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# Iraq: Surviving persecution



Father Nizar Semaan, Syrian Catholic chaplain in London, presides at a memorial service after the October 2010 massacre at Baghdad cathedral

## TWO young priests were among the 58 dead when extremists laid siege to Our Lady of Salvation Syrian Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad.

Yet a week after the October 2010 attack, two other young priests, Fathers Faasi and Aysar, broke off their studies in Rome to return to minister to parishioners. Their example provides hope where it is sorely needed. Since 2002, at least 2,000 Christians in Iraq have been killed for faith-related reasons. Thirty churches have been attacked and six priests murdered.

Hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled their homes.

In Mosul, killings and other atrocities have caused many thousands to flee this ancient Christian city.

And yet, in Mosul too, there is courage and faith. Succeeding Archbishop Rahho, who died while held hostage in 2008, Amil Nona became Archbishop of Mosul in spring 2010. Aged 42, he is one of the world's youngest Catholic bishops. "We have huge problems but my faith is strong," he said. "I want to do everything I can – with God's help – to inspire the people."

You are supporting seminarians in Iraq, who, inspired by Archbishop Nona's example, are growing in number.

ACN also helps thousands of Iraqi Christians who have fled to northern Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and Syria.

## Faith against the odds

**ERITREA:** Hana Hagos Asgedom, 41, died in a military camp isolation cell after three years' internment. Despite being beaten with a crowbar and suffering sexual harassment, she refused to recant her Christian beliefs.

**INDIA:** Sister Meena, 29, was raped during extremist riots in Orissa in 2008. She refused to be cowed and has gone on to make her final vows as a Sister.

**NORTH KOREA:** In a country where to pray in public is dangerous, 23 'Underground' Christians were arrested for exhibiting religious faith. Three were executed and the rest were sent to a prison camp.

**SAUDI ARABIA:** Employers subjected maid Norma Caldera to religious harassment. She was forced to sleep on the floor and was banned from Mass. She said: "Every day I got up early to pray and my employers mocked me. I kept faith in God."

**VENEZUELA:** President Hugo Chavez called Cardinal Jorge Urosa of Caracas "a Neanderthal" after he denounced the country's movement towards a "totalitarian dictatorship".

**VIETNAM:** Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung declared that none of the 2,250 Church properties seized during the communist era would be returned. Meanwhile, Fr Peter Nguyen Van Huu was arrested and while in jail, police removed a statue of Our Lady from the parish cemetery.



## Aid to the Church in Need

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Report by John Pontifex (2011) Photographs by ACN except where stated

# Persecuted and Forgotten?

Helping the suffering Church today



Carrying the Cross: Christians in China

*"Nothing could be worse than to turn away indifferent from Jesus who suffers in his Church. And nothing can be more precious than to comfort the abandoned Christ in his suffering brothers and sisters."*

These words of Fr Werenfried van Straaten, the founder of Aid to the Church in Need, were first uttered at the height of the Cold War but they are just as relevant today.

It is now clear that the persecution of Christians is getting worse.

According to an official report issued by bishops in Europe, 75 percent of religious persecution today is directed against Christians.

In a New Year 2011 address, Pope Benedict XVI stated: "Many Christians experience daily affronts and often live in fear because of their pursuit of truth, their faith in Jesus Christ and their heartfelt plea for respect for religious freedom."

Many of the bishops, priests, sisters and lay people ACN works with have described worsening violence and intimidation against the faithful. Murder, kidnapping, church bombings, attacks on Christian homes and businesses, taunts in the media, job discrimination – the list goes on.

As a Catholic charity for persecuted and other suffering Christians, ACN exists to help those who live in the shadow of oppression.

This is the reason behind ACN's 2011 publication **Persecuted and Forgotten?** – A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith.

Complete with a foreword by Patriarch Fouad Twal of Jerusalem and profiles of courageous Christian witness, the 144-page book describes how Christians today struggle for survival in countries where persecution is worst. To receive your complimentary copy of the report please see inside flap for further details.



**Persecuted and Forgotten?**  
Aid to the Church in Need's 2011 report on Christians oppressed for their Faith

ACN's ground-breaking report into the persecution of Christians



Aid to the Church in Need

By the beginning of 2011, Christianity has been described as the world's most persecuted religion. Yet despite the growing problems faced by many Christians, media coverage of their plight remains scarce.

Describing the situation in 33 countries, **Persecuted and Forgotten?** Shows how in some places Christians are denied their basic rights. This includes places in the Middle East where Pope Benedict XVI has said that churches are "threatened in their very existence".

