



RESPONSE FORM

Aid to the Church in Need
PO Box 6245
Blacktown DC NSW 2148
Ph/Fax No: (02) 9679-1929
e-mail: info@aidtochurch.org Web: www.aidtochurch.org

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A beautiful holy paraman (leather medallion) of Mary and the Baby Jesus will be sent out free of charge to all those who give a donation and tick this box.

The holy leather medallions are hand made by Studite Monks in Ukraine to support their community.



A lovely gift idea for family, friends and religious occasions.

An ordination unlike any other

WHEN 25-year-old Ruslan Rakhimberlinov was ordained a priest in Kazakhstan in June 2008, it marked an historic moment.

In a Church made up almost entirely of foreigners or descendants of immigrants, Ruslan became the first native Kazakh priest of modern times.

Bishop Athanasius Schneider of Karaganda, who ordained Ruslan, hopes he will have a dramatic impact in reaching out to Kazakhstan's native people.

He said: "The Church has yet to be properly implanted and this is only possible with clergy native to Kazakhstan."

Now Bishop Schneider is hoping for more vocations from the local population.

In Karaganda, we met young men who were training for the priest-

hood at the Seminary of Our Lady, Mother of All Nations. One of them was Stanislaw Bovsunouskiy (right), who told ACN: "I wanted to become a priest after seeing priests working in Kazakhstan. They inspired me to help as there is so much to do."

THANKS to our benefactors, ACN is supporting 7,624 seminarians in Eastern Europe and other former Soviet countries, including the following Catholic students for the priesthood:

Table with 2 columns: Country, Seminarians. Rows include Belarus (146), Czech Republic (135), Lithuania (123), Poland (3,645), Romania (276), Russia (39), Slovakia (438), Ukraine (1,072).



Any help you can give will go towards these and similar projects in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and throughout the world

Praying for a miracle

IN THE pilgrimage village of Ozernoye, lying near to the Russian border in the north of Kazakhstan, a small community of Carmelite Sisters welcome us to Mass from behind their grille in the tiny chapel.

This contemplative community came to pray for Kazakhstan here, at the site of a miracle.

In 1941 the Russians cut off supplies to punish the villagers, most of whom were Poles deported here five years earlier.

With the people on the brink of starvation, a lake full of fish miraculously appeared from nowhere, feeding them for years.

This 'National Shrine of Kazakhstan', accessible only by almost 20 miles of mud tracks, is dedicated to Our Lady, Queen of Peace and attracts, amongst other pilgrims, about 600 young people each August.

"What Mecca is for Muslims, Ozernoye is for the



The Carmelite Sisters came to Ozernoye to pray at the site of a miracle

Catholic youth of Kazakhstan," one young person said. Fr Lucjan, the parish priest here, explained: "The village is able to exist and survive as the Church is here... There is hope because the Church exists.

"And people are now beginning to take the initiative in this post-communist era. Now we have a lot more faith than in those days."

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Reports and Photographs by Neville Kyrke-Smith (2008) Edited by Terry Murphy

Step by Step in the Steppes
Flourishing Faith in Central Asia and Eastern Europe
Your ACN donors are doing good work - they are investing their money in a bank which will definitely give a return... We pray for them and ask them to pray and give for Christ's sake - even if it is a small amount it will have power.
Archbishop Jan Lenga of Karaganda, Kazakhstan
STANDING on the Central Asian steppes of Kazakhstan, clusters of simple wooden crosses stretch as far as the eye can see across the soft open plains. They mark some of the mass graves where more than one million people who perished in Stalin's KARLAG prison camps lie buried.
"The land here was moistened with blood and tears," Bishop Athanasius Schneider of Karaganda tells me. Emerging into independence from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan is a vast country seeking to build a new society - nowhere more so than the new capital Astana, President Nursultan Nazarbayev's lavish utopia of futuristic buildings constructed with oil money. Yet the same city is also home to grinding poverty in squalid shanty towns. And, with religious freedom threatened by new laws, the struggle to throw off the oppressive shackles of totalitarian control is proving equally hard for the Church. Archbishop Jan Lenga of Karaganda spoke of the Church's key role in developing this new society. "The Church has to be like Christ - a sign of contradiction - the stone that is rejected," he said. "We have to tell people about the Truth, not bend like



Hope on the old Silk Road

“THIS IS A MIRACLE,” I tell Fr Stanislaw, “a miracle of love.”

Standing in the rubble of the building site surrounding the new church of Our Lady of Mercy in Urgench, northwest Uzbekistan, he tells me all his phone calls and emails are monitored and that he has a government spy in the congregation.

Late one night, the young priest found himself being dragged off to the police station for questioning.

“But you know,” he continues, “we have ten Muslims who come to Mass every Sunday and now the town architect sent us the plans for the painting of Mary for the outside of our church.”

Explaining that many Muslims have a deep devotion to Our Lady, Fr Stanislaw reveals that the mural was the authorities’ idea – because they liked the church so much.

In Uzbekistan’s difficult climate, it may be that Our Lady does not appear on the outside of the building, but this new church near the old Silk Road is an encouragement that miracles do happen – amidst the rubble of the former Soviet Union, where the seeds of the Faith have been blown and sown, watered by the blood of the martyrs.



