



Reuters/CNS

Israeli police patrol a street in Jerusalem March 31. Few pilgrims came to the Holy Land for Easter, which was rocked by ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Mideast turmoil worsens

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

ROME — The intensifying conflict in the Holy Land has become "a terrible contest to see who can be more cruel and inhuman," said the Vatican's diplomatic representative to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

"Blood and human life have become of no value," the nuncio, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, told an Italian Catholic newspaper.

"In the last few days the situation has gotten completely out of control, arriving at an unfathomable level of inhumanity where nothing is respected," he said in the March 29 interview with *Avvenire*.

The level of violence and bloodshed continued to worsen after he spoke,

prompting Pope John Paul II to issue repeated appeals for prayers and for peace Easter morning and April 1.

The pope asked for special prayers for the inhabitants of Bethlehem, "which finds itself in great danger."

The Israeli army, proclaiming a crackdown on what it described as Palestinian terrorists, moved tanks close to the city of Jesus' birth April 1; fighting in the city broke out just after midnight April 2 when the tanks moved into the city center.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said April 2, "The Holy Father continues to follow the developments of the dramatic situation in the Middle East.

"In addition to his recent personal appeals, he has given indications to the apos-

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Dayquan Johnson, 2, eats lunch at St. Peter's Kitchen at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Rochester March 28.

When children miss a meal

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the second in an occasional series focusing on children's issues.

It was Holy Thursday, the day the church commemorates Jesus' Last Supper with his Apostles. But the scores of guests lining up were looking for anything but their last meal at St. Peter's Kitchen, the noontime meal program of Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Rochester.

Guests included homeless Vietnam veterans and grandparents raising grandchildren. The guests and kitchen staff both say this place serves not only as a weekday source of free food, but of companionship and social life as well. Outside, some guests joked and laughed and shared cigarettes as they waited. Inside, as they stood on the stairwell leading to the basement kitchen and eating area, an almost festive air pervaded the line.

As the guests talked with each other and the volunteers serving them, Melatina Bussey said she hoped to keep finding enough work to adequately feed her four children, as well as the newborn child of one of her relatives who is currently unable to care for the girl. Bussey has temporary custody of the girl.

Bussey, 37, has no husband, and supports herself through temporary jobs, baby-sitting and housecleaning. Although she is not on public assistance, she does get \$280 a month in food stamps, but can't always stretch them enough to cover all her children's meals.

"That's not enough for teenagers and a little baby," she said as her daughter, 1-year-old Siroya, crawled over her. "She wants to eat all the time."

So Bussey said she comes to St. Peter's for its free meals almost every weekday.

"Sometimes I don't have food at home, and lunch here is great," she said. "Sister Barbara looks out for me a lot."

Sister Barbara Kuhn, SSJ, directs St. Peter's with Patty Lorenzen. The duo said St. Peter's, which turned 20 years old this year, serves 180 to 200 people a day. And toddlers are usually scattered among that number. On school holidays, even more youngsters come to St. Peter's, they said, adding that sometimes as many as one out of five guests are children.

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