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**From humanitarian to development aid.
A case study of the activities of
the Aid to the Church in Need Pontifical Foundation.**

Abstract

The description of the mission and activities of the international NGO organization Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) should be seen as an example of humanitarian, pastoral and development aid. The presented data gives a picture of the needs, but also shows that behind each of the projects there are specific stories of disadvantaged people. Reflecting on the activities and specific projects of the ACN Foundation allows us to conclude that one organization, even with an international reach, is not able to solve all the world's problems, but it can certainly show the world a picture of needs in many of its regions. The study is part of the research into the areas of humanitarian aid, religious problems in the world, the impact of the papal aid organization on the development of social and religious life, volunteering and the integral development of local communities. The source data used in this text is the Foundation's internal 2019 data. Two selected countries, Lebanon and South Sudan are representative countries supported by ACN. The selected aid projects illustrate the scale of the aid and can be used to draw a picture of the needs.

This example of ACN activities contributes to further research into the state of aid, the identification of aid needs and aid effectiveness in different regions of the world. The presented data may also inspire even greater solidarity between nations in mutual aid and may inspire other aid organizations to increase their involvement in aid in the indicated regions.

Keywords: humanitarian help, Church, foundation, ACN, need, development help, pastoral help, Lebanon, South Sudan.

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to present a selected aid organization from the NGO sector as an example of the humanitarian pastoral and developmental aid activity. An example of such organizations in the international arena is Aid to the Church in Need.¹ Its founder, Father Werenfried Van Straaten (1913–2003)² is one of the well-known figures of the 20th century, like Mother Teresa and Abbé Pierre, who was religiously motivated to help suffering people. The sources used for writing this text were the Foundation's internal documents, 2019 Annual Report,³ studies on the functioning of the organization, and media reports. Since 1962, the foundation has extended its aid to the developing countries and has become a global organization. The study fits in the research of humanitarian aid areas, religion problems in the world, influence of religious organizations on the development of social life, voluntariness, and integral development of local communities.

¹ URL = <https://www.acninternational.org/our-history/>.

² In 1934, Fr. Werenfried Van Straaten entered the Flemish Premonstratensian (Norbertine) monastery in Tongerlo. From 1947, he called for aid to the defeated Germans during World War II and for reconciliation with the former enemy. It was the birth of the organization "Kirche in Not-Ostpriesterhilfe" (Kirche in Not). In 1952, he began helping the countries behind the Iron Curtain. After meeting with Fr. card. Stefan Wyszyński in 1957, Father Werenfried started helping the Church in Poland. Firstly, contemplative orders and seminaries were helped. Help for the contemplative sisters has continued until today. An important element of it was also the funding of scholarships, enabling the preparation of staff for Polish seminaries and Catholic universities. Aid to the Church in Need financed the construction of many Polish churches, including the Arc of the Lord in Nowa Huta. Cf. Ogonowska (2006); Kolmann (2005) - the historical information quoted herein comes from this study.

³ *Pomoc Kościołowi w Potrzebie* (2020).

The presented interdisciplinary study is set in the research space of various social, theological and religious sciences.

1. The aim of the Organization

The motto of the Aid to the Church in Need association is reconciliation and solidarity in the world. It carries out this mission by helping Christians who are persecuted, oppressed and suffering all over the world. After World War II, Father Werenfried Van Straaten showed determination to complete a seemingly impossible task of forgiveness and solidarity. His faith in people was expressed in the spectacular humanitarian action of providing existential aid to Germans, which he carried out in 1947 in Belgium and The Netherlands. Thanks to his efforts, the nations occupied by Nazi Germany gave generous financial and food support to their recent enemies. In the years that followed, Father Werenfried surprised the world with more and more intriguing ideas for spreading the Gospel and doing charitable work.⁴ Shortly after the war, he proposed chapels on wheels, converted trucks in which Mass was celebrated, reaching the faithful who were without places of worship. In 1953, he established the International Building Order to deal the construction of houses for German refugees. In the last years of his life, Father Werenfried amazed all sources with brilliant designs. The first of them was inspired by a personal request of St. John Paul II addressed to ACN for an effort concerning ecumenical reconciliation with the Orthodox Church. The answer was Father Werenfried's design of famous churches - dots "floating on Russian rivers and reaching places where there were no

