



HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church in Australia, for the Holy Land Collection 2021

For 800 years, Franciscan friars have shared the difficult lives of Christians in the often conflict torn countries of the Middle East, the most recent example being the civil war in Syria which began in 2011 and still remains unresolved. But as well as Syria, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land includes Israel and Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus. The people of these countries face their own difficulties, particularly Christians due to their minority status. Among them, the friars offer pastoral care in parishes, provide vital educational and charitable works, and in addition, maintain the constant upkeep of the Holy Places of Christianity.

But 2020 has proved to be a year like no other. As in so many parts of the world, the COVID-19 Pandemic has created enormous challenges for the people of the Holy Land particularly in terms of health and a catastrophic loss of income due to travel restrictions preventing pilgrims, and the closure of all shrines. Pilgrimages to the Holy Land are a vital resource. The offerings that Pilgrims leave allow the Franciscan Friars and local Church to carry out their mission: from the care of the Holy Places that give work to the local community, to the running of several parishes, schools and the many social works that care for orphans, refugees, the homeless, and more.

Brothers and sisters, as the Holy Land Collection Statement of Income for 2020 shows, the disruption caused by the pandemic led to a collection last year of only one-third of a normal year in Australia. This loss has been repeated around the world, often much worse, and as things appear, it will again be the case in many countries in 2021. All this makes this year's Good Friday Collection extremely important. The hope is that as our life in Australia returns more to normal and our churches are open, Australian Catholics will be able to be as generous as they have been in past years. Please remember brothers and sisters that the Collection is a vital contribution and act of solidarity that the whole Church can make to support, through the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, the Christian peoples of the Holy Land. These Christians trace their faith right back to Pentecost (Acts 2:10), and they still walk in the footsteps of Jesus, often in a seemingly endless Way of the Cross.

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 Oriental Churches."

Our Australian parishioners, Parish Priests and Bishops have always been most generous to the Holy Land (Good Friday) Collection. Our donation is a direct way to make a difference in the lives of those who are keeping alive the Christian presence in the land of Jesus often in the face of great odds, made all the more difficult now due to the terrible pandemic afflicting our world. On their behalf, may I humbly thank you all wholeheartedly.

Mario Debattista ofm

Friar Mario Debattista ofm
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