



HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church in Australia, for the Holy Land Collection 2024

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.

Two years ago it was the Pandemic that was causing havoc for the people in the Holy Land (as it was in the rest of the world) but now there is a new and more dangerous threat through the ongoing conflict which may last for quite some time. Just when pilgrims were starting to return, the Sacred Places of our Christian Faith are once again closed to pilgrims. Pilgrims are vital because they generate income that allows the Friars and the local Church to fulfil their mission of caring for the Holy Places (which also give work to the local people), as well as running parishes, schools and caring for orphans, refugees, the homeless, and more.

Brothers and sisters, 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. I have replaced the word 'pandemic' with 'war':

"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 war (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 war's (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, as is always the case, 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 difficulty in recent years. On their behalf, I humbly and wholeheartedly thank you all.

Fr. Bernie Thomas ofm

Friar Bernie Thomas ofm
Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)