⁴ Van Straaten (1965).

temples or any access roads.”⁵ Father Werenfried was the initiator of previously unused activities for re-evangelization in atheistic Germany. He organized cruising cars - confessionals encouraging people to receive the sacrament of penance. These ingenious forms of providing pastoral and material help to the followers of Christ, still inspiring admiration and respect in the world today, are a legacy that rests on those who continue the work of this Genius of Love.⁶ During the seventy years of its existence, Aid to the Church in Need has raised nearly two billion euros, which it has carefully allocated to forgotten, needy people living from hand to mouth on the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

A separate, no less important section of Aid to the Church in Need was care for the nations enslaved by Soviet dictatorship. Poland received most of this aid. After Father Werenfried and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński met in 1957, ACN funds supported nuns, priests and laity persecuted by the communist authorities. Contemplative orders are supported with the annual campaign “Quiet and faithful presence”.⁷

The most important goal of ACN is to help the Church wherever it is persecuted in the world in a broad sense. Christians are persecuted in over 50 countries.⁸ The threat to their health and even life is growing. In 70 countries around the world, worship is restricted and Christians are discriminated against and forced to reject their faith. By sharing information about the situation of many people in need of help around the world, ACN makes all Christians aware of the fate

⁵ Gołąb (2006): 12.

⁶ Kolmann (2005).

⁷ URL = <https://misericors.org/cicha-i-wierna-obecnosc-wesprzysiostry-klauzurowe-wraz-z-pkwp/>.

⁸ Cisło (2014): 008.

of their sisters and brothers in faith all over the world, and by undertaking, together with many people of good will, specific projects of help. For this purpose, a newsletter is published 8 times a year, with over 40 years of tradition. Anyone can get it for free after making such a request to the regional office and giving their address. With the help of over 700,000 benefactors and volunteers, more than 7,000 projects are carried out each year, with a total budget of more than EUR 100 million.⁹

2. The idea of help

ACN helps refugees and those who are persecuted because of their faith or religion by providing them with material and pastoral assistance.¹⁰ Because of wars, religious or political persecution and natural disasters, millions of people around the world live as refugees. Very often, because of faith, they cannot get employment. In 2019, the aid went mostly to Africa. The Middle East was also an important region that received support. The new aid trends in Africa result mainly from the vigorous activity of terrorist groups in the north of the continent and in central African countries. While the number of Christians continues to increase, the scale of persecution and other forms of oppression is also increasing. The Middle East needs many more years of help to rebuild houses, places of worship, schools. There is a need for a very urgent development aid and the lack of adequate livelihood is still noticeable, so humanitarian aid is still needed. The third region under special care from ACN is Venezuela,

⁹ *Pomoc Kościołowi w Potrzebie* (2020).

¹⁰ Cisło, Paś, Boguszewski (2018): 7.

where life is hampered by a very difficult political and economic situation and a very low level of healthcare. Parishes are often the only places where people can get real life or health-saving assistance. One should also pay attention to threats from religious fundamentalisms and hence the need for support to the inhabitants of Pakistan and India.

