

Israeli-Palestinian gun battle at church leaves one dead

JERUSALEM (CNS) — Franciscan friars at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity compound said that even after 24 hours, the Israeli army would not let them remove the body of a Palestinian killed in a gun battle.

They also said they had no electricity and were running out of food and that the Israelis were not permitting supplies to reach them.

In a telephone interview April 9, Franciscan Father Amjad Sabbara, who lives in the compound now occupied by about 200 Palestinians, said it remained fairly calm the day after the Israeli-Palestinian gun battle.

"The problem is that they (the Israelis) are not willing to allow the Red Cross ambulance to cross" into the compound to get the Palestinian's body, Father Sabbara said.

An Israeli army spokesman said April 9 the army was coordinating the evacuation

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of the body of the Palestinian, who was from Gaza, and also the delivery of supplies to the Church of the Nativity.

Earlier, Father Sabbara said ancient mosaics on the walls of the West Bank church, traditional site of where Jesus was born, were damaged by gunfire.

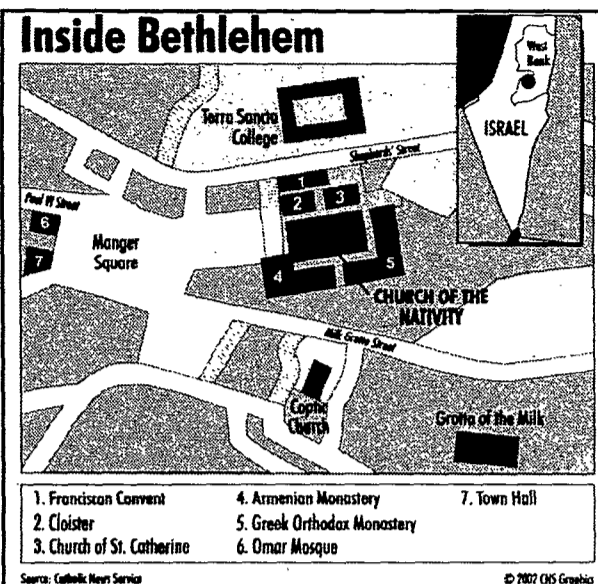
Early morning gunfire April 8 ignited a fire in the parish hall, Father Sabbara told Catholic News Service. The shooting began around 4:30 a.m., with nuns and friars gathering in one room for support, he said.

Father Sabbara said community members avoid being near windows after a priest was nearly shot over the weekend.

Israel maintained that the friars were being held as hostages by nearly 200 Palestinians, including gunmen, inside a convent adjoining the church. The friars and church leaders denied this charge, calling it "disinformation."

Some 200 Palestinians — mostly heavily armed gunmen — broke into the Church of the Nativity April 8. They fled to a neighboring convent the next day after a mid-morning explosion outside the church.

Both sides have accused the other of initiating gunfire.



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Mercy Sister Jacquelyn Reichart, pastoral administrator at Brighton's Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, prays with Penny Rose at Rose's home April 4.

Maintaining a sense of orders?

Mercy Sister Jacquelyn Reichart clearly remembers the charismatic priest who, more than 50 years ago, visited her seventh-grade class at Irondequoit's St. Margaret Mary School. "I thought, 'I want to do what he's doing.' I was really energized," Sister Reichart recalled.

These days, Sister Reichart fills more roles formerly reserved for priests than she could have imagined. She has served since 1998 as pastoral administrator at Brighton's Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish where, among her numerous responsibilities, she oversees business affairs and directs the parish staff — duties traditionally handled by a pastor. She also attends the annual priests' convocation, which took place this week.

Sister Reichart entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1951, when the order's primary focus was in education. After several years as a teacher and school administrator, she began parish ministry 22 years ago. Her path typifies an increasingly diverse list of ministries for women religious, said Sister Sheila Stevenson, president of the Rochester regional community of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

"Women religious groups have always been at the cutting edge of where the needs were," Sister Stevenson stated.

Additionally, many communities of men religious — brothers and order priests — have long-standing ties to this diocese, also in education and parish ministry. The availability of religious for parish work is particularly welcomed at this time in diocesan history, as the number of active diocesan priests continues to dip.

Yet religious orders are experiencing shortages as well. So the challenge is how these women and men can fill their primary re-

sponsibilities — to serve the orders to which they're committed — while also helping the diocese.

"We have communication with the orders as they do their planning. But they're facing the same things we are," said William Pickett, director of the diocesan Office of Planning.

History of generous service

Religious orders, working in collaboration with diocesan officials, have played major roles in the Rochester Diocese almost since the first parishes were formed here.

Many of the earliest orders came to help establish schools, particularly at German parishes. In fact, the three largest women's congregations to serve this diocese — the Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of Mercy and School Sisters of Notre Dame — all arrived in the 1850s, when Rochester was still a part of the Buffalo Diocese.

The Mercy and St. Joseph sisters established motherhouses in Rochester and also become very active in health-care ministry. School Sisters of Notre Dame serving here have been furnished by their provinces in Baltimore and, as of 1955, in Wilton, Conn. All three orders have ministered in elementary-school, high-school and college education.

Male religious orders in the diocese began with the Redemptorists who arrived in the 1830s. They were followed in later generations by orders of priests — Basilians and Jesuits are primary examples — and teaching brothers such as Christian Brothers.

Religious priests have also staffed several diocesan parishes, such as

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STORY BY MIKE LATONA • PHOTO BY ANDREA DIXON

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