

# HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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*To the people of the Church in Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2017 –*

Christians in the Holy Land today are descendants of those who first believed and lived the Christian faith. Micheal Zoughbi in Bethlehem, writes: “We Christians are losing our roots in the Middle East, especially in the Holy Land. We want to stay in our homes and to keep the roots of our ancestors and our faith alive. To help us, we would like to ask you to fast and pray and to join us as witnesses to our Lord’s desire for peace and justice. We need fasting and prayer to restore the dignity of our people and to allow us to remain in our land.”

Today, in Jerusalem, there are 65 historical churches but only 5,000 Christians remaining, among one million residents. The Custody of the Holy Land provides Christian formation and education, conducts parish ministry, offers housing and food for the poor and welcomes pilgrims to the shrines in the Holy Land. The Good Friday Collection helps the Custody to maintain ancient churches and shrines, including the endangered Edicule of the Resurrection, as well as to support the diminishing presence of Christians in the Middle East.

The Custody of the Holy Land embraces not only Israel and Palestine, but also Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus. Since 2011, the civil war in Syria has inflicted unspeakable suffering on the population. The Franciscan friars are still doggedly present in demolished cities such Damascus and Aleppo.

Our poster features a Franciscan friar in a bombed-out church in Aleppo. Fr Ibrahim Sabbagh OFM, Pastor of Aleppo, when asked whether his friary was also destroyed, answered, “We are much more concerned with people’s lives and the lives of our families.”

The friars are providing food and milk to children, clothes, reading glasses, medicines and medical care including surgical operations. They offer temporary accommodation for those whose homes have been destroyed. They are paying rents and school fees for those who stay, and they cover travel expenses for refugees to escape the fighting.

Our Pope’s world-wide Good Friday Collection offers us Australian Catholics an opportunity to express our solidarity with Christians in the Custody of the Holy Land. Our parishioners, Parish Priests and Bishops have always been most generous. Our donation is a direct way to make a difference in the lives of those caught up in war, violence and instability in the Custody of the Holy Land. I thank you all wholeheartedly on their behalf.

Signature

*Carl Schafer OFM*  
*Friar Carl Schafer OFM*

*Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)*  
[www.holylandfranciscansaustralia.org](http://www.holylandfranciscansaustralia.org)