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# “Thank you, ACN”

SUPPORTERS of Aid to the Church in Need received a warm message of thanks from Archbishop Jean Sleiman who flew in from Baghdad to give the keynote address at a recent ACN charity event in the UK.

Speaking to a record audience of 420 people, the Lebanese-born Carmelite underlined ACN's commitment to prayer and action, saying that a “paralysing fear” still gripped many Iraqi Christian communities more than five years on from the fall of Saddam.

In a message which he reiterated to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster and government officials, the Latin-rite Archbishop of Baghdad said: “I just want to say how much I appreciate the help given by you, the ACN benefactors, especially with your prayers.”

He said many faithful in Iraq believed their mission was to safeguard the future of Christianity in the country.

Highlighting the need for catechetical centres, formation for the young and humanitarian help, he added: “Helping Christians to remain in or to return to their homeland is what really matters - this is how Iraq can truly be rebuilt.”



Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor meets Archbishop Sleiman

Please help the suffering Church through **Prayer • Information • Action**

- **PRAY** for Christians who are persecuted in Iraq and around the world.
- **FIND OUT** the latest facts and figures about the suffering Church by requesting a copy of ACN's book **'Persecuted and Forgotten?'** Pass it to your friends, family and contacts.
- **SIGN UP** to receive email updates about ACN's work, and log on to [www.aidtochurch.org](http://www.aidtochurch.org)
- **CARRY THE CROSS** with suffering Christians in the Middle East - through regular giving and by encouraging support from your parish, school, friends and family.



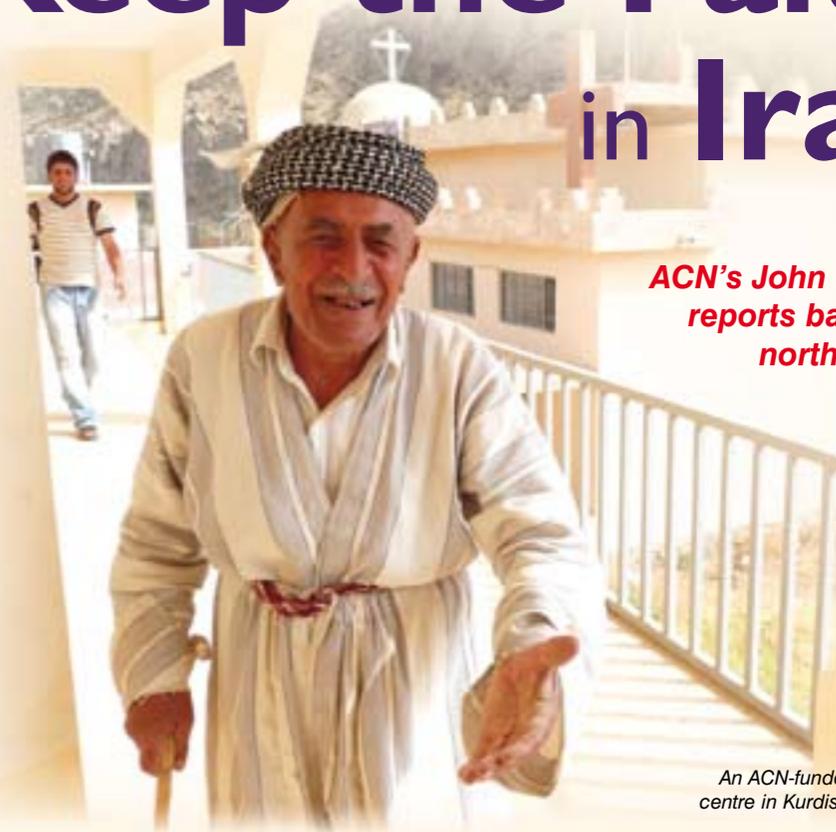
Father Andrew, 30, with children at a Christian housing estate



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# Keep the Faith in Iraq



ACN's John Pontifex reports back from northern Iraq

An ACN-funded catechetical centre in Kurdish northern Iraq

**“THIS country - Iraq - is where we belong. Christians have been in this land since the very beginning. We have a mission to stay.”**

Bold, uncompromising and full of faith, the words of Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk spell out the challenge for Christians in a land overshadowed by suffering, religious extremism and political instability.

Since 2003, more than 500,000 Christians - half the total number - have fled abroad.

Many others want to join them, having been uprooted from their homes.

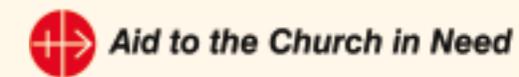
But on a trip deep inside Iraq in Autumn 2008, Aid to the Church in Need discovered new shoots of hope.

Young and old alike are determined to build a future for Christians in the country - especially with the start of massive reconstruction work and a decline in violence.

Meantime, in Syria, Jordan and elsewhere, thousands of Iraqi Christian refugees have turned to ACN for help.

They are thankful for your compassion and prayers in response to ACN's appeals to support them through trouble and despair.

