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BethBC Case for Support

Introduction

Bethlehem Bible College was founded because of the need for quality theological education located in the West Bank. When the College began in 1979, many of the area's most promising Christian leaders were leaving the country for an education. Once abroad, many of them, attracted by a new life style and opportunities, did not return to help lead the church in their own country. The College gives these young leaders a local option that helps to stem this exodus. BethBC is the only institution of its kind in Palestine or Israel that trains Palestinians in the Arabic language for a BA and MA in Biblical Studies and Christian Education. The College also trains students in Mass Media and Tour Guiding. Annually the College trains between 150 and 200 students and reaches out to thousands in the community through humanitarian ministries.

Bethlehem Bible College serves to encourage the church's continuing presence in both Palestine and Israel by empowering the Christians that have been the forerunners and bastion of the Christian faith for centuries. This is an urgent need due to the rapid decline of the Christian community over several decades from 9% to less than 2%. (In the broader Bethlehem area where the main campus of the College is located, Christians previously had a large majority, but currently they make up less than 50% of the population.) Palestinian Christians continue to leave the Holy Land as a result of the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the physical and economic hardships that it creates. Bethlehem Bible College works alongside other Christian organizations to strengthen and revitalize the Christian community, and serve as a respected bridge with the Muslim majority.

BethBC Mission and Vision

Bethlehem Bible College exists to:

- Train people to serve Christ in the world,
- Advocate a Palestinian Evangelical perspective,
- And model Christ through community development.

BethBC Core Values

- **Christian Ethical Standards:** Actions toward one another will be examples of Jesus' love within our BethBC community. We follow the biblical teachings and Christian ethics demonstrated by love, justice, integrity, fairness, transparency, mercy, accountability, integrity, responsibility and respect for all persons.
- **Christ-Honoring Community Relationships:** Actions within our wider Bethlehem and Palestinian community reflect Christ to our neighbors. We regard each person in our wider community as created in the image of God. Our interactions with everyone demonstrate the same values listed above in #1.
- **The Evangelical Christian Faith Is Our Foundation:** We empower leaders to evangelize the Palestinian people. We practice pure biblical teaching and believe in the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Academic Excellence:** Quality teachers who are specialists in their areas and a continually developing curriculum empower students to be ambassadors for Christ in their communities. College leadership is committed to the continuing accreditation, development and growth of the college. Academic facilities are first-class.
- **Palestinian Context:** The values of God's Kingdom are communicated and applied to the socio-political and cultural realities of the Palestinian people. BethBC's location in Bethlehem and its curriculum offered in the local language address the needs of the local population.
- **Gender Equality:** BethBC provides equal employment and educational opportunities, rights and benefits for both females and males.

BethBC History and Impact

Bethlehem Bible College was formed in 1979 in response to the very real need for quality theological education for Palestinian students. Founder Bishara Awad saw many of his students travel abroad for university education, and many of those who wanted to study theology unfortunately never returned. After presenting his idea to a group of local Arab pastors, one gave him a check for \$20 to start on a new venture. From there, more support followed, and they started their first class with nine students in the same year.

From the beginning, Bethlehem Bible College's vision was to train and prepare Christian servant-leaders for the churches and society with an Arab context who model Christ centeredness, godly humility, biblical wholeness, creative mercy and justice in their jobs and ministries as life-long learners.

Responding to a growing need for theological training for Arabic speaking Christians servant-leaders for churches and society within Israel, Bethlehem Bible College extended its program to an additional campus, known as Nazareth Evangelical College, in Nazareth, in northern Israel. BethBC also has an extension campus in Gaza.

Bethlehem Bible College's continued vision of graduating students who are thoroughly equipped to lead the local Church with wisdom, compassion and integrity, and who will serve their communities with care and love, has led to the development of both academic and service programs based in the college, targeting the needs of the local Bethlehem community. The Tour Guide program and Media Studies diploma programs were started in order to respond to the diminished economic situation in Bethlehem and the lack of employment. Not only do students gain practical skills for employment through these programs, but learn them in the context of Christ-centered and Biblical education, enabling them to be the light of Christ in their communities.

