



AMERICA/BRAZIL - Priest wounded last Sunday in Volta Redonda dies, funeral services held today

Volta Redonda (Agenzia Fides) – Father Dejair Gonçalves de Almeida, age 32, died Tuesday, March 16th at 7 in the morning, at St. John the Baptist Hospital in Volta Redonda, about 80 km from Rio de Janeiro, after having been attacked. His body is now in the Cathedral of the Diocese of Barra do Pirai Volta, Church of Our Lady of Grace, in the Jardim Paraíba area of Volta Redonda. The funeral will be celebrated today. Sunday, March 14, the priest was attacked while returning from Church Community in Volta Redonda "Good Lord Jesus," in the neighborhood of Agua Limpa. With him was a former seminarian Epaminondas Marques da Silva, 26, who died from a blow to the head.

According to information sent to Fides by the Diocese of Barra do Pirai in Volta Redonda, Father Dejair and Epaminondas were kidnapped and taken to the rectory in the early hours of Sunday. "The kidnappers wanted money and as they found nothing, they struck both in the head. The former seminarian died instantly and the priest underwent surgery, however did not survive," said the spokesman of the Diocese, Vagner Mattos. The former seminarian had been coordinator of the ecclesial community of Santa Cruz. "He will be sorely missed in the Church and even more in his family. We stand in solidarity now and we insist that people change this attitude of violence," said Father Samuel Camargo.

Father Dejair Gonçalves de Almeida was born in Arantina (MG), and was ordained priest on 20 April 2007. He was Chancellor of the Diocese of Barra do Pirai Volta Redonda and Director of the Diocesan Apostleship of Prayer. He worked as a priest in the Our Lady of Grace area, where he served eight Ecclesial Communities. The Bishop of Volta Redonda, Bishop João Maria Messi, said that the diocese is suffering from this violence and called for an attitude of peace: "We must be ambassadors of peace and promote peace in all directions. We should try to be like Christ and not seek revenge." The Bishop also stressed the need for more timely intervention of security forces, along with a labor-intensive drug prevention. Violence is also fought with intelligent measures in sports, education, and culture. "We cannot repay evil with evil, but justice must be done. Let us be like Christ, ambassadors of peace." "We cannot give up. We need to raise our voices and encourage people to seek practical solutions for peace," said the coordinator of the Movement "Resgia da Paz" in Volta Redonda, Father Juarez Sampaio. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 17/03/2010)