



*The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East*  
*The Diocese of Jerusalem*  
*The Most Revd. Suheil Salman Dawani*

11 March 2020

International Partners of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Dear Friends,

I am writing to convey to you how the Coronavirus epidemic has been affecting our ministries within the Diocese of Jerusalem, as well as how you might help during these trying times.

As you may have read, last Thursday the Palestinian Authority closed all educational institutions, mosques, and churches for one month, as well as prohibiting any public gatherings. The Israeli Authorities have entirely closed off the Bethlehem area. As a result, the Arab Evangelical School and the Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Center in Ramallah have been closed, as has the Christian National Kindergarten in Nablus. Our churches in Ramallah, Birzeit, Nablus, and Zababdeh have all been affected by this order.

Here in Jerusalem, because so many of our teachers and staff come from the Bethlehem area, we have also been forced to close St. George's School and partially close the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, though children's rehabilitation, special needs, and mothers' classes continue. In addition, travel restrictions by the Israeli government have led to cancellations in St. George's Guesthouse and at St. George's College, forcing the College to cancel its courses until at least Easter, with the hope that they will resume during the last week of April.

Other parts of the Diocese have been less affected, though the dwindling number of pilgrims has already placed a huge burden on poorer families. This is especially the case for those living in the Bethlehem area, whose economy is largely dependent upon the pilgrim ministry, which has ground to a halt: The Church of the Nativity is closed, hotels are empty, and the normally busy market streets are now barren.

As we are already beginning to hear from families in need of support because of lost wages and income, I am asking all our partners to do three things. First, I request that you set up and advertise a special relief fund for those impacted by this crisis so that I can respond positively to the many requests for help we are starting to receive. Secondly, once this crisis has passed, I would ask you to encourage pilgrimages to resume as quickly as possible in order to help restore normalcy to both the spiritual and economic life here. Finally, during this Holy Season of Lent, I would especially ask you to pray for us, even as we all offer our prayers for those afflicted by the Coronavirus around the world, as well as those suffering from the economic hardships this epidemic has caused.

It is my prayer that with the coming of Easter next month, in view of the current crisis, our commemoration of Christ's resurrection will have an even greater meaning, thanks to the Grace of God and to your continuing prayers and support.

Grace and Peace,

+ *Suheil Dawani*

The Most Reverend Suheil S. Dawani  
Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem