



Our 18-time Nazareth Challenge cycle veteran wants you to gear up for supporting the Nazareth Hospital in 2021

BY TREVOR JONES

Why do I participate in the Nazareth Challenge? Because I simply love it. To quote a fellow rider: "I am asked: 'Why all this effort for a hospital in Nazareth?' My answer: 'A special friend in Nazareth gave his all for me.'"

I took part in my first Nazareth Challenge cycle tour in November 1997 as one of 82 cyclists from across the UK, Ireland and the USA. Next November, God willing, I will embark on my 19th ride, which will be part of the Nazareth Hospital's 160th anniversary celebrations.

The bike rides and, more importantly, the Nazareth Hospital are very special to me. Seeing the Holy Land on two wheels is far more interesting, challenging and inspiring than from the confines of a tour coach. Through the Nazareth Challenge, I have traversed the desert with only camels and other cyclists for company,



cruised through banana plantations and orange groves, felt the freedom of cycling in the pouring rain and journeyed along the dirt roads where Jesus once walked. The bible phrases "up to Jerusalem" and "down to Jericho" take on new meaning when contemplated atop a well-worn saddle.

Israel is full of churches, many of which I have visited. However, the church that has impressed me the most is the one with which I cycle. On the bike ride, one meets new faces and establishes friendships that will last a lifetime. In 1997, I was privileged to hear the Bishop of Jerusalem speak when he referred to pilgrims who visit the stones and relics of the church, but who neglect the living stones. I have had the blessing of cycling alongside and creating great memories with a few living stones, such as, Nassim, Joseph, Hussam and Khalil, who have coloured my journey.

Aside from the land and its people, another highlight of the bike ride is the arrival at the Nazareth Hospital, where

I am always humbled by the welcome from hospital staff and their families, complete with the Jordanian pipe band. I must confess that I have witnessed this awesome experience bring tears to the eyes of more than a few bike riders, myself included.

The opportunity to see "close up" and hear about the work of the hospital is a unique opportunity that fills one with pride when reflecting on one's fundraising efforts in the build-up to the Challenge. You identify with the work and get to meet and hear from staff and management. Lastly, the service in the hospital chapel is a fitting conclusion to a week on the bike, as is a visit to the hometown of Jesus.

If you have never been on a Nazareth Challenge, I would love you to join me in 2021. If you have been before, what better incentive than to join in the Nazareth Hospital's 160th anniversary celebrations, to reunite in our love of the work of the hospital, the Holy Land and, of course, the bike. I look forward to seeing you there!