

Coronavirus Covid-19: Caritas Baby Hospital in Bethlehem. Sister: "Everything will be all right!"

"Everything will be all right" repeats over the phone Sister **Lucia Corradin** from Italy's Veneto region, living in Bethlehem for the past 18 years, where she carries out her mission as Director of Nursing at Caritas Baby Hospital, the only children's hospital in the West Bank.



Immagine non disponibile

This phrase has accompanied the quarantine of millions of Italians forced to stay home by the Coronavirus epidemic and which the nun embraces also for Bethlehem. Especially now that the Palestinian Ministry of Health has instructed the laboratory of the Caritas Baby Hospital to test for the virus Covid-19 in the Governorate of Bethlehem. **On the front line against Covid-19.** "Lab tests are carried out in dedicated rooms, separated from the children's hospital, strictly applying all established regulations both in terms of contagion prevention and respect for privacy" said Sister Lucia, of the Franciscan Elizabethan Sisters from Padua, an Institute that has been carrying out its mission in Caritas Baby Hospital for over 40 years. "In this way the children's hospital continues to function regularly. The Ministry of Health has faith in our structure, in the capabilities of its expert medical staff. Two of our laboratory technicians have been assigned to respond to the coronavirus emergency, three more have been sent by the local Ministry. The service is guaranteed every day."
The numbers. There are 39 confirmed cases of CoronaVirus in the West Bank, 37 of which in the Bethlehem area alone, according to the local authorities as of March 16 and confirmed by the nun. This figure is explained by the presence, in the first days of March, of a group of Greek pilgrims in Bethlehem, who tested positive upon their return home. Notification of the positive cases by the Greek authorities led the Palestinian authorities to track down all those who had been in touch with the Greek pilgrims in Bethlehem.



The two remaining cases are linked to the town of Tulkarem. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, the Palestinian Authority has taken a number of drastic measures, including the closing of the city of Bethlehem. Mosques and churches, including the Nativity Basilica, have also been closed. These efforts were equally shared with Israel, which, in turn, reported 277 cases by March 16. But, unlike Israel, Palestinians cannot count on adequate medical facilities and patients are quarantined, if not treated, in local hotels, now empty of pilgrims. **"We are here for you."** Given the serious situation, the Palestinian National Authority has decided to open certified laboratories for diagnostic tests. Caritas Baby Hospital, a healthcare centre of excellence in the West Bank, has been chosen for the district of Bethlehem. Since 1952, its doors have been open every day, without interruption, for sick children and their mothers, regardless of their religion and social status. Every year 48,000 children are admitted to the Caritas Baby Hospital clinic. Almost 5,000 children are cared for in 74 beds inside the wards. Its founder, Swiss priest Ernst Schnydrig, Palestinian physician Antoine Dabdoub and Swiss citizen Hedwig Vetter, continue to keep up their promise, "We are here for you", even now, in full health emergency from the Coronavirus. **A silent war.** "I have been living in Bethlehem for 18 years," the nun said. "I arrived just after the siege of the Nativity Basilica. The city was destroyed, scarred by war, occupation, under forced curfew. Today we are fighting a different kind of war, we don't hear the gunshots, we don't see the houses destroyed, we don't see the tanks, but

we perceive this virus silently worming its way through, ready to strike and claim its victims among the people.

"Nevertheless, I want to see all of this with eyes of faith and hope; this is a time to dig deeper and to rediscover the essential things in life and to grow in humanity, in solidarity". **Together we will succeed.** "We cannot deny our concern for what is happening, especially in Italy," said Sister Lucia, "we are close to you with our prayers. *This emergency affects us all. The history of Salvation was born in Bethlehem and we all feel the responsibility to carry the realities touched by this scourge in our hearts and in our daily prayers*". "We too are in a red zone. We can't go out, but we are here for them. We cannot fail those who have believed and who continue to believe in us: the families, the children, the sick", added the nun. "We are working hard and we thank God for His presence. We are sure that we shall overcome, indeed as you say in Italy, 'Everything will be fine'. **Our wish is to meet again here, in Bethlehem, where everything was born, once it's over.** It is our good wish to you in Italy, which has always supported us. *Together we will succeed, solidarity and sharing among peoples will overcome this scourge*".

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