

Pak Church Wrestles with Persecution, Discrimination
By T S Thomas

Negombo, Sri Lanka: Blasphemy law has brought great misery and suffering to Christians in Pakistan, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences was told.

"In Pakistan, the Christian community is a minority and often discriminated in different fields of life," observed Bishop Benny Travas of Multan on November 30 while presenting his country's response to an FABC document seeking ways to make Catholic families agents of the Church's mission of mercy.

The bishop noted the enforcement of blasphemy law, poverty, drug addiction and scarcity of priests and missionaries as the major setbacks for Christians in Pakistan.

In Pakistan's Punjab province alone recently reported 262 cases of alleged blasphemous behavior by Christians.

Also reported are several cases of mob attacks against the Christians and their churches, often instigated by extremist groups, Bishop Travas told FABC's eleventh plenary at Negombo, a coastal city north of Colombo.

The November 28-December 4 plenary addressed the theme, "The Asian Catholic Family: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy."

Asian bishops are meeting for the first time in Sri Lanka along with other invited bishops and funding partners from around the globe.

Bishop Travas also observed that several Christian girls in Pakistan are abducted, forcibly converted to Islam and married against their will.

Christians, who are mostly in villages, also suffer poverty and powerlessness.

Added to this are materialism and the influence of the media on people that has led to a lack of interest in religions as well as deterioration of faith, the bishop noted.

As alcohol and drugs addiction have split families, many Catholics struggle to find a solution, the prelate said.

The Pakistan archbishop, however, sees the only way to unite Catholics in their faith is to draw them to the Eucharist. This will help foster a spirituality of communion in families, he says.

The Christian families in Pakistan seek liberation from poverty, freedom from discrimination and yearn to own houses and get good job. "But yet deep down they seek closeness with their God," Bishop Travas noted.

In recent times, due to shortage or unavailability of priests and catechists, many Catholic families have gone to other Christian denominations and churches, the prelate expressed his concern.

However, the prelate, views the exodus as a sign of spiritual thirst among Catholics and to become part of a community that can provide them a ‘spirituality of communion.’”

“What is needed is to further stress the Eucharist as a source of communion,” suggested the bishop as a means to build up “communion with God and in the Family.”

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[T S Thomas of Matters India (www.mattersindia.com) prepared this report for FABC Office of Social Communication.]