



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL



The Charism of ACN

Aid to the
Church in Need

PONTIFICAL
FOUNDATION



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ACN



Introduction

The pontifical foundation “Aid to the Church in Need” started out in 1947 as a charity under the name “Oostpriesterhulp” in the Premonstratensian Abbey of Tongerlo (Belgium) – inspired by Pope Pius XII and set up by the initiative and energy of a canon of this abbey, Father Werenfried van Straaten. The organisation initially provided temporary relief, spiritual and material help to priests and faithful displaced as a result of the Second World War in a service marked out by a spirit of reconciliation. From these beginnings a worldwide pastoral charity has developed in this service to the Church in need.

Inspiration and spirituality, which have shaped the association from the beginning and over the years through the realisation of the mission entrusted to it, are reflected especially in this text about the “Charism of ACN”.

ACN’s mission and charism were reaffirmed by the establishment of the charity as a public foundation of pontifical right in 2011 with the Chirograph of Pope Benedict XVI.

ACN is therefore a pastoral charity, which, through prayer, sacrifice, evangelisation and active charity – expressed in its leitmotif “prayer, information, action” – provides both spiritual and material help and support throughout the world, especially where the Church is persecuted, oppressed and hindered in the fulfilment of its mission or where for the fulfilment of its mission it is lacking the necessary resources.



1. Pastoral character

ACN, acting as a Pontifical Foundation *in nomine Ecclesiae*, supports in its fidelity to the Pope and to the teaching of the Church, the universal pastoral mission of the Church. This mission is expressed in three ways: proclaiming the Word of God, testimony of the faith (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity and unity (*diakonia-koinonia*).



“These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being” (Deus caritas est, 25).



The pastoral character of ACN is its *central* feature. In everything they do, the co-workers of ACN should seek to imitate Jesus the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for the redemption of mankind. Hence, the greater glory of God, concern for the entire human person, with body and soul, and the salvation of each individual must always be the ultimate aim of ACN's actions, according to the measure of Christ's love.

This pastoral mission lends a deep, divine meaning to all the charitable, social, economic and technical aspects of ACN's support. God's help and salvation is the basis and prerequisite for the alleviation of every need. Consequently, because the spiritual comes before the material and the eternal before the temporal, evangelisation comes before development aid, redemption through the Cross before



political change. Hence, ACN's priority is to promote pastoral projects, even when these may appear less immediate and necessary to some benefactors than the help given in more tangible needs and catastrophes.

The co-workers of ACN fulfil a pastoral mission towards the benefactors by informing them about the persecuted and suffering Church, using various modern communication mediums.

By dissemination of the witnesses to the faith, ACN strives to make visible the power of the Gospel, strengthening the benefactors in their faith and in their communion with the universal Church.



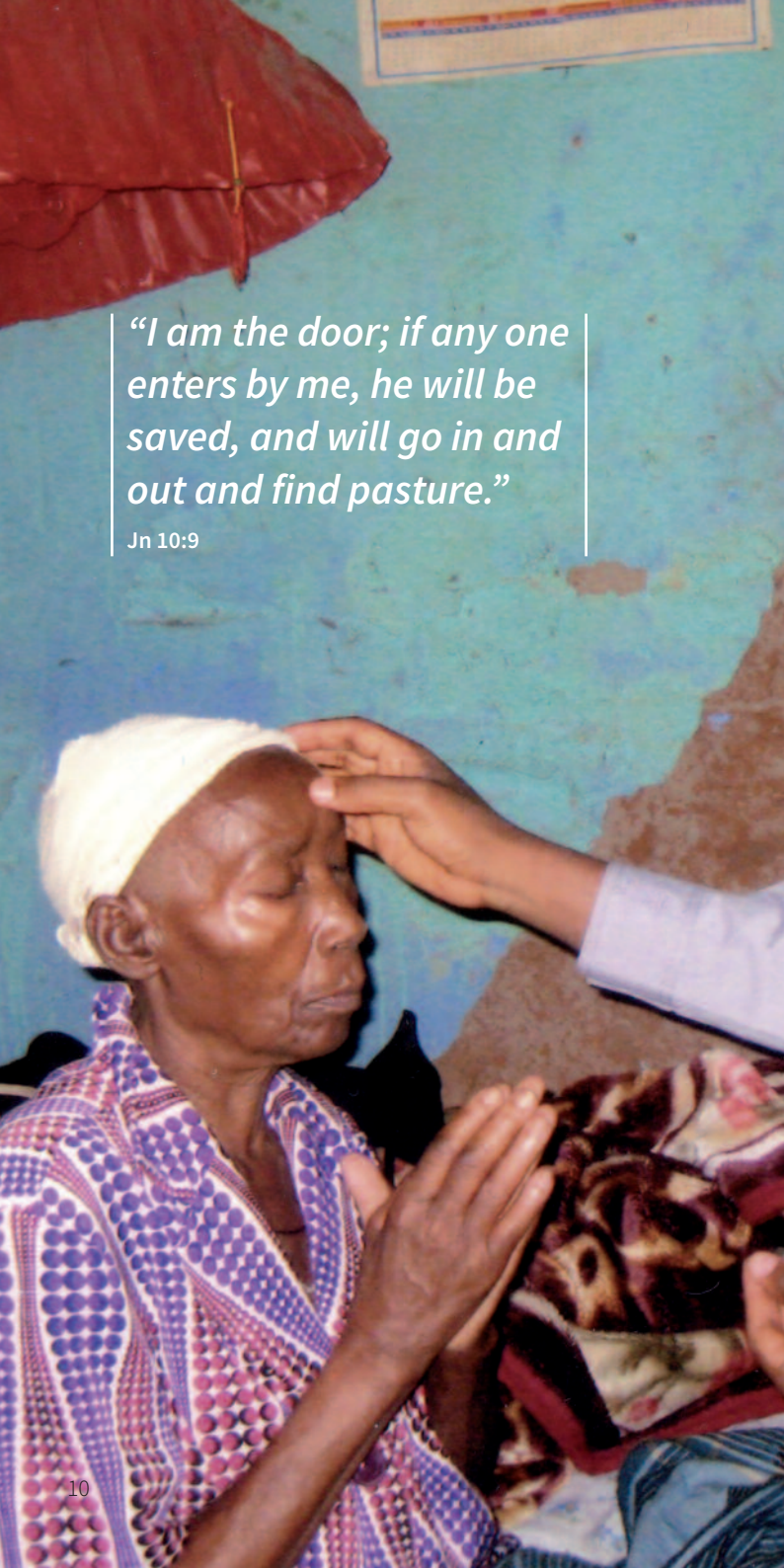
The life according to the Gospel must be the true underlying motivation when also exhorting the benefactors to generosity.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich... Your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality”
(2 Cor 8:9.14).

