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Appeal for the Collection for Christians in the Holy Land

Letter of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches

The “pro Terra Sancta” Collection

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Letter of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches

February 26, 2020
Ash Wednesday

Your Excellency,

“Jesus will be in agony even to the end of the world; we must not sleep during that time” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 553). Pascal’s phrase reminds us of the mystery of the Redeemer’s struggle and suffering, which the liturgical year celebrates and makes present in a special way through Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum. It is an affirmation that also underlines the fact that Christ identifies himself with the agony and suffering of those who in history seem to know nothing but an interminable Good Friday: people tried by solitude, by war and by hunger, by rejection and abandonment.

Pope Francis’ prayer at the end of the Way of the Cross in the Colosseum on 19 April 2019 reviews the evils and pains of the world and places them beside the Cross of Jesus: “The cross of those who hunger for bread and for love; the cross of those who are alone and abandoned, even by their own children and relatives; the cross of those who thirst for justice and peace; the cross of the elderly who bear the weight of the years and of solitude; the cross of migrants who find doors closed due to fear, and hearts armoured by political calculations; the cross of the little ones, wounded in their innocence and their purity; the cross of humanity that

wanders in the darkness of uncertainty and in the obscurity of the culture of the momentary". It concludes, "Lord Jesus, revive in us the hope of the resurrection and of your definitive victory against every evil and every death".

The Holy Land is the physical place where Jesus lived this agony and this suffering, transforming it into redemptive action thanks to an infinite love. At Gethsemane, this land receives the drops of blood that he sweats. In the upper room, he anticipates the offering of himself that he will make on the cross through the gift of the Eucharist, but also through the washing of feet and the precept of brotherly love. Along the Via Dolorosa, we can still imagine the places of the double trial and condemnation of Jesus. We can see him as he walks the road carrying the cross, helped by Simon of Cyrene, until he reaches Golgotha to be crucified. He entrusts us to Mary, hands himself over to the Father, dies and is placed in a new and empty sepulcher from which he will rise on the third day.

The Holy Land and especially the Christian community that lives there has always occupied an important place in the heart of the universal Church which – as St. Paul recalls – when it expresses its solidarity with Jerusalem, including through economic support, performs an act of restitution. Indeed, the whole Church has received from Jerusalem the gift and joy of the Gospel and of salvation in Christ Jesus "who, though he was rich, made himself poor for you, so that you could become rich through his poverty" (2 Cor 8:9). It is awareness of the gift received that still motivates us to give with joy and generosity, in fidelity to the Church's earnest request to all her children.

You know well what severe trials the Church in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East has endured over the centuries. Those trials are not yet finished: the tragedy of the progressive reduction of the number of local faithful continues, with the consequent risk of seeing the various Christian traditions that date back to the early centuries disappear. Long and exhausting wars continue to produce millions of refugees and strongly influence the future of entire generations. They see themselves deprived of the most basic goods such as the right to a peaceful childhood, to a harmonious school education, to dedicating one's youth to looking for a job and forming a family, to discovering one's vocation, to an industrious and dignified adult life, and to a peaceful old age.

The Church continues to work to safeguard the Christian presence and to give voice to the voiceless. She certainly does so on the pastoral and liturgical level, which is fundamental for the life of our small communities. She also continues to work seriously to provide quality education through schools, which are fundamental for safeguarding Christian identity and for building fraternal coexistence especially with Muslims, according to the indications contained in the "Abu Dhabi Declaration". Thanks to the generosity of the faithful around the world, the Church continues to make accommodation available to young people who wish to form a new family, as well as to facilitate their search for employment. Likewise, she continues to provide concrete material assistance where there are forms of endemic poverty, such as health needs and humanitarian emergencies linked to the flow of refugees and foreign migrant workers.

The care of the Sanctuaries, which would be impossible without the collection *pro Terra Sancta*, is also of fundamental importance, both because they preserve the memory of divine revelation, the mystery of the Incarnation and our Redemption; and because in those places the local Christian community finds the foundations of its identity. Around the sanctuaries and thanks to their presence, many of the Christian faithful find dignified work as they welcome the millions of pilgrims who in recent years have come, in ever increasing numbers, to visit the Holy Places.

To Your Excellency, to the priests, to the consecrated men and women, and to the faithful who strive for the success of the Collection, I have the joy of transmitting the deep gratitude of the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Finally, as I invoke abundant divine blessings on your diocese, I offer my most fraternal greeting in the Lord Jesus.

Sincerely,

+ Leonardo Card. Sandri

The “pro Terra Sancta” Collection

CONGREGATION FOR THE EASTERN CHURCHES

2019 A.D.

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Introduction

The “Collection for the Holy Land” was born from the desire of the Popes to maintain a strong link between all the faithful and the Holy Places, and given a decisive boost by Saint Paul VI through the Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Nobis in Animo*’ (March 25, 1974). It is an instrument that the Church provides her children in other parts of the world to express solidarity with the ecclesial communities of the Middle East.

