



## **ASIA/LAOS-New "Community of the Word" to relaunch the mission, among obstacles and hopes**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) – There are 30 young people - 20 seminarians at the Major Seminary and 10 committed in the preparatory Year in Pakse - the hope and the future of the Church in Laos, says Fr. Adun Hongsaphong to Fides, a theologian and Rector of the Major Seminary in the Apostolic Vicariate of Pakse in southern Laos. Fr. Adun is one of three priests who carries out pastoral work in the Vicariate, composed of 4 provinces: "Christian communities are mainly in the province of Champasak – he tells Fides - the others are widely dispersed. In the Vicariate there is just one Bishop and three priests and the pastoral work is not easy: we are always travelling, there are difficulties to visit the communities and to pray with the families". But "we are reviewing the methods for the pastoral care – he explains - trying to focus it on the Word of God: we try to create 'Communities based on the Word' and from there we expect some changes, because the Word of God gives strength and could inspire new vocations". Vocations, and therefore new priests, vital for the future of the small Laotian Church, a community of about 50 thousand faithful and a total of 15 priests in a country where foreign missionaries are stopped, imposed by the communists of "Pathet Lao" in 1975, when they were all expelled. Since 1991 the government has gradually loosened its grip on the faithful, giving, year after year, greater freedom of worship and religion: "Today the relationship with the authorities is friendly: there are no big obstacles, but we cannot say that they work together. Our real freedom of religion – says Fr. Adun to Fides- varies according to provinces and above all local authorities, and not so much by the Constitution, which provides for freedom of worship. In large cities, where the churches are visible, there is more freedom, in rural areas there is less ". Among the examples cited by the priest, there is the impossibility of building new churches (the government does not authorize them) but, on the other hand "you can restore or reconstruct existing buildings, and it is possible to regain the churches confiscated in the past, using them again for the pastoral service". Therefore the urgency and challenge of the Church in Laos today is to "renew catechesis and evangelization, faith lived in families and communities", creating "parishes and communities that can shine in the evangelical witness". Besides, today Lao-Christian faithful-due to the absence of missionaries - are no longer perceived as "foreigners" and are trying to recover elements of local culture in the liturgy and pastoral work, in order to integrate better into the social fabric of the country . "We have faith in the Holy Spirit, that guides our Church and our projects, we try to conform to the will of God", he concludes. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 01/10/2011)