The Bethlehem Bible College Library, while offering a resource for students to improve their academic education, is open to the public. With over 25,000 books in English and Arabic and modern computing services, the library is essential to the life of the college, while functioning as a resource for community activities, such as a children's summer camp and English as a Second Language courses.

The Shepherd Society was established as Bethlehem Bible College's charitable arm in 1996. The Shepherd Society responds to the Gospel's call to love our neighbor and care for the poor, as well as extending Bethlehem Bible College's vision to engage and provide for the local community.

Today, Bethlehem Bible College is a flourishing college with a BA Program in Biblical Studies and Christian Education, an MA Program in Christian Leadership and Ministry, and Diploma Programs in Tour Guiding and Media Studies, accredited through MEATE (Middle East Association for Theological Education), the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education, ATA (Asia Theological Association), and provisionally EEAA (European Evangelical Accreditation Association). Starting with nine students and international teachers, Bethlehem Bible College, with its current team of highly qualified local faculty and staff, has come a long way in providing educated Christian leaders able to serve the Palestinian community, as well as Arabic speaking Christians in Israel. As President Emeritus, Bishara Awad would say, "The Church is now awake" in Palestine, and Bethlehem Bible College serves a vital role in providing for the need of continued Christian education in Palestine, as well as serving the needs of the local community in the face of numerous political and social pressures.

BethBC Goals and Outcomes

- a. Provide sound theological education with a distinctively Palestinian perspective
- b. Train students to maintain a Godly influence and perspective in their field of influence, wherever that may be
- c. Serve the local community through tangible service
- d. Serve the church worldwide by advocating awareness of peace and justice issues

BethBC Strategies and Objectives

BethBC Programs and Services

BA Program in Biblical Studies and Christian Education: Our courses in theology, church history, Biblical exegesis, archaeology, ministry, and spirituality aim to educate Christian leaders and specialists in the Word of God. In the fourth year, students are required to take a course in community service, giving them practical skills in Christian ministry. In addition, our BA in Biblical Studies is combined with a minor in Christian Education. Courses in youth leadership, teaching methods, elementary education, counseling and a practicum in a local school enable graduates to teach in governmental and private educational institutions in Palestine. Our BA in Biblical Studies is accredited through MEATE (Middle East Association for Theological Education), the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education, and ATA (Asia Theological Association).

MA Program in Christian Leadership and Ministry: BethBC founded the first Master's degree in Ministry for Arab speakers in the Holy Land in 2009. Due to the decreasing Christian population in the Holy Land, there is an urgent need for strong Christian Arab leaders who are informed, have critical minds and are wise in theological, ethical and social spheres. The MA in Christian Leadership & Ministry at BethBC provides godly leaders who value the word of God, who are committed to faithful and informed ministry, and who seek unity among believers within the Palestinian churches in Israel and the West Bank. Each participant must establish a new ministry or develop an existing one in order to graduate. The MA in Christian Leadership and Ministry is accredited through MEATE (Middle East Association for Theological Education), ATA (Asia Theological Association), and is awaiting full accreditation with EEAA (European Evangelical Accrediting Association). Accreditation of the MA Program with the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education is awaiting additional accredited BA programs.

Nazareth Evangelical College: Responding to a growing need for theological training for Arabic speaking Christians servant-leaders for churches and society within Israel, Bethlehem Bible College extended its program to an additional campus in Northern Israel. Galilee Bible College was thus formed in 2007, and in 2015 merged with Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary to become Nazareth Evangelical College. NEC extends BethBC's mission of training Christian leaders throughout the Holy Land. It aims to prepare its students with excellent Christian academic training and ministry opportunities, widening their horizons by exposing them to alternative Christian viewpoints and creating awareness of environmental, social, political, and religious challenges. NEC also promotes church growth and development by encouraging the unity of the Body of Christ.

