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Aid group commits AUD \$8.5M to support priests and nuns serving communities most vulnerable to COVID-19

To help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), the international pontifical charity serving the persecuted and suffering Church around the world, is providing AUD \$8.5M in emergency funding to priests and nuns caring for the most vulnerable communities around the world.

In the face of increased social distress worldwide due to COVID-19, this vital initiative will assist religious who have lost their basic subsistence, so that they may be able to continue to carry out their spiritual and social ministries, such as administering the sacraments, teaching the faith, caring for the sick and elderly, helping the poor and visiting prisoners. ACN's funding will be a broad-spectrum intervention, in the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, through project support.

"As a rising tide of human suffering related to COVID-19 makes itself felt around the world, the demand for social and spiritual care is soaring," said Thomas Heine-Geldern, ACN's Executive President. "It is our wish that this aid, made possible thanks to our benefactors, will help ease the burden on our courageous religious, who stand on the front lines, bringing God's love and compassion to our suffering brothers and sisters. Now more than ever, the Light and Hope of the Lord is needed."

While the entire world is coping with the ravages of the pandemic, countless communities in developing countries -- already impoverished and with limited resources -- are particularly vulnerable in this crisis; often they are dependent on the local Church for social services, including health care.

"We are united in prayer with the brave and dedicated priests and nuns who give their all to serve the world's most vulnerable communities, and with all who are suffering around the world" Mr Heine-Geldern continued. "This is a drop in the bucket in terms of what is and will be needed, but the Church plays a particularly vital spiritual and pastoral role in the day-to-day life of the world's poorest Christian communities, and we must help strengthen the safety net it provides. I am so thankful to our donors, who, often despite their own pain and hardship, are reaching out to their fellow faithful. It is a beautiful gesture, one that is helping to keep the Faith alive."

This commitment from Aid to the Church in Need International follows the launch of a national prayer campaign at the beginning of April by ACN Australia. The Australian branch of ACN has distributed 150,000 coronavirus prayer cards across Australia and New Zealand and is arranging a spiritual bouquet of Masses that will be celebrated by poor priests. Many poor priests are struggling to survive due to the suspension of Masses in their diocese therefore, no Sunday collection which they rely on for subsistence. The priests will offer Masses for the multitude of needs surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the Mass offerings will help them to survive. "To date, we are very happy to have arranged 350 Masses on behalf of Australian Catholics. I am hoping we can increase that spiritual bouquet to 500 or even 1000 Masses," said National Director of ACN Australia, Mr Bernard Toutounji. 100% of the Mass stipend is sent directly to the priest in need, no administration costs are taken. You can add a Mass to the bouquet by visiting: www.aidtochurch.org/coronavirus or by calling ACN Australia: **1800 101 201** (Monday to Friday 8am-5pm) AEST.