

HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church in Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2012 –

Someone asked me, “What do you Franciscans do with all the money that you collect on Good Friday?” He may well have asked, too, how did the Franciscans get involved in collecting this money?

Blame St Francis of Assisi! Out of his great love of Jesus Christ, the Word of God who dwelt among us, St Francis in 1220 visited the Holy Places where Jesus was born, lived and died and rose from death. So the Franciscans have been involved in the Holy Land for close on nine hundred years.

The Custos of the Holy Land, Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM, says, “The mission of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land is always this: to take care of the Holy Places. Hence our role is to be in these places of memory even if no one goes there, even if they are isolated, even if it isn't gratifying, simply to be there, and to celebrate the memory of Jesus Christ with prayer, first of all. And then there is the aspect of staying with the Christian community - with the living stones - because their society is changing. Young people are changing. They have new expectations, new needs.”

The Good Friday Collection isn't for the Franciscans but we have been charged with organizing it by Pope Benedict XVI. All the Catholic dioceses in the world are asked to hold this special collection and to send their contribution to the Commissariat of the Holy Land in their country.

The Commissary sends his country's total collection to the Congregation for Oriental Churches, who determine how the money is distributed. As Pope Paul VI wrote, what the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land receives is for the use “not only of the Holy Places but above all of those pastoral, charitable, educational and social works that the Church supports in the Holy Land for the welfare both of their Christian brethren and of the local communities.”

For a number of years, the Custody of the Holy Land has pursued the objective of maintaining alive the Christian presence in the Holy City. This particular project is designed to improve the housing conditions of disadvantaged families in Jerusalem, renovating their homes where required and at the same time creating employment opportunities for the local population.

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Fouad Twal, stresses the importance of dealing with the housing problem from the point of view of planting the Christian community in the Holy Land: “Among all the things we need, housing and accommodation projects are the most urgent but also the most expensive. A family, by itself, will never be able to have a house. We aim to give a large number of young Christian families the possibility to remain and to avoid the temptation to emigrate.”

As a pontifical collection requested by Pope Benedict XVI, the annual Good Friday collection unites all Christians to support fellow Christians in the Holy Land. It offers a direct link for our parishioners to be witnesses of peace and to help protect the Holy Places. We in Australia are an important part of this effort by the whole Church. Our contribution is greatly appreciated by the pilgrims who visit the Holy Places and by the local Christian community whom we support.

Signature

Carl Schafer OFM

Friar Carl Schafer OFM

Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)