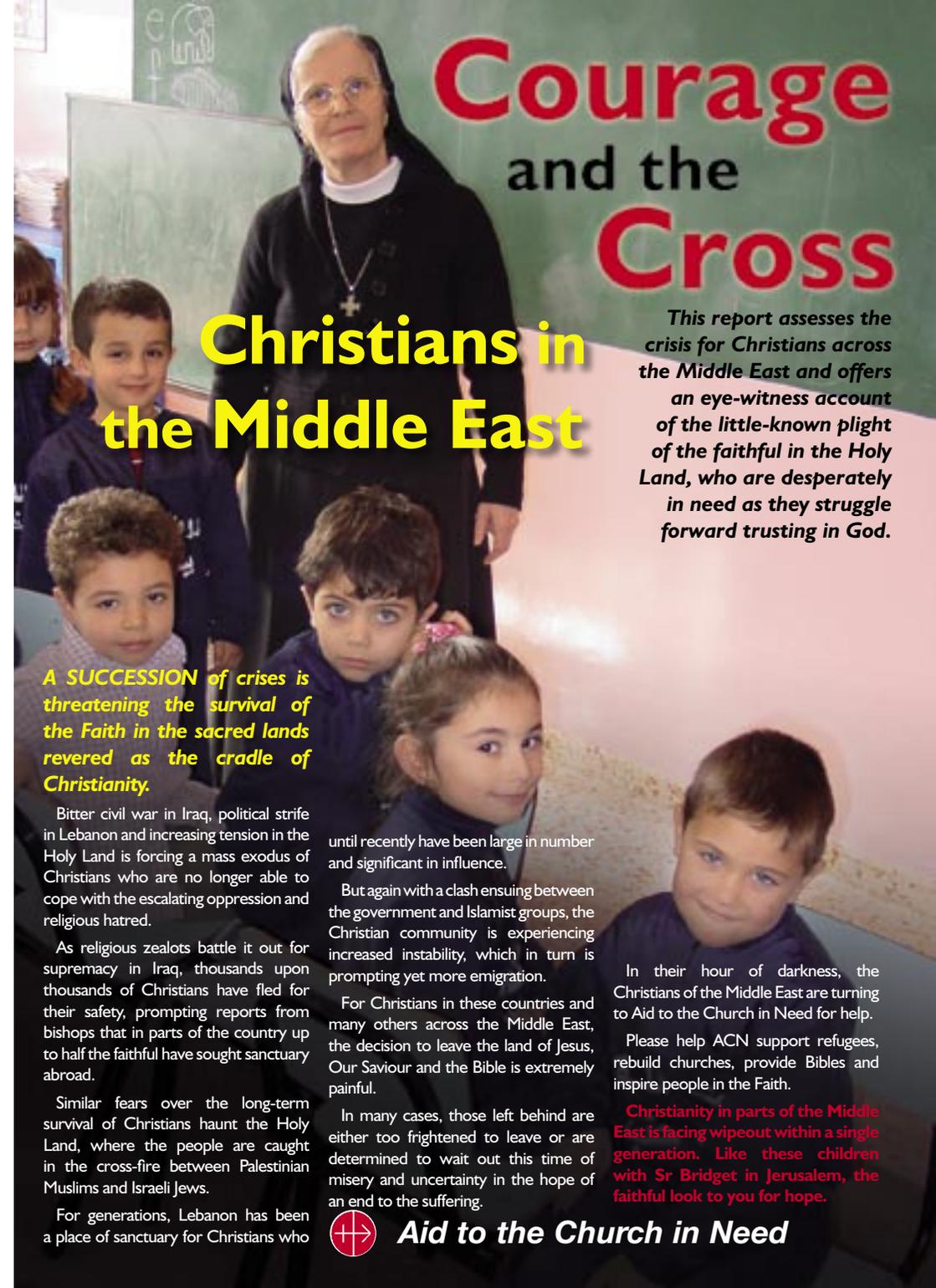
No longer does Jalal live in fear of utility bills and other costs which are so difficult to pay because of soaring inflation. He can at last afford shoes for the children.

Greeting us, he said: "You are saints at ACN. I don't know how to thank you. What ACN has done is a miracle from God."

ACN wants to continue its work so that more Christian families like the Jaraises feel able to live in the land they call home – the place where Christ was born. Olive wood crosses, nativity cribs and rosaries are available from ACN – Tel. 02 9679 1929 or visit www.aidtochurch.org.



Highly skilled: A Bethlehem carpenter atwork on devotional statues



Christians in the Middle East

Courage and the Cross

This report assesses the crisis for Christians across the Middle East and offers an eye-witness account of the little-known plight of the faithful in the Holy Land, who are desperately in need as they struggle forward trusting in God.

A SUCCESSION of crises is threatening the survival of the Faith in the sacred lands revered as the cradle of Christianity.

Bitter civil war in Iraq, political strife in Lebanon and increasing tension in the Holy Land is forcing a mass exodus of Christians who are no longer able to cope with the escalating oppression and religious hatred.

As religious zealots battle it out for supremacy in Iraq, thousands upon thousands of Christians have fled for their safety, prompting reports from bishops that in parts of the country up to half the faithful have sought sanctuary abroad.

Similar fears over the long-term survival of Christians haunt the Holy Land, where the people are caught in the cross-fire between Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews.

For generations, Lebanon has been a place of sanctuary for Christians who

until recently have been large in number and significant in influence.

But again with a clash ensuing between the government and Islamist groups, the Christian community is experiencing increased instability, which in turn is prompting yet more emigration.

For Christians in these countries and many others across the Middle East, the decision to leave the land of Jesus, Our Saviour and the Bible is extremely painful.

In many cases, those left behind are either too frightened to leave or are determined to wait out this time of misery and uncertainty in the hope of an end to the suffering.

In their hour of darkness, the Christians of the Middle East are turning to Aid to the Church in Need for help.

Please help ACN support refugees, rebuild churches, provide Bibles and inspire people in the Faith.

Christianity in parts of the Middle East is facing wipeout within a single generation. Like these children with Sr Bridget in Jerusalem, the faithful look to you for hope.



Aid to the Church in Need



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Reports and Photographs by John Pontifex (2007)