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ASIA/PAKISTAN - A new Bishop in Faisalabad: 10 thousand at the Mass with Cardinal Filoni

Faisalabad (Agenzia Fides) - "It is a moment of joy and hope. We are happy because the Year of Faith has given us a new Pastor who will help us to strengthen our faith. The problems and challenges in the area are many. There are spiritual but also material issues to deal with and we need a guide": with these words, Fr. Khalid Rashid Asi, Vicar general of the diocese of Faisalabad, a city in the province of Punjab, describes to Fides Agency the atmosphere in the diocesan community, on the occasion of Cardinal Fernando Filoni's visit, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of peoples, who on November 1, will consecrate the new Bishop of Faisalabad, Mgr. Joseph Arshad. Faisalabad is the third largest city in Pakistan, erected in 1960. "Having a new Bishop - explains the Vicar General to Fides - is like having a Father who cares for us. The faithful are excited and grateful to the Holy Father. We will welcome Cardinal Filoni with great love and with great honor".
In the interview with Fides, Fr. Khalid Rashid Asi continues: "We live in an atmosphere full of hope. People are excited. There will be about 10 thousand people for the episcopal Ordination Mass. In order to accommodate everyone, the celebration will be held at the College de La Salle, which has a large outdoor area. It will be attended by the Apostolic Nuncio, all the Bishops of Pakistan, more than 300 priests from all over the country, hundreds of religious, all children and young people of Catholic schools, youth groups and associations. There will also be six ambassadors, civil authorities and representatives of civil society. We have also invited Muslim religious leaders. The government has ordered security measures - given the dangers for Christians, especially after the recent massacre in Peshawar".
Faisalabad has a population of about three million inhabitants, of whom about 175 thousand Catholics. According to data by the local Church, there are 41 diocesan priests and 17 religious. The nuns are 101 while 90 are catechists who work in 22 parishes. The Church runs 62 educational institutes, where over 2,000 teachers work. Many nuns from the Pakistani diocese work as missionaries in other countries, including Afghanistan. In the diocesan territory there is the village of Khushpur, one of the oldest Catholic settlements in Pakistan, where Shahbaz Bhatti was born, the Catholic Minister for Minorities who was killed by terrorists two years ago. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/10/2013)

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