2.1. Help in numbers

In 2019, ACN supported 5,230 projects for a total of 111.2 million euro.¹¹ Africa received 29.6% of this sum, the Middle East – 22.1%, Asia 16.0%, Central and Eastern Europe – 14.3%, Latin America - 13.1%, international projects 2.2%, Western Europe – 1.6%, Oceania - 0.9%, North America 0.2%. The funds raised come from more than 330,000 donors worldwide. In 2019, ACN had 25 national offices in: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, USA, Venezuela.¹²

Funding comes mainly from donations made on a regular basis by donors, and an important aid trend are bequests allocated to ACN's activities. In 2019, legacies accounted for EUR 20.1 million, i.e. 18.9% of the income for the entire 2019. All projects, implemented in 139 countries around the world, were carried out with the participation of proven and reliable partners. This is particularly important for the credibility and purposefulness of the funds spent. As regards the nature of implemented projects: construction aid accounted for 24.0%, aid

¹¹ Statistical data from the ACN Yearly Report 2019 sent out to all benefactors.

¹² URL = <https://www.acninternational.org/about-us/acn-worldwide/>.

for refugees and humanitarian aid 16.8%, education of priests and religious 16.0%, mass scholarships 15.9%, training of lay missionaries 11.0%, automotive 5.8%, basic material assistance for cloistered sisters 5.0%, means of social communication 3.2%, book publications 2.3%. Thirty percent of construction projects were implemented in the Middle East; 1,315 of them basically concerned reconstruction and renovation of churches, monasteries, pastoral centres and residential houses destroyed as a result of armed conflicts. An important motivation to help with the extension of all public buildings and private homes is the fact that most of these buildings are needed so as to enable Christians, in particular, to return to their homes from exile caused by persecution. Constructions and renovations in Africa, on the other hand, are related to new infrastructure needed to achieve the goals of African beneficiaries. ACN has supported more than 16,000 seminarians who prepare for priesthood. The number of clerics who received support indicates that one in eight seminarians in the world received help from ACN.¹³ Clerics in Africa received most of that help; a total of 8,039 clerics in Africa, 3,061 in Latin America and 3,254 in Eastern Europe were supported. In 2019, support was provided to programs related to shaping personality of future clergymen. Over 13,000 religious sisters received material help in their daily functioning or in their religious and human formation. Help was provided to 3,529 sisters from active religious orders and 2,190 from contemplative orders. 4,416 sisters and 1,035 novices received help for formation. 663 means of transport were purchased. The purchases of boats, cars, bicycles and motorcycles help to fulfil the tasks resulting from the functions and tasks of the project

¹³ There are 115,382 clerics in the world today.

beneficiaries. ACN's humanitarian projects are primarily related to a very urgent need to save lives or health of the inhabitants of the regions affected by fights, persecution or violations of the rights of religious freedom. The total of 5,230 projects amounts to 211 more than in the previous year, but it should also be noted that in 2019 more requests were received than usual. In 2019, 7,154 applications were received, 2,041 were rejected. On average, one project was supported with EUR 14,535. Projects were implemented in 139 countries around the world, in 1,162 dioceses¹⁴. Support was provided to 24,000 catechists and people involved in the implementation of the goals resulting from the mission of the organizations that received help.¹⁵

2.2. Selected projects

Lebanon and South Sudan are representative countries of the two ACN assisted regions. The selected aid projects illustrate the scale of aid and can be used to draw a picture of the needs.¹⁶

2.2.1. Lebanon

1. Formation of 7 seminarians in the diocese – 2019/2020 – 10,000.00
2. Finishing of the parish hall construction at St Anthony of Padua parish – Chlifa Bekaa Nort – 25,000.00

¹⁴ There are 3017 catholic dioceses in the world.

¹⁵ *Pomoc Kościołowi w Potrzebie (2020)*.

¹⁶ The Data from ACN Archive in Warsaw.

