

President Clinton visits Israel to promote peace

By Judith Sudilovsky
Catholic News Service

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — Several hundred Bethlehem residents were on hand to welcome U.S. President Bill Clinton to their city Dec. 15, but most were ambivalent about the possible results of the visit.

"No one knows if Clinton wants to help us or not. We just know that he is the first one who found a solution" to the stalled peace talks at Wye Plantation. "No one knows if he can find a solution now; we hope he can," said Ahmed Yousef, a 20-year-old hotel management student at Bethlehem University.

From the early hours of the morning the streets of Bethlehem were cleared of pedestrian and motor traffic in preparation for Clinton's noon visit to the Church of the Nativity. As journalists waited to be allowed into Manger Square, young Franciscan monks had their pictures taken with American security guard dogs.

Those Bethlehem residents permitted into the square were kept several hundred yards away from the church. The only glimpse of the president they had was of the presidential helicopter flying overhead on arrival and later the motorcade rushing up to the church.

After a 45-minute visit to the Church of the Nativity, Clinton and his wife, Hillary, and daughter, Chelsea, lit a festively decorated Christmas tree outside the church. A youth choir sang Christmas

carols.

In Gaza, Clinton had spoken of his anticipation to visit Bethlehem.

"For a Christian family to light a Christmas tree in Bethlehem is a great thing. I contemplate how, in this small place — the home of Islam, Judaism and Christianity — the embodiment of my faith was born a Jew and is still recognized by Muslims as a prophet," Clinton said. "(Jesus) said a lot of things, but he was known as the 'Prince of Peace.'"

For Franciscan Sister Sorfaiza, a Bethlehem schoolteacher, Clinton's visit on the advent of Christmas was very meaningful.

"This is a big step toward peace. It is very special that he has come now, just before the year 2000 jubilee, just before Christmas. This is why Jesus came, for peace, and (this visit) is a very big sign for peace," she said.

Behind police barricades the people waited, waving American and Palestinian flags. They held placards demanding the release of Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli jails and posters of superimposed pictures of Clinton and Arafat under the legend "We Have a Dream: Free Palestine."

For most of the people present, the most pressing issue was the release of the political prisoners. Mothers, wives and children held pictures of their relatives still in jail.

A 25-year-old Bethlehem University pharmaceutical student who declined to give his name said: "Clinton didn't come

here to support our people, he only came to cancel the national charter. It's really nothing. There can be no peace while there are prisoners in jail."

The student was released from Israeli prison in October after serving a four-year term for being a member of Hamas, the militant Islamic movement that has claimed responsibility for terrorist attacks in Israel.

"If (Clinton) helps us free our prisoners, we can make peace. Perhaps he can help us, that is why we are here," said Asma Takatka, 30, whose husband was given a 99-year prison sentence four years ago "for taking part in the intifadah"

(Palestinian uprising). The man has never seen his 4-year-old daughter, Haya.

In his speech to the Palestinian National Council in Gaza Dec. 14, Clinton praised them for their show-of-hand vote to nullify Palestinian National Council charter provisions that call for the destruction of Israel.

The rescinding of those charter provisions had been one of the points of contention between the Israelis and Palestinians, with the Palestinians saying the vote had already been taken and the Israelis maintaining that the full PNC had not voted on it, as required by their charter.

Guatemalans Celebrate



Reuters/CNS

A boy dressed as Juan Diego is carried by his mother during a celebration marking the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Guatemala City Dec. 12. The popular apparition of Mary, who appeared in Mexico in 1531 to peasant farmer Juan Diego, is revered throughout the Americas.

CALENDAR

Chemung Schuyler

Fundraisers

■ TUE, DEC. 22 — Drawing: for holiday gift basket of Beanie Babies; to benefit St. Joseph's Hospital Auxiliary's pledge toward purchase of medical equipment; tickets available at St. Joseph's Hospital Gift Shop, 555 E. Market St., Elmira.

Meetings

■ THU, DEC. 17 — Stars seminar: St. Joseph's Hospital, Cusick Meeting Room, 555 E. Market St., Elmira; noon.
■ FRI, DEC. 18 — Soup and Scriptures: Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Hall, 1100 W. Church St., Elmira; noon-1 p.m.

