

# HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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

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## *To the people of the Church in Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2013 –*

Since 1209, the Franciscans have served in the land made holy by the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. The friars have served for many years also in the other countries of the Custody of the Holy Land that includes Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus.

Today, the friars and the Christian faithful need all the support, both material and spiritual, that we can possibly offer them. Their situation in Syria is much worse than we can gather from our news media. They desperately need food, clothing and medicines and somewhere to live in the devastation. The Franciscan friars, present in the large towns and the villages in the north, are continuing to provide assistance to the population, and to support the families who have remained in the country to overcome this period of suffering and the loss of their loved ones.

Last year, Catholics in Australia contributed \$1,320,000 to the Good Friday Collection. No doubt, many widows' mites contributed to that extraordinary amount. On behalf of our hard-pressed brothers and sisters in the Custody, both religious and laity, I heartily thank all who contributed so generously to the collection.

The Commissariat of the Holy Land in Sydney received the collections from the archdioceses and dioceses and transferred the total sum through the Holy Land Commissariat in Washington D.C. to the office of the Custody of the Holy Land, in Jerusalem.

The Commissary of the Holy Land acts on behalf of the Holy See to promote the Good Friday Collection and gives an accounting to the Australian bishops and to the Congregation for Oriental Churches that determines how the funds are distributed.

The Congregation uses a percentage for a variety of needs in the Middle East. The remainder is given to the Custody of the Holy Land for the ministries that the Holy See has entrusted to the Franciscans. The funds are used not only for the maintenance of the Holy Places but also for the pastoral, charitable, educational and social works that the Church supports in the Holy Land for the welfare both of the local Christians and of their communities (*cf.* Paul VI, *Nobis in animo*, 1974).

A pressing need is the construction of houses for the poor and for young couples. Apart from improving their living conditions, local youth are employed and trained to build and maintain housing. They are also encouraged to stay and live in the Holy Land and to maintain the presence of Christ's faithful in the land of his birth, death and resurrection.

This year, more than ever in recent times, our brothers and sisters in Christ who are determined to stay in the Holy Land need the support of our fervent prayers for their perseverance as much as our generous financial help. I am confident that our Australian Catholics will respond again generously to their material and spiritual needs.

*Carl Schafer OFM*  
Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)