

Making Christ known in the war zone

Young soldiers serving in Afghanistan are finding out more about their Catholic faith thanks to international charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), which is committed to spreading the Gospel.



In response to a request from British Army chaplain Fr. David Smith, ACN provided books about the Catholic faith and prayer cards to help with the pastoral care of 400 service personnel.

Fr. Smith, who serves in Helmand Province with the Second Battalion of the Mercian Regiment, described how he arrived in Afghanistan and found that many in the armed forces wanted to know more about their faith.

When he contacted ACN, the charity responded by sending prayer cards and copies of YouCat, the Catholic Church's new youth catechism, which the organization helped to produce.

These resources have meant the chaplain can hold catechism classes every Friday night, followed by the Rosary and Benediction.

In a message to ACN, Fr. Smith, who is the only Catholic chaplain at the UK's main operating base in Afghanistan's Helmand Province, Camp Bastion, said, "There's a real hunger to know more about the Catholic religion."

Pointing out that most UK soldiers complete their military service and return to civilian life before the age of 25, he said, "Many of these young people have been short-changed by the Catholic education

system and have left Catholic school not even knowing what the Blessed Sacrament is.”

“It’s no wonder so many of them lapse from the practice of their faith. So I decided to try and do something about it.”

Fr. Smith described how all three armed forces, the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, have Catholic chaplains working alongside service personnel.

He said, “The Sacraments are celebrated, catechesis is given and help and support is offered to our young people doing a very demanding job in the service of their country. No more so than in Afghanistan at the moment.”

The chaplain celebrates Mass every day and three times on a Sunday.

In addition to looking after the Catholic soldiers, Fr. Smith provides pastoral care for the large number of foreign civilian contractors who are working alongside the military.

Fr. Smith expressed his gratitude to the Catholic charity for its help with his pastoral work.

He said, “Thank you ACN for your support for our young soldiers who are serving their country under such difficult circumstances.”

Fr. Smith asked ACN’s friends and benefactors to pray for military chaplains and service personnel.

Aid to Church in Need