

**SPECIAL NOTE TO EDITORS:** *Soon, every parish in the United States will be taking up a special collection to assist Christians in the Holy Land. Most take up this pontifical collection during Good Friday services; some take it up on Palm Sunday. To help inform your readers about the role and importance of this collection, please feel free to share the following Q&A. It can be printed in your publication and/or posted on your website, or distributed in any way that you believe will have the greatest impact. Thank you for your assistance in helping to make this collection better known among our people.*

## **GOOD FRIDAY COLLECTION**

### ***Helping Christians in the Holy Land***

***The Holy Land Franciscans have been charged with preserving Christian places, providing pastoral care and serving the needy in the Holy Land for nearly 800 years. On Good Friday, parishes take up a pontifical collection to help Christians in the Holy Land. The following interview with Father Jeremy Harrington, OFM, commissary of the Holy Land Franciscan Monastery in Washington, DC, describes the importance of this year's collection.***

**The Good Friday collection is taken up to assist Christians in the Holy Land. Parishes all over the world are being asked to participate by the Pope. Why is this collection mandated by Pope Benedict XVI?**

Because the Holy Land Christians need help! It is difficult to get precise figures but all Christians together in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza strip and East Jerusalem are between one and two percent of the total population. To preserve the Holy Places and keep them vibrant Christian communities, they need the support of the whole Church. Catholics there are our representatives in preserving the holy places and helping the needy. In mandating the Good Friday collection for the Holy Land, Pope Benedict is doing what Pope John Paul II, Pope Paul VI and their predecessors for hundreds of years have done.

**The Pope visited the Holy Land last year and his presence gave great encouragement to the Christians there. Now, the Pope has called a Special Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. Why is the Pope focusing so much attention on issues there?**

Pope Benedict has used the analogy that the Catholic Church in the East and the West are two lungs of the one Body of Christ. The Church needs both. To bring all the Church into full communion has been an important goal for the Pope. He has also reached out to the Jewish people and to Muslims. Besides the Holy Land, the Synod includes a whole range of countries from Algeria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The Synod will bring bishops together for better communication and planning and lead to greater communion with each other. It will support Christians who are not free to practice their faith and often suffer persecution.

### **Do funds from the Good Friday collection only go to help Christians?**

The money given in the Good Friday collection is used for the care of the poorest social classes, Christian and non-Christian. The Sisters who run the Children's Hospital in Bethlehem welcome many Muslim children. Needy families receive assistance for medical treatment and pharmaceutical costs.

### **For many Americans the Holy Land seems like a place of trouble and confusion. Can you describe a project or two that you think was notably successful last year as a result of the Good Friday collection.**

Housing for the poor is certainly a success story. In Jerusalem and other places the Good Friday collection allows the Custody to offer some housing rent-free to the poor, or to other families for reduced rent proportionate to their income. In Bethlehem the Custody makes some apartments available for newly married couples. That allows them to remain in the Holy Land. The Magnificat School of Music at St. Saviour's in the Old City of Jerusalem welcomes children and adults – Jewish, Muslim and Christian – to study and perform music together in choirs and orchestras. Music is a universal language. Christian and non-Christian faculty and students – there and in other Terra Santa schools – get to know each other. The whole community experiences greater cooperation and harmony.

### **These are challenging economic times. How have people been responding to the requests for help in the Holy Land?**

With wonderful generosity! In spite of hard times, Americans donated almost the same in 2009 as they did in 2008. The people of the Holy Land and the Franciscans are very grateful!

### **What is the role of the Franciscans in the Holy Land?**

St. Francis loved the Holy Land and went there in 1219 during the Crusades and met with the Sultan in Damietta, Egypt. The Franciscan Friars have maintained some presence there since that time, almost 800 years. In 1342 Pope Clement VI entrusted the care of the Holy Places to the Franciscans, made them the Custodians of the Shrines, so our province is called the

“Custody of the Holy Land.” Friars from around the world serve there and are joined by other Sisters, Brothers, and lay people.

**In addition to the Good Friday collection, how else can people be of assistance to Christians in the Holy Land?**

Pray for them. They have a difficult life. Support peace efforts and the human rights of all the people there – Christians, Jews and Muslims. Go on a pilgrimage to connect with the Holy Land and grow in your understanding of the history and geography of salvation. Your presence as a pilgrim gives moral support to your brothers and sisters.