



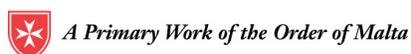
Prayers Needed for Bethlehem

Bethlehem has endured almost 17 months of the pandemic and the ensuing humanitarian and economic crisis. During this time, the economy has come to a complete halt without the usual influx of 500 tourist buses a day. 90% of the workforce is still without salaries. Some have managed to find occasional work as day laborers when they can. The streets remain devoid of people and the shops' shutters are closed tightly. Middle class families are selling their household goods to buy groceries to feed their families, wondering how much longer the crisis will last. Poverty is growing along with food insecurity. Many say this period is the most difficult they have seen, even more so than 1948.

Despite this hardship, on my recent visit I could see the trademark resilience of the Palestinians. Life goes on. Families share with their extended relatives and neighbors help one another. Weddings occur as regulations allow, students receive their college placement scores, and families mark birthday milestones even without cakes and presents. Perhaps most importantly, families rejoice with great hope at the birth of a new baby in the family. The generations of the families come together to celebrate life and hope for a brighter future. After all, what could be more hopeful and emblematic of a brighter future than a new baby born in Bethlehem.

Entering Holy Family Hospital each morning of my visit, I could feel the joy of new life and hope, perhaps even stronger than ever before. The 191 Palestinian employees are grateful to have high quality employment and pension plans. Given the circumstances, they seem to work a little harder to create a joyful atmosphere celebrating each of the dozen births a day as if each one were the first. The Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit is close to full with more babies needing Level III care and requiring longer stays. The good news is that the moms and dads, with proper PPE, can still visit their sick or premature babies and bond with them in this crucial period of their lives.

Thanks to the infection control team and generous donors, the Hospital gleams in the sunlight with increased cleaning and infection control measures. On May 30, the Hospital celebrated its 90,000th delivery with the arrival of Baby Wateen. This year alone over 2,600 babies have been born so far.





Holy Family Hospital offers the best Maternal and Neo-Natal care for a catchment area of one million people. It serves as the only hospital in the region that can deliver and care for babies born before 32 weeks. It offers more than just healthcare though; it delivers dignity to the families who can no longer contribute towards their healthcare costs as our generous donors help us subsidize or fully cover every service offered at the Hospital.

As the largest employer in Bethlehem, Holy Family Hospital also provides hope through employment. Many of our staff are the only ones, in their apartment buildings or families, receiving salaries. They share their hope by cooking for extended family and neighbors true to the Palestinian code of hospitality. The eleven resident doctors add to the atmosphere of hope eagerly rounding patients each morning with the heads of the residency programs. They are proud of their achievements and look forward to their careers in Pediatrics and Obstetrics/Gynecology when they complete their training.

I am proud to say that the Hospital itself also shares its bounty. Since the pandemic began, Holy Family Hospital has increased operations of its oxygen extraction system from eight to twenty-four hours a day to send oxygen to local hospitals and Covid treatment centers for free. Since oxygen cannot readily cross the borders, this gesture saves countless lives. Knowing the costs of the additional man hours and shortened life of the system, has not stopped the Hospital from generously extending lifesaving hospitality to its neighbors. We trust that our loyal donors will help us cover the additional costs and spare parts when the time comes.

We know that God will provide, and we pray that the pandemic recedes, and pilgrimages will soon be restored to end the suffering of Bethlehem. For now, Holy Family Hospital Foundation is redoubling its efforts to find new donors and raise additional funds to maintain the dignity of those in need and to provide hope to the families of Bethlehem. Please add your prayers to ours for an end to the suffering and for adequate funding so that Holy Family Hospital remains a beacon of hope and a refuge of peace for the mothers and babies of Bethlehem.

