



**President's Report  
February 2021  
Ambassador Michele B. Bowe**

2020 began in a promising way for Holy Family Hospital and for Bethlehem. Patients flooded the clinics and the staff delivered record numbers of babies until the discovery of the Covid outbreak in Bethlehem last spring. Hotels and restaurants were operating at capacity when the economy came to an abrupt halt. Ninety percent of the population was left without salaries because of the heavy dependence on pilgrimage activity.



*The Hospital conducts routine and random tests to ensure the safety of staff and patients.*

In the ensuing ten months, poverty has grown along with food insecurity, greatly impacting the health of patients and the work and budget of the Hospital. The three-month closure and isolation of Bethlehem adversely impacted the number of deliveries and clinic visits from the greater region. Holy Family Hospital Foundation immediately responded by increasing fundraising outreach in preparation for what would be a challenging year.

The Hospital quickly adapted operations, ensuring continuity of care, without regard to need or creed, to protect the staff members in high-risk infant and maternity care.

The clinics began media outreach and set up telehealth visits to

bridge the barriers to care during the shutdown.

Since March, 28 staff members contracted Covid through community spread and 80 staff members quarantined due to exposure. Community testing levels are low, and it is not possible to know which patients are infected.

The ongoing pandemic worsens the already dire economic situation in the region. Families continue to experience food insecurity, and few are able to contribute towards their healthcare expenses.



*The staff must assume all patients are infected to maintain proper protocols, which have curbed infections transmitted at the Hospital.*



*The growing poverty and increasing food insecurity have made for more complex care at the Hospital.*

The Hospital Board of Directors worked with the budget to ensure full operations and made the difficult decision to cut salaries by 18% for three months. In December, the Board voted to restore the salary cuts and issue backpay in recognition of the economic situation and the nature of the frontline work. **Thanks to its generous donors, the Foundation covered the expense of the backpay.**

Masks, coveralls, goggles and cleaning supplies became scarce and expensive, forcing the Hospital to become creative in protecting employees and patients. A grant from the Italian Bishops' Conference allowed for the initial purchase of PPE supplies and additional donations fund ongoing PPE needs. Border closures make imported goods scarce, unreliable, and expensive. This prompted the Hospital to redouble its efforts to source supplies locally to ensure an uninterrupted supply chain while also helping the vulnerable local economy.

Pregnant women are more likely to present in labor with no prenatal care resulting in complications and increased numbers of sicker and tinier premature babies admitted to the NICU for longer stays.

The Hospital provided 144,870 services and delivered 4,364 babies in 2020. The NICU provided lifesaving care for 423 newborns, 100 of whom weighed less than two pounds and were born before 32 weeks.

25 of these babies required higher level NICU care for 50 days or longer. Twelve micro-preemies were born before 25 weeks. While the mortality rates of babies in our NICU are much better than regional statistics, in 2020 the NICU mortality rate grew from 1.5% to 2.6%. This reflects the increased number of smaller and more premature babies delivered. Holy Family Hospital, which serves as the region's reference hospital, is the only hospital in the area that can deliver and care for babies born before 32 weeks.

Healthcare at the Hospital has become more complex and labor intensive because of Covid and the growing poverty in Bethlehem.

While the overall number of services fell from what was expected in 2020 due to the closures, staff hours required per service has increased. This has put a strain on the budget and the staff members, without vacation days since March.

**In response, the Foundation voted to send additional funds to the Hospital to cover the salary and pensions of two additional midwives and two cleaners.**



*The higher level of care and greater occupancy of the NICU stretched the dedicated staff and strained the Hospital budget.*



*The community is focused on continuing to care for and feed large extended families and neighbors without salaries.*

The stresses and pressures of the pandemic have not broken the spirits of the dedicated staff members.

They cheerfully care for the mothers, newborns and patients from the Mobile Clinic, Gestational Diabetes Clinic and the Well Woman Clinic for women past the childbearing age. Bethlehemites, especially our staff, are resilient and are accustomed to making do in times of crisis.

During Christmas, celebrations continued with the usual fanfare but transitioned from in person to online. Meals were simple and gifts few in 2020.

The Hospital has adapted by underscoring its policy of never turning a patient away regardless of their ability to pay. The social workers continue to network with other charities to help families buy milk, bread and baby supplies. They intervene for families without heat, running water and electricity. They are a lifeline for the poor. When oxygen could not pass through the checkpoints, Holy Family Hospital increased its production to supply neighboring facilities. While our Hospital only cares for women and children, by supplying oxygen to the community we are now also saving the lives of the fathers and sons who were also born at the Hospital. **Like the community, the Hospital shares.**

The Hospital remains an instrument of peace and a beacon of hope in providing state-of-the-art healthcare and meaningful employment.

Despite the pandemic and the associated economic challenges, the Hospital continues to provide hope for its 190 direct and indirect employees and the families that seek its transformative and lifesaving care. The statue of the Blessed Mother on top of the chapel looks out over Bethlehem, calling all to come and receive care under her mantel. She invites them into Holy Family Hospital and then looks to us to make sure the Hospital provides the care she has promised.

Thank you for your continued responsiveness in so generously supporting all the good works of our Holy Land Hospital. The Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem Foundation and the Members of the Board are especially thankful to you for your exemplary generosity which allows the Hospital to continue to deliver life, hope, and peace in the Holy Land. Your generosity inspires other donors from around the country and throughout the world. I am deeply grateful for your dedicated friendship and support.