Gaza Extension: With the support and encouragement of Rev. John Angle in the UK, the College is seeking to develop its teaching ministry in Gaza. Prior to the de facto sealing of the borders in Gaza, students from Gaza came to study at the Bible College, and lecturers visited and held classes in Gaza. All this had to stop, and now Christians in Gaza have asked the college to continue to help them develop their Biblical and theological understanding. Classes are taught in modules through visiting lecturers (primarily international instructors) and through distance education. While only a small number of students are able to participate at this time, BethBC has both BA and MA students in this vital program, which will serve to strengthen the small Christian community found throughout the Gaza Strip.

Mass Media: The Media Program at Bethlehem Bible College began in 2003 in order to bring hope and encouragement to the Palestinian people. The media training program, within the context of BethBC, provides a way of developing skills, providing employment, and a means of using media to promote a better society. Since the Second Intifada, Bethlehem has suffered from a diminished economic situation. Currently, the unemployment rate is 21.3%. Due to the economic situation, BethBC saw that it was necessary to develop academic programs that teach valuable skills and provide gainful employment amidst economic difficulty. The media program offers a two-year degree diploma to approximately 20 students every two years. It provides courses in journalism theories, radio recording and editing, and TV filming and editing. Our students have the opportunity to practice and enhance their skills by working with the [New Vision Media Center](#), launched in 2011, which produces impactful television programs to be broadcast every week on local, national and regional television. The Mass Media Diploma Program is accredited with the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education.

Tour Guide: The Bethlehem Bible College Tour Guide Program began in 1998 and exists to better serve the Palestinian and international communities by offering a unique Bible-centered curriculum taught in English. The curriculum provides professional training, education and practical preparation to tour guides for the Holy Land. These guides can then meet the needs of those who visit the Holy Land by providing inspirational and informative guided tours. At the same time, it will offer young Palestinians many new job opportunities and allow them to discover their own heritage through a rewarding and fulfilling vocation, while also acting as ambassadors of their own people and culture to international visitors.

E-Learning Program: *(Currently under development)* The growth of the Arabic-speaking church in the Middle East and the continuous need for robust theological education, especially among underground churches, necessitate finding solutions for distance Biblical and theological training in Arabic. Church leaders around the Middle East are not always able to leave their churches and congregations in order to pursue formal Biblical training. Furthermore, one cannot always find Biblical training in one's home country, since Bible Colleges are not found in most of the Arab world. In addition, restrictions and hardships of Christians in the Arab world make it more difficult for Arab pastors and church leaders to pursue class-based Biblical training. In Israel/Palestine, the fragmentation of the Palestinian territories complicates the teaching and learning processes. Development of BethBC's E-Learning Pilot Program in Fall 2015, brings fulfillment of that need, beginning with the College's classrooms and extension campuses (Bethlehem, Nazareth, Gaza), then to the broader Middle East and around the world.

Women's Ministry: Women are among the least privileged groups in Arab society. Some facets of traditional Arab culture tend to inhibit women from educational and work opportunities outside of the home, and can result in the passing on of myths or incorrect information within the home. Bethlehem Bible College seeks to assist women – both students and others in the

community – to embrace their worth and their God-given purpose in life, giving them the tools and power to pursue their visions and dreams. To accomplish this goal, Bethlehem Bible College has established a women’s ministry entitled “A Pot in His Hand,” which consists of: 1) Monthly meetings, 2) Support groups, 3) Individual counseling, 4) Bi-annual retreats, 5) Quarterly publication of a magazine, “A Pot in His Hand,” and 6) a television series entitled “Women of the Lord.”