Inasmuch as ACN provides benefactors with a way to live Christian solidarity through their donations, it simultaneously helps them to grow in Faith and interior freedom.

For the fulfilment of this apostolate, it is necessary also for the co-workers of ACN with the help of the ecclesiastical assistants to be inspired and guided by the Word of God and the authentic teaching of the Church, to live from the sacraments and prayer and so form themselves in the spirit of the Church and in the fundamental attitude of Christ.

This shared pastoral effort unites all the employees and volunteers, benefactors and beneficiaries of ACN in a worldwide spiritual family. This unity within the charity is a necessary precondition for joyfully bearing witness to the presence of Christ in the world (cf Jn 17:23) and gives ACN the spiritual and organisational strength to trustworthily fulfil its mission on behalf of the whole Church.



*"I am the door; if any one
enters by me, he will be
saved, and will go in and
out and find pasture."*

Jn 10:9





2. Prayer

“He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you” (Jn 15:5.7).

Co-workers of ACN are convinced that their work must be sustained by faithful prayer and unshakeable trust in Divine Providence. With firm faith in Christ’s words,

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6:33),

they seek to understand the will of God in prayer and want to place the needs entrusted to them in his Providence.



Prayer strengthens the readiness for daily conversion and the missionary zeal of the co-workers and benefactors of ACN. It unites them to the suffering Church and inspires them to help more effectively. ACN calls upon the Church around the world to pray for suffering and persecuted Christians, and also for their persecutors. Prayer is an expression of humility before God and before one another, in the knowledge that he is the source of all good things and that all his gifts are given us for this service to our neighbour.



“Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realises that of itself it can do nothing... Prayer of intercession has particular value, for it is an act of trust in God and, at the same time, an expression of love for our neighbour... Intercessory prayer is an expression of our fraternal concern for others, since we are able to embrace their lives, their deepest troubles and their loftiest dreams”

(Gaudete et exsultate, 154).

Therefore the co-workers of ACN place in prayer before God the needs that are brought daily to their attention and implore him to supply the necessary spiritual and material help. If they have to turn down requests because they do not come within the scope of ACN or exceed its financial capabilities, they ask God in prayer to alleviate the needs in another manner.

Prayer for the benefactors should be imbued with a sense of gratitude. The most beautiful form of thankfulness is Eucharistic adoration and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Through this disposition of gratitude, the co-workers of ACN responsibly and carefully administer the benefactors' donations, which are often the *“mite of the poor widow”* (Mk 12:41-44), as an expression of their own love and self-offering to God.



The origins of ACN are closely linked to the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima, who was declared the patroness of ACN. In Fatima Our Lady showed the Church the way to the triumph of love over evil – through prayer, sacrifice and consecration to her Immaculate Heart. The co-workers of ACN venerate the Virgin Mary as their Mother, Advocate and Mediatrix of all graces, consecrate all their work to her and trust in the power of the Rosary in the battle against evil.





