

Historical Milestones of the charity “Aid to the Church in Need” (ACN)

- 1947 Christmas at the Abbey of Tongerlo in Belgium: The Dutch Norbertine Werenfried van Straaten publishes the article "Peace on Earth? - No Room at the Inn" in his abbey newsletter. He calls for help for 14 million German refugees expelled from their homes in Eastern Europe and now living in abject poverty in a bombed-out Germany. At the same time he appeals for reconciliation with the German "enemies of yesterday".
- 1948 Aid from Belgium and Holland streams into Germany. It includes bacon - hence Fr. Werenfried's legendary nickname "Bacon Priest". 3,000 so-called "rucksack priests" - refugee priests ministering to fellow refugees in Germany - are "adopted" by hundreds of thousands of Flemish school pupils.
- 1949 Fr Werenfried begins supporting Mgr Kindermann, who had founded a refugee centre and a seminary for refugee seminarians in Königstein (Germany). In Belgium, the campaign "Vehicle for God" is launched to provide "rucksack priests" with motorbikes and Volkswagen "Beetles".
- 1950 "Chapel Truck" campaign. Second-hand buses owned by the Dutch railways are converted into mobile churches, allowing German refugee priests to celebrate Mass for their scattered flocks, administer the sacraments and deliver vital material aid.
- 1952 The second "Church in Need" congress is held in Königstein with representatives from 18 countries reporting on the situation of the persecuted Church behind the "Iron Curtain". It is the moment when ACN extends its aid to include the persecuted and oppressed Church in Communist dominated Eastern Europe.
- 1956 ACN establishes a fundraising section in Germany. The first “receivers” become “generous givers”, ensuring the long-term ability of ACN to help the oppressed Church worldwide.
During the Hungarian uprising, Fr. Werenfried meets Cardinal Mindszenty in Budapest and launches a major aid campaign for Hungary.
- 1957 Aid commences for the training of priests and the support of contemplative nuns in Poland.
- 1961 Relief aid is given to refugees fleeing Communist regimes in China, North Korea and North Vietnam.
- 1962 Pope John XXIII asks Fr Werenfried to include Latin America in the scope of his work.
- 1963 Fr Werenfried meets Ukrainian confessor-bishop Josyf Slipyj in Rome. Aid for Oriental Catholics becomes an important element of ACN's work.
- 1964 The Pope formally recognises ACN as a "Pious Sodality" and places it under the direct jurisdiction of the Holy See. The International Head Office is moved from Tongerlo to Rome.
- 1965 Aid for the suffering Church in Africa begins.

- 1966 Fr Werenfried helps Mother Hadewych found the "Daughters of the Resurrection" in Bukavu (Democratic Republic of Congo).
- 1968 After the crushing of the "Prague Spring" Fr Werenfried intensifies efforts for the persecuted Church in Czech Republic.
- 1969 The charity adopts the name "Aid to the Church in Need". Fr Werenfried publishes his book "Where God Weeps".
- 1973 The AMA project is launched. 300 Swiss ex-army lorries are purchased, converted and shipped to Brazil to serve the pastoral work of the Church in the vast jungle of the Amazon basin.
- 1975 The international head office is moved from Rome to Königstein (Germany).
- 1976 Focus on Asia. Support for "boat-people" fleeing from Vietnam and for refugees from communist regimes in Laos and Cambodia.
- 1979 Child's Bibles are printed for Latin America to mark the International Year of the Child. The Child's Bible idea subsequently develops into the largest ongoing international project in the history of ACN.
- 1981 First General Assembly is held in Rome to elect ACN's first ever president.
- ACN and 10 other charities launch the appeal "A Ship for Poland" to collect tons of aid for Poland.
- 1984 The Holy See recognises ACN as a universal public association dependent on the Congregation for the Clergy. By this time, ACN has established fundraising sections in 13 Western countries.
- 1988 Communist officials grant ACN permission to send 120,000 Bibles to the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union.
- 1989 Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe collapse. Fr Werenfried travels to Romania to meet bishops of the still-banned Eastern-Rite Catholic Church. A complete new version of the Child's Bible is produced under the title "God speaks to His Children".
- 1990 At an international congress of ACN staff and friends in Vallendar (Germany), Bishops from Eastern Europe give moving testimonies about the decades of persecution. The congress assesses ways of helping the Church rebuild after Communism.
- 1991 Fr Werenfried accompanies Cardinal Lubachivsky on his return to Lviv (Ukraine) from exile in Rome and publicly comforts and encourages hundreds of thousands of faithful gathered in the city centre.
- 1992 ACN launches a wide-ranging new aid programme for the re-evangelisation of Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation. Fr Werenfried travels to Russia for the first time to meet Orthodox Patriarch Alexey II and other Orthodox bishops in St Petersburg and

