

Maryland Catholics asked to give to the Holy Land collection

The Holy Land preservation efforts need funds, and Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore will be asked to give generously for the cause during the Good Friday second collection March 21.

Having led a group of Catholics on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land last October, Bishop Denis J. Madden, Baltimore's urban vicar, said the assembly was able to see firsthand the spiritual significance of the region and the need to preserve it for the future.

Pope Leo XII established the Pontifical Collection in 1887, which now raises millions worldwide annually to subsidize the maintenance of holy places in the birthplace of Christianity, as well as pastoral, social works, educational and charitable programs, according to the Holy Land Franciscans in Washington, D.C.

The Holy Land - which consists of biblically historic sites in Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey - is worthy of support from Baltimore Catholics because it's where Jesus was born, taught, died and rose from the dead, said Bishop Madden, who served in the region for the pontifical mission from 1988 to 1997.

It's important to maintain a Christian population in the region, he said.

The Franciscan friars depend on the money raised from the Good Friday collection to provide for the welfare of regional Christians, who continue to suffer from the effects of war and religious hatred, said Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, O.F.M., custos of the Holy Land in Jerusalem.

In recent years the Archdiocese of Baltimore has raised more than \$140,000 each Good Friday, a fundraising goal Holy Land advocates hope regional Catholics will meet or exceed in 2008.