



Association of Catholic Soldiers in Austria (ACS)

“A graceful past renewing towards a peaceful future.”

From the very beginning, the Association of Catholic Soldiers in Austria was aimed at raising the awareness of, spreading and promoting Christian principles and the Christian way of life among the members of the Austrian Armed Forces, the army administration, the active, militia and retired personnel as well as all their family members. The Association has been elevated to an official Church institution by the Military Bishop, tasked with the lay apostolate in particular. Every man, every woman, can become member of the Association. We have always been a community of Catholic soldiers. We are looking for Christian-oriented soldiers and want to provide them a home, when they are still active and also when they are retired. We are active where soldiers are. We want to assist in matters of life and faith, promote the Christian faith as a guiding principle of life, and be a partner accompanying you in your search for God. In doing so, the Holy Communion is the central element, while prayers and the Holy Scriptures are our basis. Our community comprises positive, dutiful and hopeful persons who gather as Christians and try to bring the Good News in the Austrian Armed Forces.

But what will be the challenge for the future?

Society has become superficial. People want to have everything, often even without being able to afford it or being willing to work for it. Egoism, deterioration of values, pursuit of profit, materialism and rigidness are their predominant characteristics. Human beings seem to come second. Abortion and mercy killing – euthanasia, in essence – as well as genetic modification actually have put life per se at stake. There seems to be only little space left – or acceptance, for that matter – for faith, piety and the Gospel. Against this backdrop, also the Austrian Armed Forces have to deal with new tasks. Every one will be affected by it, without knowing exactly, where the journey will eventually take us. Intensified international and domestic tasks result in an increase in personal strain. It is getting increasingly harder to combine service and family life. This often results in being overchallenged. Our retired soldiers are often neglected and feel ignored. Nevertheless, also after their retirement from active service they are a relevant part of society and still a part of us. They can bring in their experience, and they also want to do so. Especially with the young ones, but also with the elderly, this leads to great insecurity, lack of orientation and the question about the sense of life. Many are unable to cope with that, take drugs or even commit suicide. Yet, there are still very many who:



- search for orientation in their lives, but have not found faith so far;
- search for that faith, but are unable to really find it;
- believe in God, but are unable to stand up for their faith.

By living the “Word of God” and, thereby, conveying it in a credible manner, we want to help them and win over those who still search for faith as an answer to their question about the essence of life. In the Christian sense of loving thy neighbour, we want to provide help in solving service-related and everyday problems. The compatibility of service and family life as well as the care provided to family members and relatives are of utmost importance to us. We welcome everyone who wants to come.

Since 2002, Major General Norbert Sinn has been presiding over the Association of Catholic Soldiers. His efforts are focused on the care for the soldiers’ families, the acceptance of social responsibility and the deepening of cooperation with the military parish councils. In particular long-distance relationships, caused by absence due to international deployments and assistance operations in support of the police at the national border, are a problem for the soldiers and their families.

Therefore, the topic area of “soldiers and their families” will continue to remain our central concern as Catholic soldiers in Austria. The contents, however, will go beyond the issue of “relationship and partnership.” They will also address other problems, such as drugs, violence, the education of children and teenagers as well as schooling. New topics will include a contribution to making our society more family-friendly and Christian, on state force level, as well as the Christian soldier.

Lastly, I would like to mention a particular saint, whose message of faith was, and still is, relevant in pursuit of a peaceful future. In particular for us soldiers, our patron saint, Saint Martin, should always be an example in faith, humility and the Christian love of one’s neighbour. Quite rightly, the life and work of this Saint are considered exemplary for a Church within the military, since Martin was both, soldier and bishop. In both his functions he worked hard for the well-being and the safety of those entrusted to him, which is also an essential task of Christian soldiers. His change and his conversion from a Roman officer to a Christian, his becoming a priest, the founder of the first monastery north of the Alps and his becoming a bishop clearly show us that it is never too late to heed God’s calling.

Colonel Michael JEDLIČKA