



HOLY FAMILY HOSPITAL of Bethlehem Foundation

Sustaining Hope President's Report Amb. Michele B. Bowe, GCM

Recently I walked into Holy Family Hospital's Well Baby Nursery to find a crowd of babies and a throng of nurses and pediatricians preparing newborns for discharge home. Three hours-old babies slept peacefully in the open incubators after their morning C-section deliveries. Fathers poked their heads into the nursery asking when their newborns would be ready to meet their families, keeping vigil with the tired, but happy, mothers. That morning 12 babies, born the day or two before, were to be examined in preparation to leave the Hospital to go home. The eight most recently delivered babies were having their morning checks before returning to their mothers for breastfeeding and family introductions.

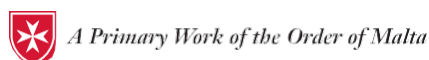


The nursery was calm but animated. Each medical professional knew his or her role and their actions were perfectly coordinated, like a well-practiced symphony. The joy of new life and relief permeated the air in what felt like a world away from the wartime conditions outside the walls of our modern-day manger. Holy Family Hospital is an oasis of peace and a beacon of hope in a troubled land.

Two hundred twenty Palestinian Christians and Muslims work seamlessly together, championing life and hope in our Catholic teaching Hospital just 1,500 steps from the manger where the Christ Child took His first breaths. Together with a dozen physician residents and a dozen nurse and midwife trainees, our Hospital's staff deliver 12 or more babies each day. Each is a miracle and a sign. What could be more tangible evidence of hope and trust in the future than a newborn babe swaddled in a blanket emblazoned with the Cross of the Order of Malta?

On my latest visit, one very special delivery stood out. It was the delivery of Woujoud, not a newborn baby, but an olive tree estimated to be about 2,000 years old. Woujoud is a name meaning "ever existing," just like our beautiful brand new but ancient tree which now graces the circular garden bed in front of the Hospital. Olive trees lasting for tens of generations are prized family possessions in Bethlehem. Families can tell you the name of the ancestor or relative who planted the tree. Each fall, schools and businesses close for the annual olive harvest, so that families can gather the olives to bring to the communal press to produce oil and to put in brine to serve as delicious treats all year long. Olive oil is an important part of each meal in the local diet, especially for villagers and Bedouin.

An olive tree is an important symbol of life in Bethlehem. Woujoud is now the official grandmother of Holy Family Hospital. She will welcome the tens of generations who will seek care and healing within the peaceful corridors of our Hospital. Woujoud is the perfect grandmother. She watches over all who come and go, shares of herself and weathers



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the storms of life. She is stalwart and beautiful as she ages elegantly. Adding such an important tree to the grounds of the Holy Family Hospital is a sign of our commitment to the people of Bethlehem. It shows that we care about our patients, staff and visitors and that, like Woujoud, we will accompany them for tens of generations to come. In 2000, Pope St. John Paul II named our Hospital as a Church priority for the millennium and, with this mandate in mind, we are committed to serving families without regard to creed or need for hundreds of years to come.

Life is increasingly difficult in Bethlehem. Even the weather adds to the harshness of life. This past winter was too dry and this summer too hot. The Shams winds have been relentless, drying crops and decimating this year's olive harvest. It's painful enough that 90% of the workforce remains without salaries since fall of 2023 when the pilgrimages stopped. Now, as a result of the drought and extreme heat, families will be without their staples of olives and oil.



Scholarship Recipients

Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem Foundation is committed to providing holistic healthcare -- caring for body, mind and soul. Our Hospital and Foundation sustain hope by delivering new life, providing excellent employment, returning dignity to older women, and through scholarships, training and practical help.

To ensure healthier families and safer deliveries, our Foundation launched a poverty alleviation program in partnership with Bethlehem's St. Catherine's Parish. Through this partnership, we are providing grocery, pharmaceutical and electric service vouchers to over 250 families each month. We are hoping that, like our new olive tree, the families we assist will stay where they are planted, complying with the request of the Patriarch and Popes Francis and

Leo. These leaders of our Church told the Christian families of Bethlehem and the region that they have a special relationship with the land and a responsibility to remain even after wars, droughts and failed crops. Our poverty alleviation program provides a bridge to sustain these families until the pilgrimage industry can once again welcome visitors. It brings both sustenance and hope to the families who, like Woujoud, have survived in and around Bethlehem for over 2,000 years.

Bethlehem is at a point of inflection. Decisions made by its residents in the coming months and years will determine the region's future as a mosaic society with a thriving Christian community living side by side in peace with a vibrant Muslim community. Since Christians tend to work in the pilgrimage industry, their economic situation is particularly dire. This is why your generosity and support for Holy Family Hospital are more important now than ever before. Your donation could be the reason a Christian family decides to remain in Bethlehem, have a baby or make the difficult decision to put their limited resources towards a college education for their daughter or son.



Holy Family Hospital and our Foundation are uniquely positioned not only to help Bethlehem and its Christian community through today's challenges to a day when the war is over, but also to change their trajectory by providing them hope which sustains. Together we can provide the long-suffering people of Bethlehem with the wherewithal and reasons to stay beyond this time of instability and economic disaster, through our employment, scholarship and poverty alleviation programs. As Pope Benedict often said, "Those who have hope live differently." Please join me, our Foundation and the Holy Family Hospital in offering hope for Bethlehem, the source of our hope.



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