

Troops withdraw from Bethlehem

Judith Sudilovsky/CNS

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — The presence of Palestinian police directing traffic was important to Ranna Kharr, 23, whose car stalled in the middle of a busy intersection a day after the local force returned to Bethlehem.

Four officers helped push her car onto a downhill road, where she was able to restart her car.

"Maybe if this had happened two days ago somebody would have helped me, but I don't know, maybe not. Today our policemen were here and they helped me," said Kharr, who is Greek Orthodox. "I am proud of them. I am glad they were there when I needed them."

For most Bethlehem residents, the July 2 withdrawal of Israeli forces appears to have at least resulted in a better traffic flow and the removal of street vendors blocking access to stores.

"Order has to be enforced here like everywhere else," said Nicola Andonni, who owns a restaurant on the road leading to Rachel's Tomb.

"In the market before, there were fruit vendors in front of every store and stall. It was bad for the shops.



Debbie Hill/CNS

The Palestinian flag flies above Palestinian police as they patrol near Manger Square and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem July 3. The uniformed police were back on the job after Israeli troops left the West Bank town the day before, signalling that steps were being taken toward the U.S.-backed "road map" for peace in the Middle East.

The Palestinian police have made order," he said.

He believes the situation in Bethlehem will improve.

"The people who live here will make it succeed," he said.

Only a few tanks had been patrolling Bethlehem in recent weeks,

so the Israeli withdrawal was not felt as deeply as in Gaza. Still, Bethlehem residents complain that they are prevented from traveling freely outside Bethlehem. But traffic at the main Israeli-manned checkpoint into Jerusalem was moving more smoothly because soldiers there opened two lanes of traffic instead of one that had been the norm.

At the Church of the Nativity, the five-man uniformed church security force patrolled the church.

"We never left this place, we were always here but we had to wear civilian clothing," said Issa Mouz, one of the security police. "It is a good feeling that tourists will know we are here to protect them."

A Palestinian police officer told Catholic News Service that the main concern for police was to help give residents a sense of stability and safety and to prevent what he called actions of "resistance" from political groups.

George Abu Aita, 16, a Catholic, sat in his father's photo shop watching police officers hang Palestinian flags at the entrance to Nativity Square.

"When we see the Palestinian flag we feel a flutter in our heart but we don't know what will happen," he said. "We don't know what the Palestinian police will give for us, if it will be something good or not. We hope it will be better but there have been no changes yet."

Ahmad Assi, 54, a pharmacist, was less hopeful as he watched the police officers direct traffic in front of his store.

"Just the traffic is better. We were one step from having a Palestinian government with the Oslo Agreement and we are now back at step one," he said. "Five years from now we will still be at step one all over again."

Sisters of St. Joseph install leaders

Sister Janice Morgan to serve second term

On June 22, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester installed their new leadership team, headed by Sister Janice Morgan, who was re-elected to her second four-year term as the 350-member congregation's president.

The Sisters of St. Joseph elected their latest leadership team at the close of their Chapter June 2 at the motherhouse in Pittsford. The Chapter is an assembly of the sisters that convenes every four years to review and set congregational direction, and elect a leadership team.

In addition to Sister Morgan, the sisters also elected Sister Barbara

Staropoli, former chair of the music department at Nazareth College, as vice president. The sisters also elected three councilors: Sister Mary Lou Mitchell, former associate professor of nursing at Nazareth and a former co-director of the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center in Rochester; Sister Kathy Weider, retired chaplain of Nazareth College; and Sister Marilyn Pray, former coordinator of evangelization at Holy Apostles Parish in Rochester and former co-director of vocations for the congregation.

During the Chapter, the sisters also pledged to a "re-founding" of their congregation, according to Sister Mary Anne Laurer, director for the sisters' Office of Mission Advancement. Essentially, the sisters

said they would recommit to the congregation's charism of "uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God," Sister Maurer said.

She added that the congregation also decided to establish a foundation to fund current ministries and future ones, and plans to make recruiting young women to the congregation a priority through vocations promotion efforts.

— Rob Cullivan



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