Shepherd Society: The Shepherd Society was established in Bethlehem in June 1996 when several Palestinian pastors and Christian leaders felt called to extend Christ's love in a practical way to those in need within their community. As the charitable arm of Bethlehem Bible College, it is one of the avenues through which we respond to the Gospel's call to love our neighbor and care for the poor. The goal of the Shepherd Society is to provide a means for the global community and Christians worldwide to encourage and financially assist the struggling Palestinian people in the West Bank. We support families in need via seven different relief programs: 1) job creation, 2) food parcel distribution, 3) in-kind contributions of clothing, health kits, food, etc., 4) medical aid, 5) school tuition assistance, 6) utility costs, and 7) family sponsorships.

Christ at the Checkpoint Conference: The mission of “Christ at the Checkpoint” is to challenge evangelicals to take responsibility to help resolve the conflicts in Israel/Palestine by engaging with the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God. The 4th Christ at the Checkpoint Conference is scheduled for March 2016 with the theme “The Gospel in the Face of Religious Extremism.” The conference brings together Palestinian and international Evangelical leaders, to study and explore the rise of religious extremism within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and how this impacts the Israel/Palestine conflict. We will also explore what the Bible has to say about religious extremism in any form. Together, we will seek a Biblical response to religious extremism, and find ways that provide an alternative through living out the kingdom of God.

Community Programs: Bethlehem Bible College endeavors to respond to the Gospel's call to love our neighbor and care for the poor by offering programs for the community that both encourage them and help contribute to a society suffering from difficult political and economic times. The Bethlehem Bible College Library, while offering a resource for students to improve their academic education, is open to the public. With over 25,000 books in English and Arabic and modern computing services, the library is essential to the life of the college, while allowing a resource for community activities, such as a children's summer camp and English as a Second Language courses (Spanish and Portuguese have also been offered). These courses aim, not only to encourage the local community, but to provide an arena for learning skills to help in increasing employment opportunities and relieving economic difficulty.

Gift Shop: The Bethlehem Bible College Gift Shop (Star Bazaar) offers a place for visitors to shop and bring back a memory token of their time in the Holy Land. It is also a way for BethBC to support the local Christian community. Many of the olive wood products sold are created by local workshops owned by Christian families. As tourism in the past ten years as decreased, the BethBC Gift Shop has offered these families a way to sell their products and in turn support their families.

Guest House: The Bethlehem Bible College Guest House is available for international tourists to enjoy their stay in the Holy land. We provide not only an inviting atmosphere to stay, but also opportunities to visit Holy sites, hear lectures from our qualified staff, and experience activities at BethBC. The tourists who come here are given an opportunity to learn about local

Palestinian Christians and worship and experience life with them. They are given opportunities to support the local community by hiring local tour guides and shopping in the BethBC Gift Shop. The BethBC Guest House gives the space for Christians around the world to support the Christians of the Holy Land.

BethBC Statement of Needs 2017

- a. General Operations and Scholarships: \$891,740
- b. Women's ministry: \$43,000
- c. Media projects: \$50,000
- d. Student activities: \$23,400
- e. E-Learning Program: \$64,073

BethBC Giving Opportunities

- a. Scholarships for students and instructors
- b. Operating expenses
- c. Capital expenses
- d. Christ at the Checkpoint Conference
- e. Faculty development (sabbaticals, conferences)
- f. Curriculum development (Palestinian theology)
 - i. Research grants
 - ii. Writing proposals
- g. Digital library development
- h. Student conferences and activities
- i. New Vision Media Center
- j. Women's ministry
- k. Shepherd Society

BethBC Key Measures of Success

In December of 2013, the final steps for a merger between Bethlehem Bible College's daughter branch, Galilee Bible College, and NETS (Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary) were approved. This is a positive move as it will promote unity within the churches in the Galilee region and it will help to develop a stronger BA and MA program for the College.

Additionally, in January 2014, Asia Theological Association granted Bethlehem Bible College full accreditation for its BA program and provisional accreditation for its MA program. We praise God for this remarkable achievement which our academic department worked diligently towards.

