



HOLY FAMILY HOSPITAL *of Bethlehem Foundation*

Hope in the Shadows President's Report Ambassador Michele B. Bowe Summer 2024

While the eyes of the world have been focused on Gaza, the town of Bethlehem is being forgotten as it slips deeper into a persistent poverty. Security measures imposed by the ongoing war coupled with travel restrictions and road closures have stalled the economy. Pilgrimages have been cancelled through the end of the year and workers can no longer go to Jerusalem for their jobs.

Hope in the very Birthplace of Hope is becoming allusive against the backdrop of food insecurity and the uncertainty of life in Bethlehem. Pregnant women are arriving in labor to Holy Family Hospital malnourished and with little prenatal care. Infants are born with more complications and low birth weights. NICU admissions have increased by as much as 60% this year.

In these difficult times, Holy Family Hospital shines brightly as a beacon of hope providing jobs, training and the gift of life 365 days a year. When a mother arrives in labor, the whole Hospital responds with warm hospitality and care. It is a moment when she can forget the worries beyond our doors and rejoice in the hope of a new life and the possibilities it brings.

In response to the deepening poverty, **we have increased the usual care subsidies from 50% to 75%** to ensure every family can access our high level of care regardless of their ability to pay. In times like these, when it seems hope is in the shadows, it is important that families maintain their dignity and not forgo essential care.



While the town outside the Hospital is fraught with the problems of the world, inside the walls of Holy Family Hospital, those issues seem miles away. The halls are cool, yet warm and welcoming. The staff smile easily as they greet the young mothers, dads and their families. The sun shines in on the waiting areas and the small children watch the peacocks in the garden while waiting to see the doctor. The atmosphere feels hopeful.

The sum of the care at Holy Family Hospital is the parts of the whole. All departments are interconnected and dependent on one another. Together in a perfectly choreographed way, they provide the high-quality care for which the Hospital is known throughout the region. Upstairs, on the second floor, is where it all comes together providing care and saving lives of the tiniest new citizens of Bethlehem. It is the pinnacle of care – our level III NICU. The heartbeat of Holy Family Hospital.

It is where the everyday miracles take place. Recently, I found the NICU full, with an unusually high number of micro-preemies. These tiny babies arrive before 26 weeks gestation, weighing less than two pounds. Their care is very intensive, often requiring blood transfusions, expensive medications and months of NICU care. The doctors do their very best and then they wait. Dr. George told me when I asked about the prognosis of an

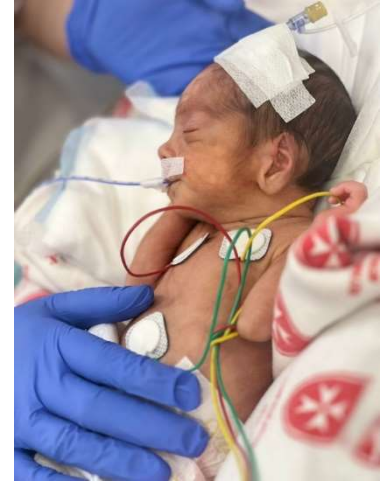


A Primary Work of the Order of Malta

especially small and weak baby, that he followed all the care protocols for that baby. Now they just needed to pray and wait. “God is the author of life; you can’t force a miracle and you can’t get in the way of one. Sometimes a baby who looks to have little chance of life surprises us, and sometimes a baby just can’t be stabilized, no matter how hard we try. It is all in the hands of God. Especially in Bethlehem – we are behind a wall; we don’t always have what we need but we work from our hearts and God provides”.

Seven of our nine ventilators were in use and most of the babies were nestled in highly specialized protected closed incubators reserved for babies in greatest medical need. Our new Nitric Oxide had been pressed into service once again as the only hope to save a newborn with pulmonary hypertension. I believe it is the only such machine in the entire region.

The staff were all tending to the babies. Checking positions, resetting alarms and making the babies comfortable. The NICU felt crowded with 16 babies, the staff and about a dozen moms and dads all sitting vigil or nursing their tiny babies. Two incubators were prepared and ready to receive babies whose mothers were in the Labor Ward experiencing preterm labor some 15 weeks early. Despite the heavy workload, the atmosphere was cheerful and professional. The staff was grateful for the intensity of the work, as busy days leave no time for thinking about the economic situation of their town. New life is a welcome sign of hope – a harbinger of better times to come.



I am happy to share that a generous friend has responded to the cry of the poor from Bethlehem with an unprecedented matching gift challenge of \$100,000 to double the impact of our Poor Case Fund this summer. All gifts will be doubled this summer through September 15 to sustain hope and maintain the dignity of the families of Bethlehem.

Lest we forget Bethlehem – the small town, which had no room at the inn, is struggling. Because of you, Holy Family Hospital’s doors remain open and fully staffed to meet the needs of the women and children of the region. This is especially important as your gift today brings life-changing hope to a struggling family in Bethlehem. With rampant poverty and food insecurity, the need is dire. Please ensure that every mother and child will have access to the hope brought by life-changing care, now and for generations. Your gift of hope will restore dignity to the families we have served for generations. Let us be the bridge to the far side of peace as we accompany the mothers and babies of Bethlehem throughout the stages of their lives.



Together with the families at Holy Family Hospital, I wish you all a joyful remains of summer and thank you for your generosity and prayers.

Together we can deliver life, peace, and hope in the Holy Land.

With great gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Michele Bowe".

Ambassador Michele Burke Bowe

