



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN  
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF  
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## The Order's commitment to disabled children in Bethlehem



**The Hogar Niño Dios is a home that mainly welcomes disabled children in the Bethlehem area. Starting from 2016, the North Central USA Lieutenancy, who sent us this article, decided to dedicate 10% of the contributions collected by members to help this structure carry out its mission of welcoming and helping disadvantaged and often abandoned children. In addition to the North Central USA Lieutenancy – which annually sends around \$ 15,000 – in 2018 the Western USA and Central Italy Lieutenancies also decided to support the Hogar thus enhancing the Order's action in terms of presence and effectiveness.**

Hogar Niño Dios, located just down the hill from the Church of the Nativity, is a home for severely disabled Palestinian children and some adults. Many of the children have cerebral palsy and other serious neurological conditions that necessitate use of wheelchairs. Some children have microcephaly, autism, Down's syndrome, and genetic defects. Some have poor vision or hearing. Most do not speak. Half of the home's residents cannot feed themselves, and most require considerable assistance in the activities of daily living.

Four sisters of the Religious Family of the Incarnate Word reside in the home, which was founded by their superior, Mother Maria Pia, thirteen years ago. The sisters are the primary caregivers, assisted by lay staff who provide night time supervision, meal preparation, cleaning, and playground supervision. Teachers, physical therapists, and a speech therapist provide full time services right in the home because most of the children are unable to attend school outside the home. Priests of the Religious Family of the Incarnate Word celebrate Mass in the home's chapel, provide spiritual direction for the sisters, and interact regularly with the children. A local physician provides medical services weekly. Seminarians from the Latin Patriarchal seminary visit regularly. Italian volunteers from Unitalsi and Misericordie assist several times per year. They participate in cleaning and painting projects and assist the sisters in feeding and playing with the children. Project Bethlehem from Great

Britain provides volunteer teachers and therapists who work with the local teachers and therapists to upgrade skills.

In 2016 the North Central USA Lieutenancy selected five Holy Land charities to which its members provide additional voluntary contributions. Ambassadors were appointed to learn more about these institutions and to be champions for these causes. Hogar Niño Dios is one of those charities.

In 2016 Deacon Glen Heinzl, a Knight, and his wife Dame Commander Christine Heinzl, travelled to Bethlehem as ambassadors to Hogar Niño Dios. They spent six to nine hours for eight days at the home. They assisted the children with meals, cleaned them up afterward, changed diapers, pushed wheelchairs, soothed the children when distressed, sat alongside them, held them in their arms, and helped them exercise. In September, 2018, the Heinzls returned to Hogar Niño Dios for an additional twelve days of assisting in the care of the children.

Mother Maria Pia is most grateful for the funding which has gone toward general operating expenses. During the past two years an additional teacher and physical therapist have been hired. The number of residents has increased from twenty five to thirty one. Work is underway to move the now adolescent boys to a nearby home to be run by the same religious community; this will require additional expense.

Joy, peace, and love are evident within the home as well as rambunctious behavior typical of most children. The needs of the children are great, and the sisters would like to accommodate still more children as need arises.

## **Matthew Bunson**

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