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**Gaza Strip. Father Romanelli (parish priest): “The Pope phoned again yesterday.” The local Christians: “We live in a cage surrounded by rubble, but we will not leave.”**

Pope Francis has made another telephone call to the parish priest of Gaza, Father **Gabriel Romanelli**, in which he expressed his closeness and affection “to the entire Catholic community of the Holy Family parish in Gaza.” The news was conveyed to SIR by the priest himself, a member of the Institute of the Incarnate Word (IVE), stranded in Bethlehem because of the ongoing war and anxious to return to his parish of slightly over 100 faithful. There are just over 1,000 Christians in Gaza, of whom only about a hundred are Catholic. The majority are Greek Orthodox and belong to St Porphyry's parish. “The Pope called me last night,” said Father Romanelli. “As in previous phone calls, he wanted to express his closeness to us. He blessed all the faithful and assured us that we are always in his prayers. He also expressed his concern for what is happening, but encouraged us to remain strong, to remain close to the community, and above all - as he always repeats - to protect the children. He invited us to pray, the only "weapon" in our hands to promote peace. To pray and to always be in communion with him and with the Church.



[The Holy Family Parish in Gaza, the only Catholic parish in the Strip, opened its doors to people who have lost their homes and jobs, especially friends and relatives, in the immediate aftermath of the 7 October attack and the subsequent Israeli response. “There are more than 500 people in the parish,” adds the priest. “Many Christians have taken refuge here. The men and women religious are doing their best to help the most distressed parishioners. Many of them have seen their homes destroyed by bombs and have lost their jobs. They also mourn the loss of family and friends. There are also the elderly, the sick and the severely disabled. We know that when the war is over - hopefully soon - life will not be as we would like it to be. The cage we live in is surrounded by rubble.” A persistent question is asked by the faithful: “Where will we go when it’s all over? There are many families with children,” said the parish priest, “all of them will receive our material and spiritual help. For now, the priority is to save their lives. The constant raids and rocket attacks, the massacre at the Anglican hospital, only increase fear and anxiety.”](#)



[, from the Institute of the Incarnate Word \(IVE\) Servants of the Lord and of the Virgin of Matarà, reiterates the words of the parish priest. “During the night there was a sporadic shelling in the area where we live. Many of us managed to get some rest. Thank God we are relatively well.” The nun stressed to SIR that “we will not leave the parish. We will not leave this place. And we will not abandon this church. Those](#)

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who think they can attack the parish after we leave are wrong because we will stay here, on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament. This is our home and we feel safe here.” The parish compound is situated in al-Zaytoun, one of the neighbourhoods of Gaza City that has been targeted by Israeli attacks in recent days. The homes of more than 20 Christian civilians are reported to have been destroyed or partially damaged by the shelling. Despite this, the Christian community has chosen not to evacuate to the south of the Strip, as ordered by the Israeli army. In the Greek Orthodox parish of St Porphyry, not far from the Latin parish, there are at least another 200 displaced believers.

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