



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - 200 CYCLIST CATECHISTS ATTEND TO CHRISTIANS IN MUSLIM VILLAGES IN LAHORE ARCHDIOCESE: VIGOROUS LABOUR FORCE AT THE SERVICE OF EVANGELISATION**

Lahore (Fides Service) – They are the “Workers in the Lord’s vineyard”: the 196 catechists in Lahore archdiocese are a formidable labour force for evangelisation. Each of them follows the formation, growth difficulties and needs of between 250 and 500 Catholic families in 20 rural communities.

Lahore archdiocese is the largest for its area. It has more than 500,000 Catholics gathered in 24 parishes, 9 in Lahore city and 15 in rural areas. Each rural parish cares for a number of villages, between 90 to 130. The diocese has 22 priests, 12 Brothers. Each parish has between 7 to 20 catechists who help the priests in the work of evangelisation and keeping contact with the families.

“Our catechists are the arms of a very important apostolate. They are indispensable. Pakistan is a Muslim country and although Christians are a small minority their faith and Christian identity is strong thanks to the work of our catechists” Father Morris Nadeem, head of the Catechesis Commission of Lahore Archdiocese, tells Fides Service. “They are faithful and precious collaborators for the priests in reaching families, keeping contact, sustaining their faith, playing an important role in their formation. They often use a bicycle to go from one village to the other. They are married men and their wives help them with the preparation of children for First Holy Communion or before special Feasts of the year such as Easter or Christmas. The catechists live among the people, they are familiar with their difficulties and problems. This enables them to be good mediators between the people and the clergy. Their work is effective because they are geographically and spiritually close to the people and close to God”.

Father Nadeem explains: “Their first duty is to teach catechism and to evangelise, living with the people, sharing their joys and sorrows and also providing useful social services. Pakistan has many villages which are remote and priests have difficulty in reaching them from the cities. The presence of catechists is important to renew and deepen the faith of individual Catholics and to keep alive the community dimension.”

The formation of catechists is important and for this Pakistan has St Albert Catechists Training Centre in Faisalabad diocese at Kushpur village with a large Catholic population. The centre trains catechists from all over the country, providing formation in doctrine, liturgy, theology, Catholic morals, pastoral work. PA (Fides Service 11/6/2003 EM lines 39 Words: 457)