3. Pastoral festival camps for children of Riders of the Virgin Mary Movement– CCVM – Northern Beqaa Region, 2019 – 15,000.00
4. On–going formation for animators belonging to Riders of the Virgin Mary Movement – CAGM – Northern Beqaa Region, 2019/2020 – 8,500.00
5. Extension of St Elie Beit – Shema church, Bekaa Valley (continuation) – 15,000.00
6. Pastoral summer camps for eight diocesan parishes – July 2019 – 6,800.00
7. On–going formation activities for 30 diocesan priests – 2019 – 15,000.00
8. Formation of 6 seminarians studying at the University of Holy Ghost Kasslik (Khalil Berqachi, Chadi Khoury, Georges Daoud, Tony Keyrouz, Marc Rahme, Johnny Al Kozah) 2018/ 2019 – 9,000.00
9. Missae ordinariae for 30 diocesan priests–2019– 14,400.00
10. For children and youth summer camps– 2019– 15,000.00
11. Missae ordinariae for 20 priests of Patriarcate de Cilicie des Arméniens Catholiques – 2019 – 8,000.00
12. Missae ordinariae for four diocesan priests–2019–3,200.00
13. Rehabilitation of noviciate belonging to Saint Michael convent, Kesrewan (Cesc n°3133) – 15,000.00
14. Youth and children camp “Jesus Ma Joie” – 27./ 28.09.2019 – 30,000.00
15. Special donation ACN Poland: Bus and mattresses for students and orphans living in the Salvadorian House in Dar Al Sadaka, Zahle/ Beka – 29,047.08
16. Emergency help after the burning of Carmel St Joseph de Mechref – 30,000.00
17. Forwarding donation ACN USA to support Télé Lumière– Noursat – 86,956.52

18. Enlargement of the chapel and alteration of the ground floor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel convent, Hazmieh – 53,000.00
19. Socio–pastoral support for imprisoned female Ethiopian migrants in Lebanon – 2019 – 10,000.00
20. Missae ordinariae for 23 Missionaries of St Paul – 2019 – 9,200.00
21. Missae ordinariae for 27 priests of the Ordre des Pères Carmes (Carmelites) – 2019 – 16,100.00
22. Holistic assistance for young girls in Distress – Sisters of Good Shepherd, Sehaile, Keserwan, Mount Lebanon (October 2018 – July 2019) – 41,500.00
23. Missae ordinariae for 62 diocesan priests – 2019 – 24,800.00
24. Missae ordinariae for 39 diocesan priests – 2019 – 15,600.00
25. Missae ordinariae for 38 diocesan priests – 2019 – 15,200.00
26. Emergency food and hygiene packages for 500 families – 6,000.00
27. “Saint John the Merciful Table” for Syrian refugees and others in Zahle area and Bekaa Valley (03/ 2020– 02/ 2021) – 700,000.00
28. Assistance plan “Children Summer Camp” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – April 2020/ September 2020 – 30,000.00
29. Assistance plan “Students School Tuition” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ March 2020 – 70,000.00
30. Assistance plan “Secondary Care Assistance” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ September 2020 – 250,000.00
31. Assistance plan “Primary Care Assistance” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ September 2020 – 80,000.00
32. Assistance plan to enable Syrian refugees to remain in Lebanon – October 2019/ September 2020 – 36 000.00

33. Assistance plan “Mazout for heating” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ March 2020 – 80,800.00
34. Assistance plan “Diapers” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ September 2020 – 10,700.00
35. Assistance plan “Rent Assistance” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ September 2020 – 80,800.00
36. Assistance plan “Hygiene Kits” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019/ September 2020 – 120,000.00
37. Assistance plan “Food Packages” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – October 2019 – September 2020 – 96,000.00
38. Assistance plan “Children Summer Camp” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 27,000.00
39. Assistance plan “Students School Tuition” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 71 000.00
40. Assistance plan “Secondary Care Assistance” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 200,000.00
41. Assistance plan “Primary Care Assistance” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 80,400.00
42. Assistance plan to enable Syrian refugees to remain in Lebanon – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 89,000.00
43. Assistance plan “Mazout for heating” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 107,200.00
44. Assistance plan “Diapers” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 10,720.00
45. Assistance plan “Rent Assistance” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 80,400.00
46. Assistance plan “Hygiene Kits” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 160 800.00

47. Assistance plan “Food Packages” for Syrian refugees in Zahle – 2019 (continuation from 2018) – 128,640.00
48. Distribution of 2000 books catechism “Our Way to God” in the parishes of Bekaa Valley (Arabic version) – 3,200.00
49. “Saint John the Merciful Table” for Syrian refugees and others in Zahle area and Bekaa Valley (03/2019 – 02/2020) – 880,000.00.