*“Whatever you ask
in prayer, you will
receive, if you have
faith.”*

Mt 21:22





3. Sacrifice

“If one member suffers, all suffer together...”
(1 Cor 12:26).

As a charity serving the suffering and persecuted Church, ACN participates consciously in the mystery of the Passion and Cross of Christ. God did not want suffering, just as he did not want its cause, sin. He gave liberty to men and has compassion for the great misfortune and evil that has befallen human history after the fall into sin. God is love and responds to our misfortune only with love. He has the power to transform the evil into good and it is in suffering that this might of love is most powerful. Drawing on an ever deeper understanding of the love of God, who died for us on the Cross and rose from the dead, ACN wants



to do all it can to stand by persecuted and suffering Christians, to alleviate their suffering, to help them to bear their cross and to give them a voice in public.

The example of the suffering Church also helps the co-workers and benefactors of ACN, as disciples of Christ, to take up their cross daily and inspires in them the willingness to make sacrifices themselves. This spirit of sacrifice unites them with suffering Christians and gives them a share in the redemptive work of Christ. For it is in the suffering and persecuted ones that Christ wants to continue his redeeming Passion, as expressed in the words of Saint Paul:



“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...” (Gal 2:20).

This participation in redemption is the work of God’s love in us and through us for our fellow men. For God has called us to live not merely with one another but also for one another, which also means to suffer for one another. Thus each personal cross may bear fruits of redemption.

In this sense, ACN recognises that a decisive power for the transformation of the world issues from the suffering and persecuted Church, and it also treasures in a special way the sacrifices of our sick and suffering benefactors.



*“But when you give alms,
do not let your left hand know
what your right hand is doing.”*

Mt 6,3





4. Evangelisation

“The love of Christ compels us!”

(2 Cor 5:14).

“Since they are members of the Church by virtue of their Baptism, all Christians share responsibility for missionary activity... Through holiness of life every Christian can become a fruitful part of the Church’s mission... In this way, individual believers extend the reach of their charity and show concern for those both far and near”

(Redemptoris missio, 77).

Both through this spiritual unity with the missionary Church, as well as through the concrete material support for the mission, the co-workers and benefactors of ACN become missionaries themselves.

ACN is committed to the joyful proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness all over the world, whether this is convenient or not. The missionary spirit of ACN’s co-workers, their lively faith and their striving for holiness are the precondition for this. In particular, ACN sees it as its duty to inspire people to active Christian love, to lead benefactors and co-workers to Christ and thus give them clarity, consolation and courage. At the same time, we must be aware that Christ will always remain a sign of contradiction and that his teaching will often oppose the spirit of the times.

