



HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church in Australia, for the Holy Land Collection 2023

For 800 years, the Franciscan Friars have shared the difficult lives of Christians in the countries that make up the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land: Israel and Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus. The people of these countries face their own difficulties, but particularly Christians due to their minority status. Among them, the friars have never ceased offering their pastoral care.

The ongoing effects of the Pandemic have created enormous challenges for the people of the Holy Land in terms of health and a catastrophic loss of income due to the absence of pilgrims. Pilgrims are vital because they generate income that allows the Friars and local Church to fulfil their mission of caring for the Holy Places (that also gives work to the local people), as well as running parishes, schools and caring for orphans, refugees, the homeless, and more.

Brothers and sisters, the Good Friday Collection of 2022 was a great improvement on 2020 and 2021 and we thank you for this. However, as is the case in many parts of the world, the financial situation in the Holy Land continues to be extremely challenging. In late 2021, Fr Francesco Patton OFM, the Franciscan leader of the Holy Land Custody wrote the following which I believe is still relevant for us:

“We have not closed the sanctuaries, but tried to enhance them by intensifying our invocations in the name of all humanity. We have made them accessible by broadcasting the celebrations to keep alive the bond with the faithful and pilgrims. We have not stopped caring for our parishes with their faithful, whether they are Arabic, Hebrew or Greek speaking locals, migrant workers or refugees. The liturgies, Sacraments and Catechesis, albeit with many restrictions, have continued to nourish the lives of our people. The care of the sick and accompaniment of the dying have continued so as not to abandon them in the face of the pandemic. Our charitable commitments have continued to serve a population tried not only by the pandemic, but also by the disasters of war, the cynical and cruel ‘Laws of the Market’, the absence of social assistance, and by having to resort to begging to satisfy everyday needs or send their children to school. We have not closed schools but continued to take care of the education of infants, children, and young people. But all this, of course, has a cost, a large part of which is covered by the Good Friday Collection and the generosity of the faithful from all over the world. In light of the pandemic's ongoing effects, we friars of the Holy Land, even more than in past years, make ourselves beggars and appeal to the generosity of your hearts.” (Patton, 2021)

Brothers and sisters, the Good Friday Holy Land Collection is extremely important, and a mission that we all can assist with. The hope is that our Australian parishioners, Parish Priests and Bishops will again be as generous as they have always been. Our donation is a direct way to make a difference in the lives of people who are keeping alive the Christian presence in the land of Jesus, often in the face of great odds and in recent years, made all the more difficult by the pandemic. On their behalf, I humbly and wholeheartedly thank you all.

Fr. Bernie Thomas OFM

Fr Bernie Thomas OFM
Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)