Novgorod. Pastoral aid for the Orthodox Church in Russia becomes a strategic dimension of ACN.

1995 ACN extends and intensifies aid for the persecuted Church in Communist China.

1996 The first ACN fundraising section in a former “developing country” is opened in Chile.

1997 A special Mass in Rome, a meeting with the Pope and a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine in Fatima by two thousand donors and friends of the organisation mark ACN's golden jubilee.

1998 Publication of the first edition of the Little Catholic Catechism "I Believe" as a complementary sequel to the popular Child's Bible.

1999 In an audience in Rome on the eve of the Jubilee Year 2000, Fr Werenfried, the now aging founder, presents the new leadership of ACN to Pope John Paul II.

2001 Fr Werenfried meets Pope John Paul II during the latter's pastoral trip to Ukraine. The Pope blesses the property on which a Greek Catholic seminary for priests will be built with ACN help. The Holy Spirit seminary in Lviv becomes the largest single investment in the history of ACN.

2002 First ever meetings of ecclesiastical assistants from all ACN national sections are held in Königstein and in Rome, together with the leadership of the charity and its founder.

2003 Fr Werenfried celebrates his 90th birthday on 17 January. A solemn festive Mass is held in Limburg cathedral, together with more than 500 staff, friends and benefactors. In his laudatio Bishop Franz Kamphaus says the life and work of Father Werenfried are the best proof that "religion is still an adventure today". Two weeks later, on 31 January, Fr Werenfried passes away to eternal rest.

On 7 February 2003, after the solemn Requiem Mass in Limburg Cathedral headed by the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos and Cardinal Joachim Meisner of Cologne, ACN's founder is laid to rest in Königstein.

An international conference for the members of ACN is held from 11 - 14 September in Castelgandolfo to reflect upon "Father Werenfried - his Legacy and Mission".

2004 Over 450 benefactors and staff members of ACN take part in an international pilgrimage to Marian shrines and historic sites in Poland. The consecration of ACN to the Mother of God is renewed in front of the renowned image of the black Madonna in Czestochowa.

2005 ACN farewells Antonia Willemsen, longstanding secretary general and Fr Werenfried's right hand, upon retirement.

The Fr Werenfried Centre is opened in Königstein. It includes the office where the founder worked, his Archive and various multimedia presentations. One of the main exhibits is the renowned "hat of millions" which Fr Werenfried used for over 50 years in collecting donations.

2006 The 17th national section is established in Poland, the first such ACN fundraising section in Central Europe.

2007 ACN celebrates its Diamond Jubilee. In April in Rome, the Holy Father thanks the charity for its commitment to ecumenical dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church. In May, the Pope receives the ten millionth Brazilian copy of the Child's Bible in a special ceremony marking the occasion at the *Fazenda da Esperança* in Guaratinguetá (Brazil), a rehabilitation centre for young addicts supported by ACN.

In September, the international leadership of ACN convenes in Castelgandolfo to mark the 60th anniversary of the charity. The theme of the conference is „*Aus unserer Wurzel hoffnungsvoll die Zukunft wagen*“ (From our roots with trust into the future).

On the First Sunday of Advent, an ACN delegation prays at the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem for peace in the world and calls for solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land. As the culminating event of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the pilgrimage to Bethlehem pays explicit and fitting tribute to the Christmas article "Peace on earth? - No room at the Inn" written by Fr Werenfried in 1947, which marked his first ever appeal for help and which inspires ACN today to continue his work with creative fidelity.