Social Activities

■ FRI, DEC. 18 — Concert: "Holiday in Barbershop Style"; Elmira Free Academy, 933 Hoffman St., Elmira; 8 p.m.; free, but donations accepted for local charities.

Livingston County

Religious Activities

■ FRI, DEC. 18 — 125th anniversary celebration: St. Patrick's Church, 46 Stanley St., Mt. Morris; Mass, 7 p.m.; Bishop Dennis Hickey, president; reception following at Peter's Party Complex; \$7 for adults, \$4.50 for children 5-10; 716/658-2110.

St. Salome's angels



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

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Photo at left, Emily Kane (right), follows sister Carolyn's lead during a liturgical dance at St. Salome's Church, Irondequoit, Nov. 29. Above, angels dance on the altar. Five girls ages 7 to 9 participated during the 10:30 a.m. Masses on Sundays during Advent.

Monroe County

Religious Activities

■ DEC. 19, 24, 25 — Christmas services: St. Christopher's Church, 3350 Union St., N. Chili; Sat, Dec. 19, confessions 4:15-4:45 p.m.; Masses: Thurs., Dec. 24, 5, 7:30 p.m., midnight; Fri., Dec. 25, 10 a.m.
■ SUN, DEC. 20 — Lessons and carols: Holy Cross Church, 4492 Lake Ave., Rochester; 7:30 p.m.; freewill offering; 716/663-2244.

■ DEC. 22, 24, 25 — Christmas services: St. Jude's Church, 4100 Lyell Rd., Gates; Tue., Dec. 22, penance service, 7:30 p.m.; Masses: Thurs., Dec. 24, 5:30, 7:30 p.m., midnight; Fri., Dec. 25, 8, 10 a.m., noon.

■ THU, DEC. 24 — Christmas Eve Mass: St. Mary's Hospital Chapel, 89 Genesee St., Rochester; 4 p.m.

Social Activities

■ THU, DEC. 17 — Christmas Concert: with Jazz Ensemble, Choir, Nativity Pageant, etc.; 7 p.m.; Northeastern Catholic/Bishop Kearney Auditorium, 125 Kings Highway S., Irondequoit.
■ FRI, DEC. 18 — Concert:

Handel's Messiah; Sacred Heart Cathedral Choir; with the Choir of Ascension Episcopal Church and the Select Choir of Aquinas Institute; Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park, Rochester; 7:30 p.m.; free; 716/254-3221.

■ SAT, DEC. 19 — Concert: "A Child's Christmas"; Madrigalia's Christmas concert; Asbury First United Methodist Church, 1050 East Ave., Rochester; 3 p.m.

■ SAT, DEC. 19 — Concert: "Christmas Memories"; John McDermott; Nazareth College Arts Center, Callahan Theater, 4245 East Ave., Rochester; 8 p.m.; \$28; 716/389-2170.

Steuben County

Religious Activities

■ FRI, DEC. 25 — Cablecast Mass: Christmas Eve Mass from St. Patrick Church, Corning; Time-Warner Cable Channel One; 10 a.m.

Yates Ontario Wayne

Meetings

■ SAT, DEC. 26 — Support group: divorced, separated, bereaved; Log Cabin Restaurant, Route 31F, Macedon Center; 9 a.m.; call Eleanor at 315/597-9558.

Social Activities

■ SAT, DEC. 19 — Kwanzaa: Alex Eligh Community Center, Newark; 5 p.m.; for tickets call 315/483-4092.
■ SUN, DEC. 20 — Christmas caroling: at facilities where shut-ins reside; meet at 6 p.m. at Park Presbyterian Church, 110 Maple Court, Newark.
■ FRI, DEC. 25 — dinner: 26th annual Community Shared Christmas Dinner; 1 p.m.; First Methodist Church, S. Main St., Newark; public welcome. Volunteers welcome 8:30 a.m.-noon Dec. 24 and after 10 a.m. Dec. 25.