Drawing on the latest reports available and first-hand testimony, **Persecuted and Forgotten?** describes the struggles faced by Christian communities who are prevented from practicing their faith and living normal lives. It is for these people that Aid to the Church in Need exists.

The picture on the front cover of the report shows a demonstration held in Detroit, Michigan, USA, calling for increased protection for Christians in Iraq. The rally was held a week after the 31st October 2010 siege at Baghdad's Syrian Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance where 58 people died and more than 70 were injured.

**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 response coupon that accompanies this Mirror newsletter.

# The persecuted Church today

## Your compassion is their hope



To learn more about suffering Christians around the world please visit our News & Features page on the web at [www.aidtochurch.org](http://www.aidtochurch.org)

## China: Loyalty and faith – a price worth paying

Loyalty to the Holy Father can impose heavy burdens on the suffering Church, as bishops in China discovered last Christmas.

Authorities bundled bishops into vehicles and ‘deported’ them to the capital, Beijing. They were forced to appoint people to a body seeking to control the Church in defiance of Rome.

Many bishops went into hiding. Others were attacked.

In Henshui diocese, Bishop Feng Xinmao was seized by 100 police and officials who fought for hours against parishioners and priests shielding their bishop.

China’s Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun recently led Good Friday prayers at the Colosseum in Rome, stating: “The temptation to cultivate the powerful and oppress the weak is very widespread. May [the authorities] recognise the innocence of Christ’s followers.”

In spite of continuing oppression, Christianity in China is growing fast – Christians there may now total 40 million.

People are turning anew to the Church, inspired by heroic figures like Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding.

Emerging from prison in June 2010 for the 13<sup>th</sup> time in six years, Bishop Jia emphatically refused to compromise his loyalty to Pope Benedict XVI.

For Bishop Jia and many others, the Scriptures are essential.

**You have helped print 70,000 ACN Child’s Bibles and 10,000 catechisms for China’s faithful.**



Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding

## Pakistan: Light in the darkness

When mother-of-five Asia Bibi was put on death row in Pakistan, it sparked fear especially among her fellow Christians.

Asia, an agricultural worker, was unjustly denounced by fellow workers who attacked her Christian faith and accused her of blasphemy.

In January 2011, barely two months later, Salman Taseer, the Governor of the Punjab, was killed after criticising the country’s notorious Blasphemy Laws. He had asked that Asia be pardoned.

Meantime, Asia’s family – the only Christians in their village – received threatening phone calls.

As extremism grows, Pakistan’s bishops have warned that the country’s 2.5 million Christians are under threat from ‘Talibanisation’.



Christians in mourning after an attack in Punjab, Pakistan. Photo: Diocese of Faisalabad

But they are determined to keep hope.

Early in 2011, Bishop Joseph Coutts of Faisalabad told ACN: “It becomes more difficult to be messengers of peace and love where there is so much prejudice, violence and hatred.

“Yet this is the challenge we have to take up – to love and expect nothing in return, to carry on without losing hope, to light at least one candle rather than curse the darkness.”

You are training catechists and providing catechetical materials so they can pass on the Faith in Pakistan’s villages and towns. You are also helping promote inter-faith understanding through meetings involving religious leaders and faithful.



Father Yaqub distributes ashes at the start of Lent in Faisalabad diocese, Pakistan

## Egypt: Indestructible faith

Amid political turmoil and unrest, Christians in Egypt are under threat from religious intolerance.

In January 2011, 71-year-old Christian Fathi Saeed Ebaid was shot dead on a train south of the capital, Cairo, apparently for religious reasons. His wife, Emily, 61, was seriously injured and four others were wounded.

The attack came days after a bomb targeting a church in Alexandria left 23 dead and more than 70 injured.

Egypt’s 10 million faithful – the largest Christian population across the Middle East – are at risk



from worsening extremism.

The government recently suspended 12 television stations accused of promoting religious hatred.

Bishops close to ACN have reported how at a local level, good relations often exist between Muslims and Christians.

They say their people’s faith is growing stronger.

Bishop Kyrillos William of Assiut told ACN that his diocesan shrine of Deir Dronka now attracts up to two million pilgrims every year.

He said: “Christians are becoming closer to the Church – we see this more and more.”

Applications to build churches require the permission of the president himself but Christian leaders are frequently able to cut through the red tape.

**You are helping to build churches, parish halls and convents in Egypt.**