



HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

Franciscan Provincial Office
47 Victoria Street, Waverley NSW 2024, Australia
Tel: (02) 9369 9300 • Email: holyland@franciscans.org.au

To the people of the Church in Australia, for the Holy Land Collection 2025

As many of you are aware, 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.

Over the last five years the people of the Holy Land have had so much turmoil in their lives. My prayer as I write this letter is that the ceasefire in Palestine, Gaza and Israel will be honoured by all the leaders. Already the Christian church leaders are encouraging people to come back on pilgrimage. 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 gives work to the local people), as well as running parishes, schools and caring for orphans, refugees, the homeless, and more.

Brothers and sisters, I am amazed at the determination of the people of this area of unrest. I read with interest in January about the consecration of the new Church of the Baptism of the Lord at Al-Mughtas, Jordan. I remember visiting this site in 2015 when it was just a concrete shell of a building. Despite the challenges of the last 10 years, the people in the Holy Land (including many pilgrim sites in Jordan) have stayed strong in faith and the opening of a new church must bring about a great hope for the future.

In Dec 2024, Fr Francesco Patton ofm, the Franciscan leader of the Holy Land Custody wrote the following, which reminds us of the need to continue to support the Holy Land...

We provide more than 400 apartments for local Christians in Jerusalem. In this way, we are able to preserve the Christian character of the Christian Quarter in the Old City. We provide more than 200 houses in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas. We also have a major project starting soon in Jaffa and a joint project with the agricultural sector to build an efficient compound near the wall that encloses Bethlehem. This is one way we provide job opportunities. We provide jobs for more or less 2,000 people, which is a great effort because it means every month we have to pay a lot of salaries.

For me, the most important social activity is our schools. We have 18 schools in the Holy Land. These schools are crucial because they provide not only cultural education but also human and religious education. We stress the importance of living together and the values of (papal encyclical) "Fratelli Tutti." Our Magnificat music school is a rare example of coexistence: Most of the teachers are Jewish and most of the students are Muslim and Christian. Through these efforts, we hope to foster a mentality of living together and counter the polarization fueled by politics and ideology. (Patton, Dec 2024)

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)

