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# Pakistani official meets with the pope

Kristin Gobberg  Catholic News Service  | Nov. 17, 2011

**VATICAN CITY** -- A Pakistani government official met with Pope Benedict XVI after his general audience to discuss "the expectations and hopes of Christians" in Pakistan, according to Fides, the Vatican's missionary news agency.

At the brief meeting Nov. 16, Akram Masih Gill, the minister of state for national harmony, said he asked the pope "to pray for the faithful Pakistanis who, during the difficulties they encounter every day, trust in his support."

Gill, a practicing Catholic, was named in August to head the ministry that deals with interfaith relations and minority affairs in Pakistan. His predecessor, Shahbaz Bhatti, also a Catholic, was assassinated last March.

During his visit to Rome, Gill met with Bishop Enrico Dal Covolo, rector of the Pontifical Lateran University, and established a joint project between the university and the Pakistani government agency to promote harmony and dialogues between different faith groups, Fides reported.

The project envisions the exchange of professors, students and books, as well as the joint organization of conferences on issues like dialogue between faiths and religious harmony.

Gill also praised the construction of a new church in the diocese of Faisalabad sponsored by the parish of God the Merciful Father in the Diocese of Rome.

The church in Pakistan, set to be completed by Christmas, will also be called God the Merciful Father and will contain a picture of Our Lady of Divine Love, Fides reported.

Gill told Fides he was very pleased with the initiative. "Certainly the Christian minorities will benefit and this project will be fruitful. Let us hope that God the Merciful Father will lead Pakistan towards peace and harmony."

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