

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 in Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2014 –

Pope Francis, like his predecessors, has charged the Franciscans with organizing the Good Friday Collection. The Pope asks all the Catholic dioceses in the world 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 the Oriental Churches, who determine how the money is distributed. The Prefect of the Congregation stated that the Good Friday Collection remains the ordinary and indispensable means of promoting the life of Christians in the Holy Land.

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."

As a pontifical collection requested by the Popes, 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 maintain the Holy Places. We in Australia have our part in this effort by the whole Church. The pilgrims who visit the Holy Places and the local Christian community whom we support greatly appreciate our contribution.

For example, Christians in the Bethlehem area rely heavily on the Good Friday Collection and on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The area was once 90% Christian, but is now less than 20%. Those who have remained, struggle to survive and to keep their way of life intact. A shopkeeper added, "We need the whole world to pray for us and to stand by us."

The Franciscan friars serving exclusively Catholic villages in northern Syria also count on our support and prayers. They received orders recently: "All crosses and statues must disappear. It is forbidden to ring the church bells. No woman should leave the house without covering her face and hair."

Fr Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM, Custos of the Holy Land, explained. "In case of refusing to abide by these orders, Islamic law will apply. Whoever does not accept these orders either must go away or will be executed. I invite everyone to pray for all the communities of Syria, especially for those who live under the control of the extremist rebels."

Not only Syria but other countries that comprise the Custody of the Holy Land, such as Israel and the Palestinian Territories (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Egypt, Jordan and the Lebanon, need our generous support and our fervent prayers. Our Australian Church has never let them down. I am confident that the Good Friday Collection in 2014 will match or even exceed our past efforts.

Signature

Carl Schafer OFM

Friar Carl Schafer OFM

Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)