



## HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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### ***To the people of the Church in Australia, on GOOD FRIDAY 2020***

For 800 years, Franciscan friars have shared the difficult lives of Christians in the often conflict torn countries of the Middle East. Very high in everyone's concern since 2011, the ongoing civil war in Syria has inflicted huge suffering, with more than 465,000 Syrians killed, over a million injured, and over 12 million displaced. Up till now, the friars remain doggedly present, living among and working for the local population, including refugees.

While the Syrian conflict has rightly captured our attention, it is important to remember that the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land embraces not only Syria but also Israel and Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus. The people of each of these countries face their own challenges, particularly Christians who often suffer due to their minority status. Among them, the friars offer pastoral care in various parishes as well as providing vital educational and charitable works: schools and colleges for some ten thousand pupils that include Catholics, other Christians and non-Christians, student halls and after-school activities, artisanal workshops and workshops for women, parish circles, homes for orphans and the elderly, help for young families to find a home, care for Christian migrant workers who are far from home, summer camps and dispensaries, and lodging for pilgrims. And in addition to all this, there is the perennial upkeep of ancient sanctuaries - the Holy Places of Christianity which range from the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem to the very many less known shrines throughout the Land of Jesus.

The world-wide Good Friday Collection is thus a vital gesture of solidarity that the whole Church is invited to make to support, through the Custody of the Holy Land, the Christian peoples of the Holy Land who still walk in the footsteps of Jesus and often experience a seemingly endless Way of the Cross. These often Arab Christians trace their faith back to Pentecost, where they are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles: "... Cretans and Arabs, we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God" (Acts 2:10).

The solidarity that we Australian Catholics can make is not only with the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land but also with the Latin Diocese of Jerusalem and with the six ancient Oriental Communities in the Middle East. Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, writes: "I am glad to transmit to all who work for the success of the Good Friday Collection, the deepest gratitude of the Holy Father together with my own gratitude and that of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches."

Our Australian parishioners, Parish Priests and Bishops have always been most generous to the Good Friday Collection. 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 and elsewhere in the Middle East. I thank you all wholeheartedly on their behalf.

*Mario Debattista ofm*

Friar Mario Debattista ofm  
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