

# ZENIT

## The World Seen From Rome

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### Hope for Holy Land Mothers

Interview With Director of a Bethlehem Hospital Foundation

By Karna Swanson

WASHINGTON, D.C., DEC. 7, 2008 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).- A short distance from where Mary gave birth to the Son of God more than 2,000 years ago, the Holy Family Hospital is working so that no more expectant mothers are told there is "no room" at the proverbial inn.

The hospital is the only obstetrical/gynecological facility in the region that can handle the complicated medical conditions of women living in extreme poverty, many of them residing in nearby refugee camps.

Colleen Marotta, executive director of the U.S.-based Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem Foundation, spoke with ZENIT about the work being done at the hospital, and how Christians around the world can help expectant mothers this Advent.

Q: How did the Holy Family Hospital begin?

Marotta: The Order of Malta, a lay religious order since 1050, saw the urgent need for maternal and neonatal health care in the Holy Land and opened the hospital in 1990. The hospital offers a Catholic presence to the region and Pope John Paul II, recognizing that its service is saving lives and fostering healthier futures for families, listed the hospital as one of the "top 100 priorities for new millennium."

This birthplace of hope is providing state-of-the-art health care to nearly 22,000 women and children annually -- regardless of religion, national origin or ability to pay.

Q: You just visited the hospital in Bethlehem. Could you explain to us what conditions are like there right now?

Marotta: In this region the unemployment rate is approaching 70%, movement is restricted and there is no health insurance or social services to cover the cost of health care.

These families live under grueling economic and social conditions making a joyous event

-- welcoming a new child into the world -- a time of uncertainty and stress. They ask, "Where will our child be delivered safely? How will we afford the cost of care? If there is a complication is there a staff well trained in emergency situations?"

It was inspiring to witness how Holy Family Hospital answers all their fears and brings hope and peace to a region full of misery and despair. The hospital gives witness to Gospel values -- caring for the poor and sick. Catholic charity allows all who come to its doors to be served with dignity and love only 500 yards from the birthplace of Jesus.

Q: Who are the patients at the Holy Family Hospital? Are they only Christians?

Marotta: Holy Family Hospital is the primary maternity center for the Bethlehem district, surrounding villages and refugee camps operated by the U.N. Relief and Works Agency. Some 60% of Bethlehem families birth their babies at Holy Family Hospital and 25% of those being served reside in refugee camps. The hospital's mobile outreach van brings medical care to families who are living in the desert with neither water nor electricity.

Q: Can you share with us some stories of the families who have benefited from the services of the hospital?

Marotta: Mouna, 36, comes from the Christian suburb of Beit Jala and works as a cook to support herself and her husband, Nadar, and their four children. Nadar is illiterate and unemployed.

Five months pregnant, Mouna came to Holy Family Hospital. She had had a miscarriage the year before and feared she might lose this baby, too. She worried that she could not pay for medical care.

Holy Family Hospital treated Mouna in its outpatient clinic, and she gave birth to a healthy baby in October.

Thanks to the generosity of its donors, the hospital was able to cover the costs of Mouna's medical care.

Mouna and her newborn left the hospital in good health.

Although Firyal, 29, holds a nursing degree, she is unemployed due to a lack of job opportunities in the West Bank. Her husband, Rami, 40, has a degree in business administration, but he too cannot find work. Rami also suffers from declining vision.

Firyal and Rami have two children and live in a house they inherited in Bethlehem.

Firyal came to Holy Family Hospital in March, needing a caesarian delivery. Learning

this would cost extra, Rami tried to take Firyal to a cheaper medical facility. Firyal knew she would not get the care she needed there, so she stayed at Holy Family, where she soon gave birth safely.

After studying the family's acute economic distress, the hospital covered 50% of Firyal's expenses. The generosity of many donors made this possible.

Firyal and her newborn baby left the hospital in good health.

Q: Can you explain to us an initiative of the foundation to host a baby shower for expectant mothers?

Marotta: As we prepare for the birth of the Christ Child, we thought that Catholics would want to share their blessings with those less fortunate by hosting a baby shower for poor mothers and babies who live in Bethlehem just steps from where Our Blessed Mother gave birth to Baby Jesus.

By gathering together family, friends, neighbors, Catholic schools and parishes, your baby shower will bring hope and care to families who face dangers similar to those faced by the Holy Family 2,000 years ago. You and your guests can guarantee that every newborn will be swaddled, fed and cared for in Bethlehem. Baby showers can be hosted all throughout the year and everything you need can be found at [www.birthplaceofhope.org](http://www.birthplaceofhope.org).

Items on the Nativity Registry for mothers and babies include:

- Baby Blanket for a pre-mature baby (\$10)
- Pre-Natal vitamins for an expectant mother (\$20)
- Newborn Care Set: soap, lotion, shampoo, swabs, etc.) (\$30)
- Newborn Layette Set (\$40)
- Pre-Natal consultation (\$50)
- Provide medical care to a mother living in a remote area of the desert (\$100)
- Give the Gift of Life: sponsor the delivery of a baby (\$250)

Q: Your Web site is called BirthPlaceofHope.org. Do you see real hope for the people of Bethlehem in the future?

Marotta: Hope is given each day by the only neonatal intensive care unit in the region. In the Holy Land, a majority of expectant mothers do not have access to prenatal care and because of their desperate situations. Family meals often lack the vital nutrients for the mother and her unborn child. These conditions lead to newborns being born with low birth weights and severe health complications. This lifesaving unit provides newborns -- many otherwise having little or no chance of survival -- with the ability to live to their fullest potential.

Peace is being brought to each family who is served by the Holy Family Hospital. For these poor families, a time of celebration can be overshadowed by the fear of covering the cost of care. When they meet with the hospital's social worker they learn that Catholics from around the world care about their suffering and believe that the poorest deserve the best.

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On the Net:

For more information: [www.birthplaceofhope.org](http://www.birthplaceofhope.org)