

Love Stories from Bethlehem and Beyond

A President Report from Ambassador Michele B. Bowe, DM

Increasing hardship and poverty marked 2021 for the families of Bethlehem and at the same time great stories of love and hope emerged. Because of the ongoing pandemic, Bethlehem again celebrated Christmas alone with no pilgrims able to join the festivities. The shops, hotels and restaurants remained shuttered, as the humanitarian crisis was sliding into its third year. 2022 began with overfilled hospitals, supply shortages and runaway inflation.

It was ambitious for the Holy Family Hospital to launch a Prenatal Program in such circumstances, but it was also greatly needed as babies were born smaller than ever in 2020 and more mothers had pregnancy complications. In 2020 the NICU was frequently over capacity and mothers were undernourished. For 2021 the Hospital set a goal of providing increased prenatal care to ensure better delivery outcomes, concentrating efforts on outreach and education. Starting an initiative in a pandemic presented significant challenges, but generous Holy Family Hospital Foundation donors stepped up and donated funds for prenatal vitamins, media outreach and increased staffing so the practitioners could spend more time with each patient. The patients enrolled in this program are experiencing healthier pregnancies and they are returning for every prenatal visit. Despite the hurdles the Hospital has had to overcome, the program is showing signs of success and will decrease NICU admissions. A generous donor offered the gift of a color doppler ultrasound from the equipment wish list to round out this program.



Construction on the Hospital's new surgical wing has restarted, and the progress is visible. When inflation, supply chain issues and the 20% rise in the Shekel value threatened the project, generous donors and foundations made new gifts and some repeated their gifts to ensure that the future generations of women in Bethlehem will continue to have safe surgeries and c-sections.

The deteriorating situation in Bethlehem is touching people's hearts around the world. Media outlets in France, Italy, the UK and here in the United States covered our work closely in 2021, sharing the story of hope and love against the backdrop of hardship. The Cathedral in Stockholm hosted a benefit concert for the mothers and babies in Bethlehem. Donors responded from four continents and one foundation doubled the size of its grant to help close the funding gap at the Hospital.

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In the midst of the crisis, a generous family ensured that learning and teaching at Holy Family Hospital would continue. In loving memory of their father, a physician, they underwrote the cost of a full Ob-Gyn residency.

Another couple sponsored a resident for a full year. The Hospital provides hope, not just through healthcare and employment, but through training, too.

Love doesn't just come from abroad. It also fills the halls of Holy Family Hospital. When the head of Obstetrics and Gynecology suffered an accident and couldn't perform surgeries or deliver babies, his colleagues filled in for him, taking his shifts so he could concentrate exclusively on clinics, allowing him to keep his salary. Two young midwives who had a lot of free time (since everything in town is closed) learned photography and began doing free of charge photoshoots for newborn babies.



Thanks to the additional generosity of donors to the Poor Case Fund in 2021, the Hospital forgave patient contributions for those families which are among the 90% of the workforce with no salaries.



The greatest love came from Holy Family Hospital staff members working in difficult circumstances. They covered each other's shifts and cared for each other's children. They made their tables longer to share meals with neighbors and the elderly who are the last of their families to remain in Bethlehem. The care Holy Family Hospital provides extends beyond the Hospital's walls like leaven throughout the community. The Hospital staff shows love not only to the patients, but to the sick and the poor of the

community, faithful to the charism of our Order. As Dr. George told reporter Neil Hallows of the British Medical Journal, *The Doctor*, "We strive to bring the latest advances in medicine and medical practice to our patients. Sometimes we have great challenges doing so mostly due to limited resources, but we compromise with a little bit of extra love and compassion through our work."