

# The Cornerstone of Faith

THE ancient Church in Lebanon – whose roots go back to the earliest times – is widely regarded as the cornerstone which underpins Christian life across the Middle East.

But here too, a lethal mix of civil war, deepening poverty and increasing religious extremism have caused Christian communities to haemorrhage.

Ongoing emigration has meant that in many towns and villages the Christian population has dropped from 30 percent to three percent since the 1970s.

Between 1983 and 1985, 300 Christian villages were destroyed.

And yet, in this small country of four million people – approximately twice the size of Brisbane – the Catholic population is still the largest in the Middle East, nearly two million (45 percent), and hence the Church continues to play an important role across the region.

Invoking the prayers of Our Lady, to whom Lebanon is dedicated, Pope John Paul II memorably said: “Lebanon is more than a country. It is a message.”

Through your kindness and generosity Aid to the Church in Need is helping literally to rebuild the Church after decades of devastation.

Churches and parish halls are being repaired in towns and villages devastated by violence – most recently the 2006 July War between Lebanon and Israel, in which 1,000 died and more than one million people were displaced.

ACN Middle East projects coordinator Marie-Ange Siebrecht stressed the importance of church construction.

She said: “We have to build the churches – for the people, when they see the church



ACN is helping to build this church in Tyre, Lebanon

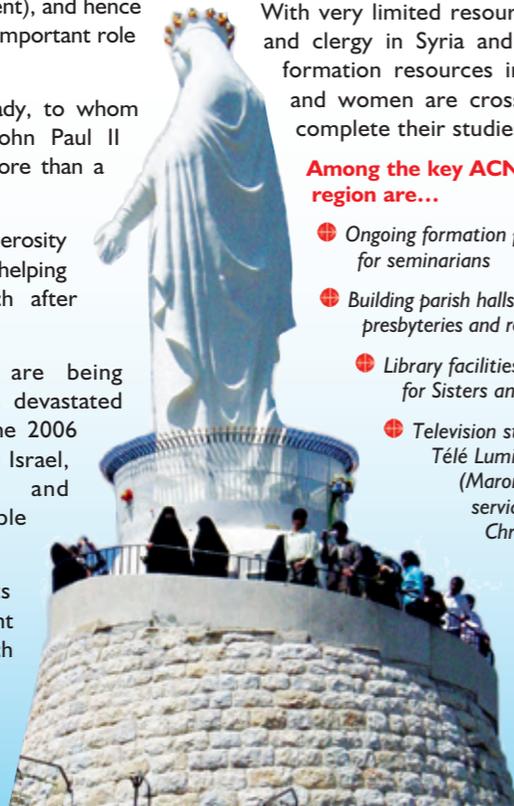
being rebuilt, it gives them the courage to go back to their villages and start again.”

With very limited resources to train Sisters and clergy in Syria and severely depleted formation resources in Iraq, young men and women are crossing the border to complete their studies in Lebanon.

### Among the key ACN projects in the region are...

- ✦ Ongoing formation programmes for seminarians
- ✦ Building parish halls, churches, presbyteries and retreat centres
- ✦ Library facilities for Sisters and seminarians
- ✦ Television stations including Télé Lumière, the Lebanese (Maronite) Catholic-run service, and SAT 7 Christian broadcasting, which are viewed all over the Arab world including parts of North Africa. SAT 7 is popular among Muslims.

**Symbol of devotion: Our Lady of Lebanon**



# The Courage to Believe

**“FIDELITY to your Christian roots, to the Church’s mission in the Holy Land, demands from you a particular kind of courage.”**

Such were the stirring words of Pope Benedict XVI at the start of his 2009 trip to the Holy Land.

Addressing his remarks to vast crowds of faithful who had travelled from near and far, he was determined to renew the confidence of this ancient Christian community and inspire them in the face of many difficulties.

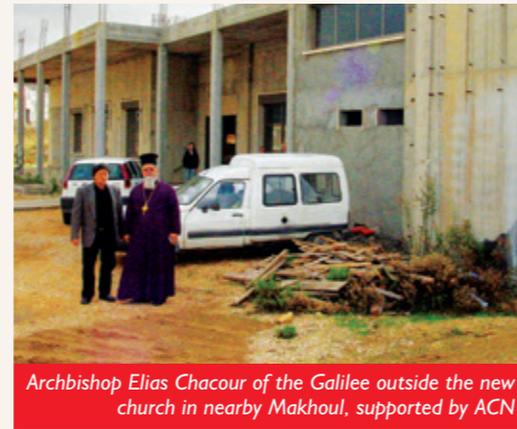
Charged by the Pope to play its part in supporting that “mission”, Aid to the Church in Need is continuing to step up its work in the region.

Essential to that work are Mass offerings for priests in the most poverty-stricken areas, help for training and formation of priests and Sisters, and support for religious education in schools.

In the Galilee region, ACN is helping to build churches in parishes deprived of proper pastoral care for generations.

In Makhoul, one of the only completely Christian villages to emerge since the creation of the state of Israel, ACN has offered key support to help the faithful complete work on their long-awaited church.

Fraught with setbacks over planning permission, the church is crucial for the Christian community, many of whom came to Makhoul after fleeing



Archbishop Elias Chacour of the Galilee outside the new church in nearby Makhoul, supported by ACN



A true shepherd: Archbishop Elias Chacour of Galilee with young Catholics

persecution in a nearby village where they had lived for generations.