Now ACN has made more promises of love to help these Christian communities keep the Faith in a region where the Church's roots go back to the First Century AD.



Largely unknown to the outside world, Christians today suffer physical and verbal abuse, imprisonment and even murder. In the last few years, acts of persecution have suddenly escalated. More Christians are persecuted than any other religious group.

Focusing on nearly 30 countries including China, Iraq, Sudan and Zimbabwe, **Persecuted and Forgotten?** shows the reality of life for people denied the freedoms many of us take for granted.

Pictured on the front cover is Chinese 'Underground' Bishop John Han Dingxian of Yongnian (Hebei province) in police custody. Still from footage filmed in secret in 2005. Bishop Han died in September 2007 after two years in isolation and a total of 35 years in prison.

**Free with any donation to help the work of Aid to the Church in Need.**

If you would like a copy for yourself or extra copies to pass onto your family, friends or parish community please fill in the box overleaf.

**"IF there is any point at which I am afraid, I will leave."**

There was no doubting the faith and determination of Fr Bassman Fatoohy. Aged just 27, he was charged with leading the Christian community in Mosul, one of Iraq's most dangerous cities.

Fr Bassman's bishop, Paulos Faraj Rahho, died in captivity in March 2008, two weeks after being kidnapped outside his cathedral.

It came barely nine months after the death of Fr Bassman's close friend, Fr Ragheed Ganni, who was murdered alongside three subdeacons for refusing to shut his church in Mosul.



Undaunted: Fr Bassman Fatoohy

By mid-October 2008, a campaign of murder and destruction of homes was forcing thousands of Christians to leave the city.

Iraq's Archbishop Louis Sako spoke of "a liquidation" of the city's Christian community, reporting that efforts to step up security were "too little, too late".

Fr Bassman told ACN how he had recently received an envelope with a bullet inside. He said: "I knew I was a marked man."

He explained: "It is hard but we have learned from Archbishop Rahho to be there for the people."

ACN gave him help so he could continue ministering to his suffering community.

**Thanks to you, ACN is providing Mass offerings for poor and persecuted priests across Iraq and the Middle East.**

## Fighting fear with Faith

**DESPERATE to escape the suffering in Iraq, vast numbers of Christians have fled over the borders in search of sanctuary.**

ACN staff have made frequent visits to refugee communities in Jordan, Syria and Turkey to assess the plight of the faithful and channel aid to those most in need.

Many Christians arrive with high hopes of a better life only to find abject poverty, few jobs and very cramped accommodation.

Working with senior clergy including Bishop Antoine Audo of Aleppo, Syria, ACN is spearheading programmes providing food, blankets and medical aid as well as help for priests, Sisters and catechists committed to providing for the people's spiritual needs.

ACN emergency help is also going to displaced Christians still in Iraq.

Relief programme leader Sister Merna said: "Many people in the villages have nothing. They turn to us for their most basic needs."

The Sisters are also planning to open a clinic administering essential medicines.

**Thanks to you, ACN is providing emergency aid for Iraqi Christian refugees in Jordan, Syria and Turkey.**

Many Christians like these have fled their homes



The aid also reminds them that in spite of persecution, bereavement and displacement, they are not forgotten.

**With your help, ACN can provide food parcels to towns and villages in the remotest parts of northern Iraq.**

**THOUSANDS of Iraqi Christians are this winter desperate for food, warmth and safety, having fled to northern Iraq to escape persecution.**

Scattered in towns and villages in this mountainous Kurdish region, many thank God that they now have a roof over their head and basic food rations.

But many others are not so lucky.

ACN is helping Iraqi Sisters who go to the poorest villages with car-loads of provisions - cooking oil, rice and sugar.

These Christmas and Easter food parcels are helping people to survive the winter.



Sister Merna with one of the food parcels

ACN, Batul described the classes she gives which draw young people from miles around.

Batul said that she had moved to the north from the Dora region of Baghdad - where she earned the respect even of extremists for her willingness to enter bomb-damaged buildings,

rescuing the injured and burying the dead.

She said: "It is not possible to do anything without Faith."

**With your help, ACN can support initiatives to teach Christianity in Iraq with retreat centres, a nursery, ACN Child's Bibles and classroom furniture.**

Heroic: Batul in front of an ACN-built catechetical centre



**"...Churches in the Middle East are threatened in their very existence... May God grant ACN strength to help wherever the need is greatest."**

Pope Benedict XVI

### RESPONSE FORM



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AD9/1/1

BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

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

Address: .....

..... Postcode .....

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I/We enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ to support the projects of Aid to the Church in Need 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 (to support the priest celebrating the Mass)*

Total Enclosed \$\_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque/money order payable to Aid to the Church in Need OR please debit my Visa or Mastercard:



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

Signature: .....

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ FREE copy/ies of the ACN report Persecuted and Forgotten?



**FREE with any donation!**

**Please help circulate this report!**

**Any help you can give will go towards these and similar projects in the Middle East and worldwide.**