AN INTRODUCTION TO BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY IN THE HOLY LAND

Established in 1973 as the first Catholic University in the Holy Land, Bethlehem University plays a significant role in serving the educational and professional development needs of the Palestinian community, and in fostering inter-religious dialogue. Jointly founded by the Vatican and the De La Salle Christian Brothers, an international Catholic religious order also known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Bethlehem University annually enrolls more than 3,200 students, new and returning, in bachelor, master and professional diploma programs.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
The core Faculties of Arts, Sciences, Business Administration, Education, Nursing and Health Sciences are complemented by several unique programs, including an Institute of Hotel Management and Tourism, an Institute for Community Partnership and several advanced research units such as our world-class Hereditary Research Laboratory and the UNESCO Biotechnology Center.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS
The largest group of students today comes from East Jerusalem (46%). Another 45% comes from the Bethlehem District, including refugee camps. The remaining 9% come from Hebron and elsewhere in Palestine, including students in a new Nursing facility in the village of Qubebeih, Emmaus, North of Jerusalem.

SIGNIFICANT FEMALE ENROLLMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT
Some 78% of the students enrolled at Bethlehem University are female. Bethlehem University is providing a wonderful opportunity for these young women to not only develop their abilities, but to also have a more significant impact on the way Palestine is developing. Many female graduates of Bethlehem University hold significant positions in the local business, IT organizations, Palestinian Ministries, UNRWA, hospitals, schools, NGOs, and other important organizations.
INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

The student population is 77% Muslim and 23% Christian. One of the unique features of the Bethlehem University curriculum is a university course, Cultural Religious Studies, taken by all students in their fourth year. Muslim and Christian students come together in the same classroom to focus on the three major religions in the Holy Land: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Having this academic opportunity to examine one’s own – and other’s – history, beliefs, moral precepts, feasts and rituals provides a way to reach a deeper understanding and appreciation of their roles in contemporary society.

AN OASIS OF PEACE

International visitors are often pleasantly surprised at the smiling faces and the amount of laughter they see at Bethlehem University. Given the circumstances under which students and faculty live with the curfews, travel restrictions, military checkpoint harassment, and other negative aspects of the on-going Israeli military occupation of Palestine, some visitors expect a somber atmosphere. The faculty and staff have, however, created an environment where students are provided with a rigorous quality higher education while feeling safe and cared for. They enjoy being with one another knowing that having a degree from Bethlehem University provides them with better opportunities when they graduate - students speak of Bethlehem University as a beacon of hope.

INTERNSHIPS, CAREER AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES

The economic situation in Palestine, alongside of the geo-political situation associated with the on-going Israeli occupation and settlement expansion, makes it challenging for some to find employment. Through community engagement initiatives and international links, Bethlehem University is expanding internship, career, and entrepreneurial programs to enable students to be better prepared upon graduation. Some graduates, building on their entrepreneurial skills, have successfully established new businesses. Recently, three such enterprises have expanded, providing employment for additional graduates. Students are encouraged into situations where they can be mentored and supported as they explore opportunities. During recent summers, for example, with support from the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre (USA Northwestern Lieutenancy and the Canadian Atlantic Lieutenancy), in coordination with Catholic Charities USA and Georgetown University, Bethlehem University students are in career-focused mentoring internship programs in Palestine and across the USA and Europe, empowering students and mobilizing their amazing talent.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT, PARTNERSHIPS, AND INITIATIVES

Bethlehem University is honored to partner with a growing number of supporters from around the globe on a variety of projects and initiatives. Together with Palestinian, EU, and USA Universities, Bethlehem University has four Masters Programs in International Cooperation and Development, Biotechnology, Social Work, and Tourism Studies. Among some of the additional key projects and programs are:

- Breast Cancer Research
- Fair Trade Development Centre
- Internship and Entrepreneurial Opportunities
- Neonatal Nursing Education and Training
- Occupational Therapy Education and Training
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- Enhancing Primary and Secondary Schools in Palestine

Described by many as an “Oasis of Peace” and a “Beacon of Hope” in a land that is all too often characterized with socio-political conflict, Bethlehem University is a Catholic university in the Lasallian tradition whose mission is to provide quality higher education to the people of Palestine and to serve them in its role as a center for the advancement, sharing and use of knowledge. The University emphasizes excellence in academic programs and the development of students as committed people prepared to assume leading positions in society. The University fosters shared values, moral principles and dedication to serving the common good. Thus, Bethlehem University is making a unique contribution to building this nation and enabling young Palestinians to take responsibility for themselves and for the future of the Holy Land.