

ORU Students Prove Selflessness Knows No Religious Boundaries

In a land known for miracles, it's no wonder or surprise that miracles still take place every day here in Israel. Some may be small miracles that could risk passing under the radar, but are miraculous all the same. When we see them, it's important to pause, recognize them, and take a moment to thank God.

This past week I was privileged not only to witness one such miracle but participate in it. It's a double edged miracle in that it took place to begin with, and as a result dozens of Israelis' lives will be saved.

More than 100 students from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma came to Jerusalem to serve at the Empowered21 Global Congress. Uniquely, they took a turn off the beaten path of traditional sightseeing to give of themselves in a most precious, personal, and meaningful way. They donated blood in Jerusalem.

While not yet at the level of a tourist attraction or pilgrimage site such as visiting the Garden Tomb, Sea of Galilee, Western Wall, or other modern historical sites, over the years thousands of tourists have lined up, and rolled up their sleeves, to leave part of themselves behind to help others.

When presented with this opportunity, ORU staff only hesitated in the sense that we had to carve out a few hours into their already packed schedule. But the idea of donating blood in Israel was a powerful calling which was embraced immediately.

As director of Heart to Heart whose sole mission is to support Israel's national ambulance, EMS, and blood service, arranging

and implementing this special event was both a pleasure and a privilege. About half of the students were eligible to donate.

The scene was lively and joyous, even festive. It's no surprise, of course. How could one put dozens of Christian students who value and cherish life in a room and have such a life-affirming and sustaining opportunity not be so?

The only limitation was time, and I honestly can't recall the last time I've seen the staff of Jerusalem's blood donation center move faster, more efficiently, but with no lack of professionalism and reciprocal joy. It was a blessing many times over.

Of the dozens of students who were eligible and had time to donate, the response and emotion was effusive.

"I love blessing people, and giving blood was a simple way for me to give someone a new chance to live. I was honored that my first blood donation was to the people of Israel," ORU student Caleb Lutz said.

Faith Edwards echoed this, "As a nursing major, I've seen the effects that generous blood donations can have on saving lives. Giving blood was an incredible opportunity to bless the people of Jerusalem, and I am thankful that my blood will make a difference."

Since not everyone is able to come to Israel to donate blood in person, Heart to Heart has pioneered the world's first virtual blood donation program, which you can learn about at [http://www.hearttoheart.org](#). We have been blessed by the outpouring of love and support from people all over the world who join us by sponsoring a unit of blood to give us the resources to be sure Israel always has a safe and plentiful blood supply.

In Israel, when one thinks of the need for blood, one might think of war and terrorism. Unfortunately, we have a risk for that possibility and need all too often. Indeed, on the same

day as the fabulous ORU student blood drive, an Arab terrorist ran over a group of teenage boys, one of whom is my son's friend and the center on their school's basketball team. He has had two surgeries so far, and odds are there was blood involved.

But before visiting with the ORU students, I got to visit with mothers of children with thalassemia, a disease they have all had since as long back as birth, now requiring a transfusion of up to two pints of blood every two to three weeks with no end in sight.

I asked the mothers how the blood helped their children. Each in her own words said the same thing—the blood their child receives simply gives them life. When I asked what would happen if there wasn't enough blood, they wept and shuddered at the thought. "It's not even a possibility I can think about. There always has to be blood."

Making me all the more proud is that two of the three mothers I met were Israeli Arabs. Not only does disease not discriminate but neither does our responsibility to save lives. That's Heart to Heart's calling, that's what's possible because of support from people all over the world, and that's what the ORU students understood to their core. You might say it runs in their veins.

In the coming weeks, as the blood donated by these students is processed and dispatched to Israel's hospitals, as many as 90 people will benefit from this life savings gift. The recipients will never know that students from Oral Roberts University donated the blood that saved them, and will likely be of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

It's a miracle of creation that we are able to share blood from one person to another and an even greater miracle that Christian students from the U.S. can donate blood in for Israeli Jews, Christians and Moslems, as well as Syrian and

Palestinian Arabs, African refugees and migrants, and others who find themselves in Israel requiring live saving treatment

In Jewish tradition, at special milestones and occasions we say a special prayer, *Shechianu*, thanking God for sustaining us and being able to reach this special occasion.

I pray that support for Israel and Israel's national blood service by righteous Christian students like these will become so commonplace that we run the risk of taking it for granted. For now however, hats off, thanks, and kudos to Oral Roberts University and their students for sharing their heart with Israel, literally.

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