



## **ASIA/HOLY LAND - Syria, Gaza, Egypt: Holy Land Custodians launch initiatives to face emergency**

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) – Ongoing violence and social and political crisis rocking the Middle East has prompted the religious communities in the region rethink forms of presence in order to meet the urgent needs of the moment. Fides was told that in recent years the Franciscan Custodians of the Holy Land, in collaboration with the pro Terra Sancta Association have launched a series of initiatives of solidarity on three key fronts in the Middle East : the Syrian front, the West Bank and the Egyptian front.

Fides read in a message from the Custodians that in Syria, due to the prolonged violence, the Custodians have opened four aid centres in (Knayeh, Yacoubieh, Jser – El Chougour and Jdeideh) which offer shelter to some 200 people and care for about 4,000 people daily. Every month the Custodians help some 50 displaced families to find shelter. The 11 friars still in Syria are working in Aleppo, Damascus, Lattakiah and Knayeh.

In Gaza the Christian parish has only 250 Catholics. The pro Terra Sancta Association plans to provide economic aid for Christian families and children in Gaza to buy medicines, other necessities, sudden arising needs, and economic support to ensure school attendance. Special projects included support for centres for disabled persons in Gaza and in particular in the Latin parish of Gaza City.

In Egypt the Franciscan Custodians have reopened a large Monastery of Musky, formerly the home of an important Latin parish in Cairo which had been left almost empty following the Egyptian revolution in 1952. It is run by the Centre for Eastern Christian Studies, with the patrimony of its library and highly appreciated activity of assistance for study and research, providing a cultural service to the local Christians and Muslims. The friars in Cairo, besides assistance with studies on the Christian communities in the Middle East also care for people in need in the poor outlying district of Musky, in particular providing basic needs for children of large families, daily food and urgent medical care.(GV) (Agenzia Fides 25/2/2014).