

Flash

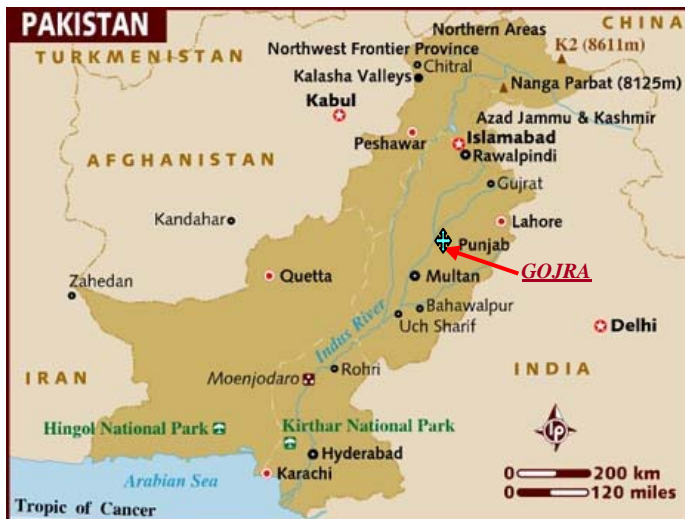
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Violence affects *Holy Family*



GOJRA, in the District of Toba Tek Singh, is the place where the first Holy Family community in Pakistan was founded in 1975. The house is the Delegation headquarters.

Over the years, the area around Gojra, where there are several Christian villages, has been relatively peaceful, but in the past few days the violence which you may have heard about in the international news was actually taking place there, and this is seen as a very serious development.

The Delegate, Thresa Perera, is away from Gojra at present, because Kumudinie Dassanayake (General Councillor) is visiting the Delegation, and Thresa accompanied her to the Punjab to visit the communities there.

We share with you some information received from different sources:

From an email written by Thresa to Margaret:

“I write this with a very heavy heart. Kumudinie and I left Gojra on July 22; Srs. Sheila (GRIFFITHS), Brigid (DAVIS) and Sumble (SAMUEL) were left in Gojra. Unfortunately some untoward incident had taken place in one of the Gojra villages, and as a result, about 45 houses belonging to Christian families were burnt, but no lives were lost. After that, things quietened down somewhat. Yesterday, (Friday July 31) however, there was a strike, and a peaceful procession; but when the procession reached the Basti (village) where our people live, it seems that they retaliated, and so four human lives were lost (two Muslim, two Christian). So today, the basti was set on fire. People (including one whole family) were burnt to death, and houses lost. There was a struggle to put the fire out. Sumble was out attending some classes, so only Sheila and Brigid were in the house. The Bishop wanted them to leave Gojra, so now they are on their way to Lahore.

I have just received a message to say that the Rangers (army) have come to the rescue and are around the place. We pray that there may be peace and harmony. We feel so bad that we are not there at this time. Please keep us in your prayer...



From Nasreen NAZIR (Pakistani Sister, in France preparing to go as a missionary to Cameroons/Chad) (Sunday, August 2)

Today I phoned my mother. The houses of my younger sister, my first cousin, my four uncles' and my grand parents have been burnt. Two men came inside my house to set it on fire, but at that time my neighbour's boy threw glass bottles and stones at them and injured them; so without doing anything to my house they ran away. The neighbouring houses where my uncles live was being burnt and damaged at that time and my brother was trying to help the women and children who have come over the walls onto the roof of my house to go to a safe place. My mother was alone, so when she saw the men entering my house, she escaped.

The first house to be burnt was my younger sister's. It is a miracle that they were saved. Some people helped them to jump to safety. In the house next door, almost the whole family was burnt alive.

My grandmother's house is also totally destroyed, and their animals and bicycles have been stolen. My Uncle has lost everything he had. Most of my father's brothers and cousins live in that area: the people who died are very well known to me. It was by the grace of God that my family members have been spared, and my house has not been burnt. The children are scared. My nephew keeps asking where is his bed, what happened to his house... he has a very high fever. Please pray for the people of my village...

From Margaret:

The Christian population is around the house of our Sisters, and they know several of the people who have been killed. Today (Aug 2) they have the funeral of 7 of their parishioners who were killed. I hope that this will not lead to more violence. The Church is near our house. . They have sent Brigid and Sheila to Lahore and five Pakistani Sisters are in Gojra today.

Via a telephone call to Gojra, (Mon Aug 3)

There is a big military and police presence in Gojra at present; things have been calmer today; the five Sisters are safe, their compound is guarded. Yesterday, the funerals could not take place until 10pm. An important politician is on his way; he will visit the afflicted areas to see the damage for himself; there will be a dialogue with the Bishop, and they will both speak to the people to try to defuse the situation.

Through this Flash, we express our concern and solidarity with our Sisters and all members of the Holy Family in Pakistan, and we join with them in praying for all the people of that troubled country: may our God grant that, living the values of forgiveness, reconciliation and truth, they may give witness in and around Gojra to their profound belief that "communion is possible".