The church and Christian community in the Holy Land is being blessed by graduates of Bethlehem Bible College. In the past 35 years, the College has graduated hundreds of leaders, many of whom are having a great impact on the church today. Throughout the land, from the North to the South, graduates of BethBC are serving in strategic places. A sample of graduates from the previous ten years are:

Elias Al Najjar is serving with the Palestinian Bible Society. He is involved in a program called "Community of Interaction" that targets university students in the West Bank. Through this program he is training leaders and conducting other initiatives and programs such as lectures, seminars, etc. He works with all the churches in the area.

Miss Grace Al Zoughbi is a teacher at Bethlehem Bible College. She finished her Master's program in London and has returned to teach and serve as head of the Biblical Studies department at the College. She has been a great asset to the college during the past year as she was responsible for overseeing the College's accreditation application to Asia Theological Association which was approved in February of 2014.

Gabriel Hanna graduated from Bethlehem Bible College's MA program in 2012. He is now the director of the Mass Media training program at the College and is also host of a weekly television show produced by the New Vision Media Center that reaches the entire Bethlehem area. He and the media team also produce Christian programs that are aired on Sat 7. Gabriel is very talented in playing the piano and leading in worship.

Yousef Khalil, from the town of Zababdeh, is now serving youth in his village and beyond through the arm of Young Life Ministries. This organization is reaching hundreds of Palestinian youth and is very active in planning youth meetings and field trips.

Rev. Azar Ajaj is president of the NETS (Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary). Rev. Ajaj serves the seminary as a lecturer in Church History, Old Testament, and Pastoral Studies. He is also director of the Bachelor of Theology program. Rev. Ajaj received his BA in Theology from Bethlehem Bible College, his Master of Theology from the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, and is a PhD candidate at Spurgeon's College in London. Rev. Ajaj was ordained to ministry in 2008. He has served as pastor of the Local Baptist Church in Nazareth.

Rev. Dr. Jack Sara is the President of Bethlehem Bible College. Jack was born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem. He studied at BethBC after committing his life to Christ and became more involved in the ministry of the Jerusalem Alliance Church. Jack went to the Philippines to study at the Alliance Biblical Seminary and came back with an MDiv degree. He began ministering full-time with his church and teaching part-time at BethBC. After serving the church for 13 years as a senior pastor (ordained with the Evangelical Alliance Church in the Holy Land), he saw the Alliance church become a church planting movement and a catalyst in reaching out to the Palestinian people and Arabs with the love of Christ. Rev. Jack holds a doctorate degree from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Missions and Cross Cultural Studies. Rev. Jack travels around the globe, teaching about Missions and Cross Cultural work in the Middle East.

Anton Nassar graduated from Bethlehem Bible College's MA program. During his studies at Bethlehem Bible College he started to work at a Lutheran school in Bethlehem, *Dar Al-Kalima School*, as teacher of Religious Education from grade one to grade twelve. He then became Deputy Principle from 2007 to 2015. In 2015 he was named Principle of the school.

Emili Khoury graduated from the College in 2012. She always dreamt to work with youth and children and since her graduation God has granted her that desire. She works as a Religion teacher at *Dar Al-Kalima School* in Bethlehem. She considers her job crucial as she is teaching teenagers (from 13 to 16) how to read the Bible and to make it relevant for their everyday lives.

Yousef Al Khoury is from Bethlehem but raised in Gaza. In 2007, he got a permit from the Israeli authorities to move to Bethlehem. For Yousef this was a sign that God wanted a change in his life and wanted Yousef to live for Him. In 2008 he joined Bethlehem Bible College. After

his graduation Yousef and his wife Merna have been serving the Lord at BethBC and Emmanuel Church. In the college Yousef serves in a youth ministry called '*Revival Generation*' and Merna serves with '*A Pot In His Hand*' a ministry focused on empowering Palestinian women. In Emmanuel Church they work together in the *Young Couples Ministry*.