2.2.2. South Sudan

The political conflict that has been going on for years, as well as the wildfires and floods ravaging the country, not only cause suffering but also lack of development prospects. ACN aid projects in South Sudan are primarily related to pastoral aid. Pastoral assistance is understood here as a wide-range of help to organize parish life and evangelization. The organizational structure of the church’s life is based mainly on one archdiocese and 6 suffragan dioceses with a couple of smaller structures of Eastern Churches consisting mainly of immigrants from the neighbouring African countries. As usual, aid provided to parish communities which is aimed at pastoral care is consequently developmental and humanitarian.¹⁷ The impact of parishes on society, especially in the poor countries of Africa, is evidence of this.

In 2019, fourteen projects were carried out in this African country for a total amount of almost EUR 500,000.¹⁸ The main aid project in 2019 was the construction of a pastoral house

¹⁷ Basically, contacts with representatives of the local partner of projects or local Church on the part of ACN takes place through bishops and senior religious superiors without whose approval it is impossible to obtain help. Every project must be accepted by the Church authorities.

¹⁸ The Data from ACN Archive in Warsaw.

in the Diocese of Tombura - Yambio. The cost of this project amounted to EUR 119,130. The project was realized at the request of Fr. Sungerukauri who represents Bishop Edward Hiiboro Kussal. Bishop Kussal has been bishop of this diocese since 2008. The second largest financial aid project was a contribution to the construction of a monastery and a multi-purpose hall at the congregation premises of the Daughters of St. Paul in the Archdiocese of Juba. The cost of this project amounted to EUR 80,000. Also the amount of EUR 30,000 was donated for emergency assistance to the victims of floods in the parish of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Diocese of Malak; the amount of EUR 25,000 was given for the formation of priests in the Diocese of Rumbek and EUR 30,000 for the renovation of the catechetical centre. The amount of EUR 30,000 was donated through a Polish missionary working in the Diocese of Rumbek for medical and food aid to refugees; The diocese of Rumbek also received funds for the purchase of a car for pastoral work. The car was financed together with MIVA Poland. The amount of EUR 70,000 was donated by the Diocese of Tombura-Yambio to Father Diko to build a pastoral and catechetical complex and a shelter for the homeless; the amount of EUR 40,000 was allocated in the Diocese of Diko for renovation of the house and chapel of the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Diocese of El Obeid, two projects were carried out. The first one, costing EUR 32,000, was dedicated to the support of priests and sisters in this diocese. The second project amounts to EUR

24,000 for the reconstruction of a chapel and parish house near the military base in the Nubian Mountains.

Conclusion

The chosen mission and activities carried out by Aid to the Church in Need illustrate how a developing sector organization can contribute to development aid by conducting various humanitarian aid projects. The actions referring to religious axiology and means of pastoral influence appropriate for religions turn out to be very effective tools for helping and for the development of communities, especially local ones, previously affected by various crises. The description of ACN's mission and the activities of this international aid organization contributes to further research into the state of aid, aid needs and aid effectiveness in various regions of the world. The presented data undoubtedly give a picture of the needs, but also show that behind each of the projects there are specific stories of the aggrieved and gifted. Reflecting on the activities and specific projects of the Aid to the Church in Need Foundation it should be stated that a single organization, even with an international outreach, is not able to solve all the world's problems, but it can certainly show the world a picture of needs and can inspire even greater solidarity between nations in mutual humanitarian and development aid.

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