



Planting Seeds of Hope
Spring 2024 Update
By: Ambassador Michele B. Bowe, GCM



A newborn baby at the Hospital

Almost 6 months have passed since the last pilgrims left Bethlehem. It was hoped that they would return after Christmas. Now, Easter is upon us, and Bethlehem is a locked-down city with a stalled economy. Hotels are closed, shops have empty shelves, and the consumption of bread has doubled. Poverty is not new to Bethlehem, but this time it feels different because there seems to be no end in sight.

Over 100,000 workers who travel from Bethlehem have lost their permits to work in Israel. Medical permits to visit specialists in Jerusalem have become rare. Pilgrims won't be returning this spring. The streets are empty at night. It is dangerous to travel then because security patrols enter the city and refugee camps at night and pop-up roadblocks close streets. Clashes prompted by settlers have become commonplace.

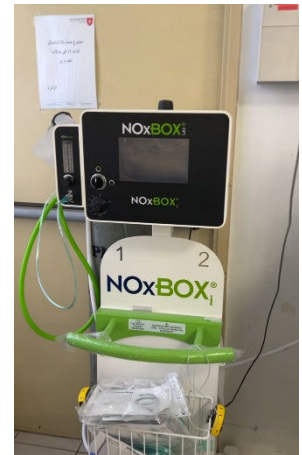
The Bethlehemites are adjusting to the new normal. They have made their tables longer and have been adding some extra rice and bread to the midday meal. Extended family and neighbors are back to relying on the kindness of others to share their tables. Most in Bethlehem no longer have salaries.

Patients in Bethlehem and the West Bank are having to choose between medical care and meals. Patient contributions for services provided by Holy Family Hospital have dropped dramatically as a result. The Hospital's social workers are working around the clock to ensure that families have access to both medical care and basic necessities.

Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem Foundation is committed to maintaining on-time payment of full salaries for Holy Family Hospital staff despite the loss of local revenue. The Foundation has also increased its contribution to the Poor Case Fund, which subsidizes patient contributions. With additional donations, we will be able to increase the help we offer and ensure that the mothers and babies of Bethlehem do not forgo care.

While the war continues in Gaza, a forgotten Bethlehem struggles with the basic necessities. Parents are doing their best to distract their children from the economic and political problems, encouraging them to focus on their studies. Everyone is glad that the schools are open, and the students have their routines. This is especially important for the children of the Hospital Staff as their parents are still working 12-hour shifts and need the children to be in school.

On the brighter side, the Mobile Medical Clinic has recently resumed making its rounds to the Bedouin areas and the isolated villages. The driver has found side roads and has been able to make the daily visits 95% of the time. The clinic days are long because there is huge pent-up demand for services that became unavailable when the clinic had to close. It is a blessing to provide needed services to these marginalized communities.



Nitric Oxide Machine

I have more good news to share. This winter our brand-new nitric oxide machine was pressed into service twice to save the lives of two struggling newborns in the NICU. Two tiny souls who would not have survived are living and thriving, thanks to the generosity of two families who donated the funds for this lifesaving





Baby receiving lifesaving care in the NICU

equipment. This machine, the only such machine in the region, is expensive and its use is rare, but it is the only means of saving the life of a newborn suffering from pulmonary hypertension.

Our nitric oxide machine not only saved two new lives; it also greatly boosted the morale of our staff each time it was used. There was great rejoicing throughout the Hospital to know that this equipment and our well-trained, dedicated staff were able to save lives that otherwise would have been lost. Every life saved is a big win at Holy Family Hospital. I am grateful to our donors who say yes and help us purchase a piece of equipment or provide a lifesaving gift for the Poor Case Fund.

During this time of war in Gaza, it is important to show that we value each life, no matter how small. Every new life born at Holy Family Hospital is a cause for celebration. Most families still find a way to keep the tradition of bringing a box of candy to share with staff and visitors. The boxes are smaller now, and the candies are rarely chocolate, but the pride and joy on the faces of the fathers and siblings as they present their small gift are emblematic of the hope for the future that new babies bring.

Good things come in threes. My last bit of good news is the progress we are seeing in our hospital construction project. The new wing is now a beautiful addition to the Bethlehem streetscape. The interior is a flurry of plasterers, electricians and plumbers finishing the wing so the work in the adjacent department can commence. This summer the new operating theaters will come into service while the existing ones will be renovated to become dressing rooms and the new home of the sterilization department. The staff is eagerly awaiting the changeover and there will be a big celebration when they perform the first surgeries in the new theaters.



Women of Bethlehem – Project Engineers and Architects

The Foundation and the Hospital are focusing on these bright lights of good news to help us through these difficult times. It is particularly difficult for the staff as they work long hours and support so many additional family members from their own salaries. They cling to the joy of a baby saved, the dignity of an older woman restored by a laparoscopic surgery, and the excitement that comes when a new piece of equipment is put into use at the Hospital. All of these are signs of a better future to come.

Thank you for helping to ensure this better future with your prayers and generosity. Each act of kindness brings hope to a suffering Bethlehem. Together we can be the bridge to the better days ahead and beyond war to peace and renewed prosperity for the families of Bethlehem.



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