

HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church in Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2018 –

Since 2011, the civil war in Syria has inflicted unspeakable suffering on the people. The Franciscan friars are still doggedly present in demolished cities such as Damascus, Homs and Aleppo.

“Welcome to Aleppo!” The road sign reads like a joke. But the town has slowly started to come back to life. Some Christian families have heard that the Church is ready to donate a first-aid food package, also to assist in rebuilding their damaged homes and to help a father to find a job. They have decided to return home. Parish Priest Fr Ibrahim Alsabagh OFM sees this as a great sign of hope for the exhausted local community and for the Franciscans who have always been alongside the people. “It encourages us to keep on going.”

Visiting Aleppo, Fr Luke OFM from Rhodes reports, “Our friars and nuns really have done a wonderful job. The two Catholic hospitals have remained open throughout. The soldiers are used to seeing the Franciscans about on foot, visiting the poor and gathering the children for the creches and for Catechism. Even a few kind words from us help the people. They see in us determination to be with them and near them despite the danger.”

Syria has captured our attention, but the Custody of the Holy Land embraces also Israel and Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus.

Fr Michael Perry OFM, Minister General, visited the Custody of the Holy Land and reported, “I admire the courage and determination of the Christians who do not want to leave their country... I saw that the friars are united, they pray and work together, although they are tired and worn out by the situation... Then I listened to the local Christians, who spoke of the presence of the friars in their midst like real men of God capable of love and welcome.”

Our Pope’s world-wide Good Friday Collection offers us Australian Catholics an opportunity to contribute to the upkeep of the Holy Places and 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