



James Howell is pictured in Jerusalem in early October 2023. (Courtesy of James Howell)



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March 27, 2025

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It was an astounding moment, perhaps the closest many of us will ever come to seeing something like a miracle.

On Sunday, March 23, Pope Francis [appeared](#) on the balcony of his hospital room, waving to the crowds — tired, perhaps, a bit worn — but, after 38 days surrounded by doctors, there he was, alive. That day, he left Gemelli Hospital and returned to his home at the Vatican.

That incredible moment stood out as a bright light in a season of change, even chaos. From Rome to Washington, from Gaza to Russia and Ukraine, the world seems to spin at lightning speed. Where it all settles, no one knows just yet.

As independent journalists, this an urgent time for the mission of NCR. Reliable, credible news and common-sense commentary are more important — and harder to find — than they've ever been. We're able to keep the faith and report truthfully about issues that matter because we are not controlled by a profit-focused corporation or a church authority with its own agenda. We answer to our readers and our donors.

That's why we are so grateful to bring on an important new person to NCR — James Howell, our chief advancement officer. In this position, James will help get out the word about our mission and connect with committed Catholics who value our journalism. He joins a dedicated fundraising group whose work with donors — like many of you — keeps NCR independent and growing, even as we celebrate 60 years of service.

Let me tell you a little bit about him. James brings to NCR years of experience with vital Catholic institutions, including Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Charities Oregon and Boys Town. His most recent post was with the Bethlehem University Foundation.

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Bethlehem University is in the Holy Land — and is a unique institution with a special student body. Founded in 1973, it's a joint project supported by the Vatican and run by the De LaSalle Christian Brothers. The student population is 77% Muslim and 82% female. James began his work with the university's foundation while actually in Bethlehem on the West Bank two days before the events of Oct. 7, 2023.

That is the mark of someone with a deep commitment to Catholic social justice and Gospel values. I'm positive that as he gets to meet and know our readers and donors, he will see that same commitment reflected back to him. The NCR community, of course, doesn't face the same challenges as the people at Bethlehem University — but we share a dedication to Catholic service for others.

At NCR, we serve through trustworthy reporting of truthful information. Our thanks to the NCR community for supporting that mission, and to James Howell for joining us in such an important role, at such an important time.

Back at Gemelli Hospital, Francis' doctors say there was a moment when it seemed the pope might not survive. Those doctors had a decision to make: to step back or keep going. They turned to the pope's personal physician, who knew best what his patient wanted: "Try everything, don't give up," he told hospital's doctors. "That's what we all thought too," [one of them said later](#). "And nobody gave up."

Those words worked for Francis. And they have the power to carry us all through the chaotic times in which we now live. Try everything. Don't give up.

With your support, that will carry NCR's mission forward, too.