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PAKISTAN

Fasting and solidarity during Lent in Pakistan

Christians begin fasting at sunset to be different from Muslims. Local dioceses urge the faithful to donate for tsunami victims.



Lahore (AsiaNews) Solidarity for tsunami victims and fasting are setting this year's Lent apart. Unlike the rest of the Christian world, Christians in Pakistan engage in Friday fasting in the 24 hours that follow sunset rather than sunrise as tradition demandsthis way they can be different from Muslims.

Fr Francis Nadeem, a Capuchin with the Order of Minor Friars (OMF) and executive secretary of the National Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue and Ecumenism, stressed that Lenten fasting has meaning if it accompanied with prayers and charity. "I expect many faithful will express their solidarity to tsunami victims as well," he said.

The Lent Commission has invited Catholics to save one rupiah per day with half of the money raised going to help the sick and the needy in individual parishes and the other half deposited with the archdiocese's attorney to fund good deeds in the community.

Pakistani Christians responded generously to the December 26 tsunami disaster. Fr Nasir Gulfam, also a capuchin with the OMF and the diocesan Lenten committee's coordinator, said that in 2004 the Christian community raised 120,000 rupiahs (about US\$ 1600) which funded the education of about 20 orphans.

Fr Inayat Bernard, a priest in a Lahore parish, emphasised how "important it is not to just follow the ritual, but share its meaning with the poor and the needy".

In Pakistan the tradition of Lent arrived with the missionaries in the second half of the 19th century.

Pakistan has a population of 143 million people, 96 per cent Muslim and 2.5 per cent Christian.

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