Complete with new flooring, windows and doors, the church is an important focus for encouraging the young in their faith.

When ACN visited the region, priests and lay people described taking youngsters out on trips to some of the holy places in Galilee which Christ had known so well – Capernaum, Cana and Lake Tiberius – where they attend Mass and receive catechesis.

**Archbishop Elias Chacour of the Galilee said: “Working with the youth here is amazing. If you reach out to them they really respond. They are a real hope for the future and with ACN’s help they can give the Church fresh energy and vision.”**



First Holy Communion children in Jerusalem

# Helping the priests of tomorrow

**The fruit of years of study, discernment and pastoral formation – the ordination of a priest in the Syrian Catholic Church.**

The liturgy, which took place in Homs, Syria, is notable for one reason if no other – that there are no seminaries in the country and that students have no option but to train in neighbouring Lebanon.



Dedicated to a life of service: The ordination of a Greek Catholic priest in Bosra diocese, Syria

With its strong Catholic history and influence, Lebanon’s seminaries serve the Church across the Middle East.

In the Year of Priests, as promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI, ACN is committed to supporting seminary training in Lebanon, crucial for the future of the Church throughout the region.

ACN is helping students for the priesthood including the Maronite seminaries in Ghazir and Karm Sadde as well as the Greek Catholic Melkites of Raboué and the Syrian Catholic seminarians of Charfet.



RESPONSE FORM

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BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

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

Address: .....

Postcode .....Ph .....

Email .....

I/We enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ to support the projects of ACN for the persecuted and threatened Church worldwide.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ Masses offered for my intentions, and enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ as an offering to help poor priests overseas.

(We recommend - if possible - an offering of \$10 per Mass)

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

OR please debit my Visa or Mastercard:



Expiry date: ...../.....

Signature: .....

Anyone able to help this cause will be sent a Rosary bracelet hand-crafted from olive wood beads by christian families in the Holy Land struggling to survive! Please offer them your prayers and solidarity.

Please tick the box if you would like to receive the complimentary Rosary Bracelet.



Holy Land Rosary Bracelet
Length of chain: 20.5cm (8")

In Search of Sanctuary

SINCE the Iraq war broke out in 2003, ACN has stood by to help the thousands of people fleeing persecution and desperate for a new life away from the violence.

With your help, ACN supported programmes providing emergency relief - shelter, food and medical support - in Lebanon, Turkey, Syria and Jordan as well as in northern Iraq.

The relief programme stepped up a gear in late 2008 in response to an emergency mass evacuation of Christians from the Iraqi city of Mosul, following a wave of killings and threats against the faithful.

Working round the clock to help



Fr Bashar Warda

panic-stricken people pouring out of Mosul, Redemptorist priest Fr Bashar Warda turned to ACN for help as he tried to stem what was fast becoming a humanitarian crisis.

Later, after the emergency passed and most Christians were able to return home, he said: "The support and prayers we have received from you at ACN has really given our people hope at a time when they feel very vulnerable."



In places such as Syria, the work continues. ACN has teamed up with the Good Shepherd Sisters in Damascus, helping them to renovate a house and turn it into a centre for refugee families with mothers suffering trauma, both physical and mental.

Speaking from the centre in Marouni, Sister Lolita, a trained psychologist, explained that with ACN's help the 30 or more women were receiving expert care and vocational training - for example learning new languages - enabling them to start afresh and build new lives.

Sister Lolita said: "It is very difficult for us to imagine the pain so many of the women have experienced but with your help we are doing what we can and encouraging the young mothers to feel that they are not alone and that they can start again." "We always tell them nothing is impossible to God."

Supporting refugees: Thanks to you, Sister Therèse in Damascus is helping Iraqi refugees



"FIDELITY to your Christian roots, to the Church's mission in the Holy Land, demands from you a particular kind of courage - the courage of conviction, born of personal faith... the courage to... work with other Christians in the service of the Gospel and solidarity with the poor... and the courage to build new bridges [with] people of different religions and cultures..." Pope Benedict XVI, Amman - 10th May 2009



Aid to the Church in Need

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Heralds of Hope
ACN Middle East Report 2009



Pope Benedict XVI meets young people and their families at a hospital in Bethlehem

THE urgent need to assure Christians of a future in the Middle East has become a defining mark of Benedict XVI's pontificate.

Profoundly saddened by the mass emigration of the faithful, the Pope's 2009 pilgrimage to the Holy Land showed that he was determined to throw a lifeline to Christian communities, enabling them to stay in the place that bore Our Lord and Saviour.

Weakened by grinding poverty, under threat from rising religious extremism and dwindling in numbers and influence, it takes courage for these ancient Christian families to be heralds of hope.

They cannot do it all by themselves. This report thanks the friends and benefactors of Aid to the Church in Need who are committed to helping realise the Pope's

vision of peaceful coexistence in the Middle East. Inside you will also find updates on those ACN priority projects, singling out for special attention support for clergy in the Year of Priests, as declared by the Holy Father.

The report spotlights Lebanon, emphasising how the Church there plays a pivotal role in serving the faithful across the region.

Prayer and support both in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East are crucial as the Church responds to Benedict XVI's call for the faithful to be "intrepid heralds of the luminous hope which Christ's empty tomb proclaims".

"I urge that... everything possible is done to ensure this ancient Christian community are given their fundamental right to peaceful coexistence with their fellow citizens." Pope Benedict XV