The funds traditionally collected on Good Friday are the main source of material support for Christian life in the Holy Land. The Franciscan Custody uses the Collection to carry out its important mission of preserving the Sacred Places, the stones of memory, and promoting the Christian presence, the living stones, through many pastoral, educational, welfare, health and social structures.

The territories that benefit in various forms of support from the Collection are Jerusalem, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

As a rule, the Custody of the Holy Land receives 65% of the Collection, while the remaining 35% goes to the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, which uses it for the formation of candidates for the priesthood, the support of the clergy, educational activities, cultural formation and subsidies to the various ecclesiastical circumscriptions in the Middle East.

In summary, we report what the Congregation received in 2019 and how it was distributed:

Amount received in 2019 from the Collection	US\$ 6.929.209,64
Amount received from the Custody for previous years	US\$ 1.350.000,00
Total	US\$ 8.279.209,64

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Academic, Spiritual and Human Formation of the Seminarians and Priests of the Churches under the Jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches

Thanks to the Collection, contributions can be made to seminaries, religious houses of formation and cultural institutions in the territories of competence, supporting in various forms (scholarships, university fees and health needs) young seminarians and priests, men and women religious and, depending on the funds

available, and some lay people. About 300 students benefiting from scholarships are hosted in 7 colleges under the jurisdiction of the Dicastery in Rome. A new college that opened four years ago for nuns from different Eastern countries welcomes 32 female students this year.

In addition, the Dicastery contributes to the sustenance of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, a higher academic institution with two faculties, Eastern Ecclesiastical Sciences and Eastern Canon Law, of which the Cardinal Prefect is Grand Chancellor.

Formation of seminarians, priests and nuns in Rome, Maintenance of Colleges	US\$ 2,310,681.00
Pontifical Oriental Institute (PIO)	US\$ 915,571.00
Extraordinary subsidies for cultural collaboration	US\$ 50,000.00
Total	US\$ 3,276,252.00

Subsidies for Educational Activities

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Custody of the Holy Land, the Eastern Catholic Churches of the Holy Land and Religious Institutes are committed to the education of young people in the Holy Land. Keeping in mind the particular circumstances faced by Christian students and taking into account the arrival into the Holy Land of thousands of school-aged children from Syria and Iraq, the Congregation for the Eastern Churches has decided to increase the subsidies also for the current academic year.

The work of the Secretariat of Solidarity in the coordination and distribution of subsidies to educational institutions managed by the aforementioned institutions is also noteworthy.

One of the prestigious Institutions that ensures academic formation is Bethlehem University. Almost 3,300 young people, mostly Palestinian Muslims, are trained intellectually and humanly with the hope of engaging in the construction of a country where mutual respect reigns and where human dignity is preserved. The commitment of the De La Salle Brothers in running the university is much appreciated.

Secretariat of Solidarity	US\$ 990,000.00
Schools of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem	US\$ 850,000.00
Bethlehem University	US\$ 1,200,000.00
Total	US\$ 3,040,000.00

Ordinary and Extraordinary Subsidies

This Congregation contributes to supporting the Churches placed under its competence with subsidies drawn from the Holy Land Collection.

The Middle East continues to live in instability and tension. Those who have no food, medical treatment

or school make themselves heard, as do the orphans, the widowed and the wounded. The Congregation pays particular attention to the needs of these people and works to rebuild social structures through the local Eastern and Latin Dioceses, as well as by coordinating the Catholic agencies involved in the aforementioned countries. Ensuring the means necessary for a dignified life for those returning to Iraq and Syria and for refugees in neighboring countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, requires the collaboration of all people of good will. Furthermore, cultural, spiritual and psychological activities are encouraged that in various ways bring people closer, despite religious and ethnic differences.

Jerusalem	US\$ 339,100.00
Jordan	US\$ 38,000.00
Iraq	US\$ 153,000.00
Lebanon	US\$ 244,000.00
Turkey	US\$ 175,000.00
Syria	US\$ 296,000.00
Iran	US\$ 78,000.00
Egypt	US\$ 271,000.00
Ethiopia	US\$ 178,000.00
Eritrea	US\$ 148,000.00
Total	US\$ 1,920,100.00

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Conclusion

The generosity that the Catholic faithful express towards their brothers and sisters in the Middle East though the Collection can solve many problems, but prayer and moral support are even more necessary. We therefore invite you to “adopt” a Christian from the Middle East, even if you do not know his/her name, and pray for him/her throughout the year 2020. As Pope Francis said during the audience granted to the participants of the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Eastern Churches (ROACO) of June 2019, “the cry of many who in recent years have been robbed of hope” must reach our ears and open our hearts to solidarity with them, “manifesting the face of the Church and helping to make it alive, in particular by fueling hope for the younger generations”.

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