

HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

Franciscan Provincial Office
47 Victoria Street, Waverley NSW 2024
Telephone (02) 9369 9300 Fax (02) 9369 9322

To the people of the Church of Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2010 –

Over many years, Australian Catholics have contributed very generously to the Good Friday Holy Land Collection. Last year, you contributed Aust\$1,100,000.00.

For a long time, we understood that the collection was made for the upkeep of the Holy Places. The “quarried” stones of ancient holy sites do require constant restoration. New buildings are also required.

The extent of restoration and construction is most impressive. The Custos of the Holy Land in his recent summary report describes the restoration achieved in Ain Karem, Bethany, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Magdala, Nazareth, Nablus and Mount Nebo. These excellent projects could not be realized without the Good Friday Collection, but only 29% of the collection is spent in this way.

More important than the *quarried* stones of the holy sites are the *living* stones: the Christian communities who live in the Holy Land. Some of them predate the most ancient buildings that mark the holy sites. Others are as new as today.

Christians in the Holy Land need our prayers and financial support more than ever. Many have found their living conditions intolerable. The scarcity of housing and even evictions from their family homes and the constant threat of violence and hatred have forced many to abandon the Holy Land and to seek a better life elsewhere. But, as the Custos of the Holy Land said, “As Christians, we have a historical task: not to abandon the land of our Lord, but to be there, to stay there, to be Christians there.” He expressed what the Franciscan friars have said and done in the Holy Land since the time of St Francis, in spite of persecution and martyrdom.

A recent report of the Commissariat in the USA describes how the Good Friday Collection has been spent on the living stones, the local communities of Christians. In fact, 47% of the collection is spent on charitable programs for the poor: projects in favour of youth, support of families and of parish communities and schools, as well as building apartments for the poor and young couples, plus a variety of cultural projects. 19% is spent on educational programs and 5% on pastoral programs.

Pope Benedict XVI remarked, “The value that St Paul attributes to this gesture of sharing is so great that he seldom calls it merely a “collection”. Rather, for him it is “service”, “blessing”, “gift”, “grace”, even “liturgy” (cf. 2 Cor 9). Particularly surprising is the latter term which gives a value that is even religious to a collection of money: on the one hand it is a liturgical act or “service” offered by every community to God and, on the other, it is a loving action made for people.” (*L'Osservatore Romano*, October 2, 2008, p.1).

Australian Catholics, you can be truly proud of your contribution to the Good Friday Holy Land Collection. You can be assured that your donation is much appreciated and very well spent.

Signature

Carl Schafer OFM

Friar Carl Schafer OFM

Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)