



May 16, 2024

Dear Friends,

I have come to the end of a sabbatical program in San Antonio, Texas, which was a wonderful way to help me transition from Bethlehem University after I concluded my fifteen years as Vice Chancellor in December 2023. In having the chance to stand back and reflect on what Bethlehem University is doing, it has given me a greater appreciation of its mission. Being so far away from campus and hearing about what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank is a great source of grief for me.

I lament the suffering people there are enduring and feel angry and sad that this has been allowed to happen. I visited Gaza a few months before October 7 and met with a group of young people interested in exploring ways of engaging with Bethlehem University. I know at least three of those young people have been killed, but because I have lost contact with anyone in Gaza, I suspect there are more who have suffered that fate.

I have a sense of powerlessness and helplessness as I reflect on what I can do! *Perhaps you have some of the same feelings?* However, I continually remind myself of President Teddy Roosevelt's comment: "Do what you can with what you have, where you are!" I know I cannot change the attitude of the Israeli or United States governments. And I cannot rescue the people I know in Gaza and the West Bank from the oppression they are experiencing. And I do not have the resources to fund the students who are struggling financially.

So, what can I do?

To draw attention to the situation in Palestine and support students at Bethlehem University, this May I am walking the El Camino de Santiago in Spain. *With over a \$1 million funding gap existing this Spring at Bethlehem University*, this is my way of showing solidarity with the Palestinian people while also raising funds to help students.

As so many students' families are involved in the hospitality industry, and because no pilgrims or tourists are visiting Palestine, there is no income available to those families. In addition, with checkpoints closed to Palestinian workers who have jobs in Jerusalem, the same applies to those families. This means children of those families who attend Bethlehem University are having serious difficulties paying their tuition. As a result, the University has difficulties paying salaries and running costs. My little effort is one contribution to help address this challenge.

Brother Hernán Santos, the new Vice Chancellor has walked into a very difficult situation, and I hope my little effort will slightly ease the challenges he faces.

Will you walk with me, for our students?

I estimate I will take between 1.2 and 1.3 million steps in walking the 730 km of the Camino. It would be wonderful to get \$1 for each step, but that might be a bit ambitious! The Bethlehem University Foundation and the Advancement Office at Bethlehem University are working together to promote this fundraising effort.

While I do not have money to contribute, I do have the feet to take these steps in solidarity with Palestine and in support of the students. I would ask you to think about what you can do, where you are, with what you have!

A gift sponsoring my journey will go directly to Bethlehem University to support tuition expenses for our young people.

Above all, I ask you to pray for peace in the Holy Land, a peace based on equality and justice. I intend to keep you informed as I make progress along the way. It will take over 39 days for the walk, beginning on May 23 in Pamplona in the northeast of Spain.

Please keep me in your prayers as I do my little bit to stand with Palestine and support students at Bethlehem University.

Brother Peter Bray, FSC