Parishioners at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Urgench – built with ACN’s help

‘Freedom of religion’ – but oppression

CASTING off the yoke of brutal communist persecution, the modern Church in Central Asia is still in its formative years – but already there are serious threats to its future.

New legislation passed by Kazakhstan’s parliament could spell virtual shut-down for the bishops there, while in Uzbekistan a climate of worsening state oppression is developing.

Archbishop Jan Lenga of Karaganda in central Kazakhstan told ACN the new religion law would be “a disaster”, sparking fears of Soviet-style controls forcing the Church into major retreat.

In the draft law, proposed strict quotas would ban foreign missionaries – devastating a Church which only ordained its first native Kazakh priest in June 2008. Only seven of the 80 priests in the country have Kazakh citizenship.

Restrictive controls on religious literature and Church buildings could be introduced and foreign aid – crucial to the Church’s survival in a region wracked by poverty – would be banned.



Archbishop Jan Lenga of Karaganda: New religion law would be “a disaster”

“The law is against all non-Orthodox Christians and will hit us,” Archbishop Lenga told ACN.

Now Church leaders are pinning their hopes on President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who must approve the bill before it becomes law.

“We hope that the President – who will have the last word on this – won’t allow Kazakhstan after 17 years to return to the path of restrictions on religious freedom,” Archbishop Tomasz Peta of Astana told the Forum18 news service.



This icon of Christ was riddled with bullet holes after being used by Soviet soldiers for target practice. It is now revered by Catholics in Kazakhstan.

IN NEIGHBOURING Uzbekistan, meanwhile, laws enshrining state oppression of religious activity fly in the face of a constitution declaring freedom of religion for all.

One proposed bill out-laws discussing religious issues outside ‘recognised’ places of worship, and would fine offenders up to 600 times the average monthly salary for a first offence. People have been arrested for carrying religious literature, and bibles destined for Uzbekistan’s Bible Society were turned away at customs.

ACN heard how there is no longer a weekly Mass in the city of Navoi as the authorities banned Fr Francis, the parish priest, from using a basement flat.

And with officials monitoring religious activity closely, Fr Lucjian told how he was asked for a list of church-goers in his parish of Samarkand. He refused.

Yet bishops in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are cautiously optimistic about the future.

Thanks to your solidarity, they have been able to make real progress – vital as the Church is reborn in these post-Soviet societies. Elsewhere in this report, you can read about some of the ways in which you have helped.

Iron Curtain Church Relief

AID to the Church in Need’s traditional help for former Soviet countries continues to this day, with around 30 percent of all aid payments going to support projects in that region.

In August 2008 the church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Kazan, Russia, became the first to be rebuilt with government help – and ACN paid for the interior furnishings and the adjoining parish centre.

The church was seized 90 years ago during the Bolshevik Revolution, and took four years to rebuild.

After the consecration Mass (pictured right) the parish priest, Fr Diogenes Urkiza, told ACN the rebuilding was a “unique instance of restorative justice” and “a miracle”.

Your response to our October 2007 appeal for



Sister Gabriella of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus in Karaganda, Kazakhstan



unemployment, health care and lack of provision for the handicapped and elderly. This is only possible thanks to you – among thousands of nuns around the world, you are helping 1,658 contemplative Sisters in Eastern Europe and former Soviet lands.

Sister Teresa, who works with traumatised youngsters in a deprived area of the Kazakh capital Astana, told ACN: “If we didn’t have the help of others we would not have the strength to do our work... so you are the first missionaries here!”

“With you and our families and friends we can fulfil our mission. The biggest thing we give the children is hope.”



Children like these in Astana are enjoying ACN’s Child’s Bible, thanks to you

The living Word in Central Asia

CELEBRATING its 30th anniversary in 2009, ACN’s Child’s Bible is for so many of the 46 million who have received a copy a spiritual lifeline – but perhaps nowhere more so than in Kazakhstan.

Facing strict controls on publishing religious literature if a new religion law gets the go-ahead, the bishops will have to rely on what resources they have to hand.

So they are very grateful that they have the Child’s Bible, as well as 10,000 prayer books which you helped to print as a Christmas ‘gift’ in 2007.

Fr Cezary Komonsinski from Kulsary told ACN: “Thank you for everything. We use your Child’s Bible in Kazakh, as well as in Russian, and distribute God’s Word to the many children in my parish.”

Handmaids of the neediest

“COME IN, PLEASE,” said Sister Gabriella in their small house on the edge of Karaganda in Kazakhstan, “the children want to sing for you and thank you.”

In front of me a dozen very young children sang, danced, smiled and clapped their hands whilst their proud mothers looked on.

Not such an unusual scene, perhaps, except in this house the Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus are saving lives.

These children are the dependants of alcoholics – and now thanks to the prayers and work of the Sisters they have some hope and help.

ACN and others have come to the rescue of Sister Gabriella, the Superior, and her community – including helping build a small chapel where they have Eucharistic Adoration once a week.

ELSEWHERE in Kazakhstan, Sisters are tackling the social problems which the government ignores – drink, drugs,