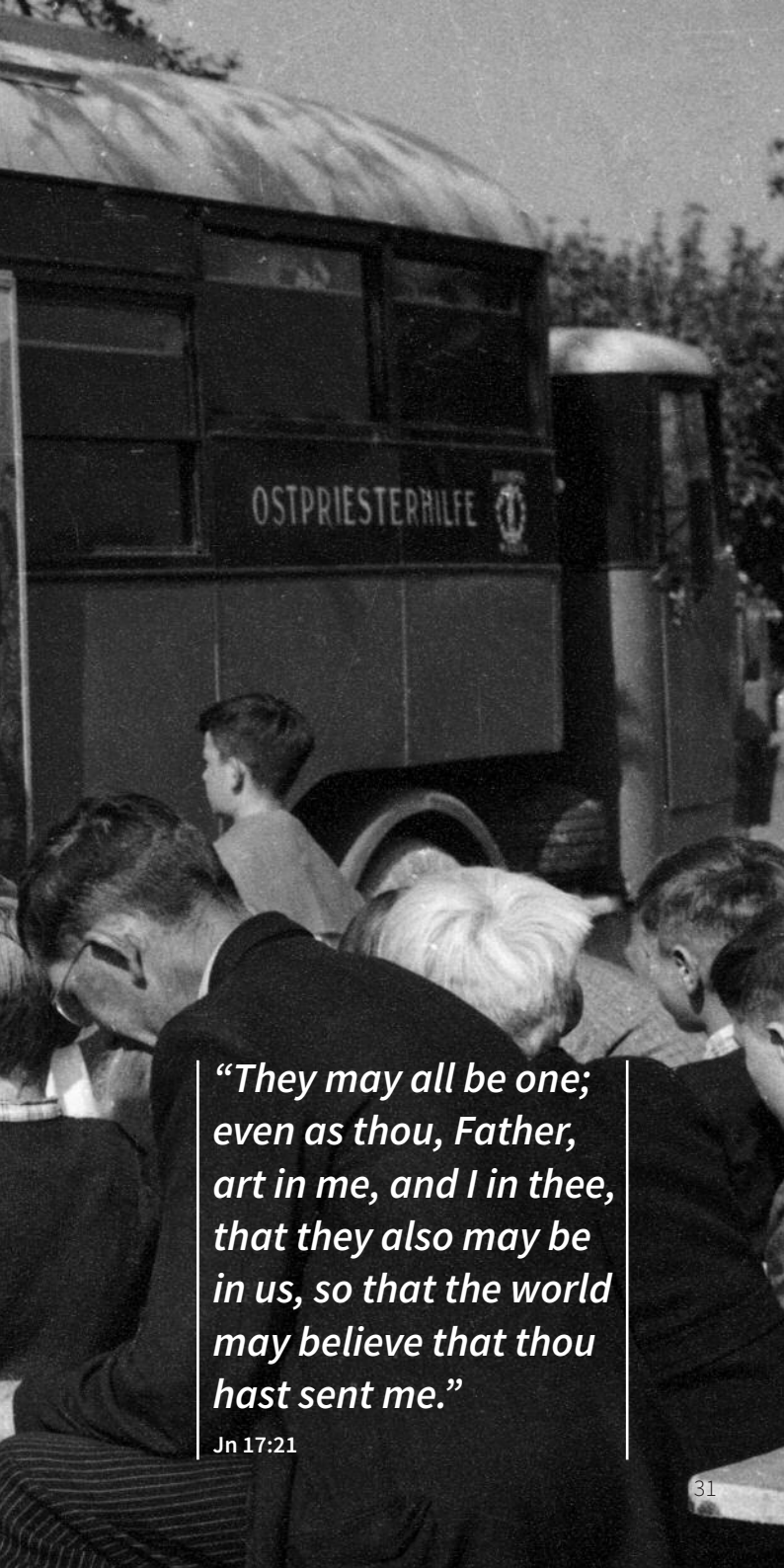


Given the widespread apostasy from the faith, evangelisation belongs to the specific duties of ACN. For in the abandonment of God lies the real cause of all the suffering and the ultimate threat to the peaceful and humane future of the world. By vigilantly recognising the signs of the times, ACN also wants to fulfil its prophetic role to prevent or mitigate harm and disasters in the world and transmit to the world the true fount of hope.



ACN is actively involved in the evangelisation of peoples, informing about the suffering and persecuted Church and supporting concrete pastoral projects all over the world, which make visible the richness of the spiritual gifts and charisms of the Church. The way it disseminates information, fundraises and administers the projects should be in the service of evangelisation.





OSTPRIESTERHILFE

*“They may all be one;
even as thou, Father,
art in me, and I in thee,
that they also may be
in us, so that the world
may believe that thou
hast sent me.”*

Jn 17:21



5. Active charity

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34).

“As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

Christian charity is founded in the love of God and draws life from it. The love of God gives every person an infinite dignity. Since Christ identifies himself with “the least” of our brethren, this *Caritas* assumes a divine dimension. Hence, every act of true Christian charity ultimately should be directed towards God and thereby fundamentally distinguish itself from purely humanitarian aid.



ACN strives to live according to this ideal of Christian charity and makes every effort to measure its actions according to this supernatural and superhuman standard of Christ. In the spirit of this love, the co-workers and benefactors of ACN engage themselves personally and as an organisation for the suffering and persecuted Church, in which they recognise Christ.



“The Church is God’s family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church... Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to the Galatians is emphatic: ‘So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith’ (6:10)” (Deus caritas est, 25).

By carrying out its mission, ACN also seeks to contribute to reconciliation and unity among Christians and peace among peoples and religions, in accordance with the prayer of Jesus (Jn 17:21). In particular, ACN fosters among Christian churches the ecumenism of love and the ecumenism of saints and martyrs, which are the most credible signs of future unity.

Trust in God’s mercy enables people to live supernatural joy and to do good, for people are much better than we think. Concrete acts of charity let people experience how *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).



ACN passes on the offerings of the benefactors to the suffering and persecuted Church in such a manner that the co-workers are not dictating but are listening respectfully and attentively to the needs of the brothers and sisters, responding to them and discerning priorities with them. ACN strives to serve the Church's mission worldwide and to be a bridge of love between the benefactors and beneficiaries, thereby uniting them in selfless love to the community of the Church, the mystical body of Christ.



In all the needs of the Church, ACN's co-workers are confident and full of hope that in fulfilling their mission they can count on the blessing of God, who can do all things and who at all times works miracles of charity!



*“Having loved his
own who were
in the world,
he loved them
to the end.”*

Jn 13:1



MANAO VAVAKA
RÔZERY
NY ANKIZY

Mifotika mihafoty, manazana
mampitohelo ary ho famolavina

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