

## Iraqi priest shot dead in Baghdad

**An Iraqi priest has been killed in a drive-by shooting by unidentified gunmen in central Baghdad.**

Fr Adel Youssef, an Assyrian Orthodox priest, was gunned down near his home in the capital's Karrada district.

His death follows the discovery of the body of Chaldean Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul last month, two weeks after he was kidnapped.

Iraqi Christians repeatedly complain of being targeted by Islamist militants, and many have fled Iraq since 2003.

Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly, head of the Chaldean Catholics - Iraq's largest Christian denomination - said Iraqi Christians were shocked by Saturday's killing.

### Fleeing Christians

"We are praying and asking God for security in Iraq," Cardinal Delly told Reuters.

**What can we do? How many people have been killed?**

Cardinal Emmanuel Delly  
Chaldean patriarch

The cardinal said the Church was "ready to forgive the people who committed these crimes for the sake of the single family of Iraq".

"What can we do? How many people have been killed? Christians, Muslims, Sabaens, people who have dedicated themselves to serving this country but they are killed."

Many Christians have fled as a result, and their number, believed to have been around 800,000 five years ago, has dwindled since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Shortly after the murder of Archbishop Rahho, Pope Benedict XVI had issued an anguished plea for Iraq's Christians, and called for an end to bloodshed in the country.

Elsewhere in Baghdad on Saturday, a bomb exploded on a minibus, killing three people.

Story from BBC NEWS:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle\\_east/7332339.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/7332339.stm)

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## Sorrow, defiance, Iraq Christians bury slain priest

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By Aws Qusay

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Scores of grieving Christians packed a Baghdad church on Sunday for the funeral mass of a priest slain by gunmen in the latest attack on a minority community that has become a target in Iraq's sectarian violence.

Men wept and women wailed as the coffin of Adel Yousef was carried into the Syrian Orthodox Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Baghdad's central Karrada neighbourhood, near where the priest was killed in a drive-by shooting on Saturday.

Mourners hurled flowers at the open coffin as it was carried through the modern church building.

Iraq's small Christian minority has tried to keep out of the sectarian violence that has killed tens of thousands of Iraqis since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. But Christian clergy and churches have been targeted repeatedly in the past few months.

The Archbishop of Mosul of Iraq's largest Christian denomination, the Chaldean Catholics, was kidnapped in the northern city in February and found dead two weeks later.

"They are blind, mercenary people, who attack Christians because we are so few in Iraq and we cannot respond on a large scale," said an elderly man who works at the church as an engineer.

"But this is our country and our life. We will endure it," he said. Like other mourners, he asked that his name not be published for security reasons.

Religious leaders from other denominations came to pay their respects, including Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Emmanuel III Delly, who earlier told Reuters: "How many people have been killed? Christians, Muslims, Sabaeans, people who have dedicated themselves to serving this country, but they are killed."

"We are ready to forgive the people who committed these crimes for the sake of the single family of Iraq."

In Rome, Pope Benedict lamented the killing.

"(The Pope) prays that all people will follow the ways of peace in order to build a just and tolerant society in the beloved land of Iraq," the Vatican said in a telegram, signed by Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone.

Many of Iraq's Christians have left the country, among the two million refugees who have fled to neighbouring states. But the mourners at Sunday's funeral said they refused to be intimidated into leaving their homeland.

"Sometimes I think of leaving Iraq. But I insist on staying in Baghdad. It is an

issue of faith," said a young man.

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## Iraq priest 'killed over pope speech'

The relatives of a Christian priest who was kidnapped and beheaded in Iraq have said that his Muslim captors had demanded his church condemn the pope's recent comments about Islam and pay a US\$350,000 ransom.

They were speaking as more than 500 people attended a memorial service on Thursday for father Amer Iskender after his decapitated body was found in an industrial area of the northern city of Mosul on Wednesday.

Iskender was a priest at the St. Ephrem Orthodox church in Mosul.

"He was a good man and we all shed tears for him ... He was a man of peace," said Eman Saaur, a 45-year-old schoolteacher who said she attended Iskender's church regularly.



**Iraq's Christians have been repeatedly attacked by Muslims**

### Pope apology demanded

Iskender's relatives, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, said the unidentified group that seized Iskender on Sunday had demanded a ransom and that his church condemn a statement made by Pope Benedict XVI last month.

Before Iskender was kidnapped, his relatives said, the church already had put up signs condemning the statement and calling for good relations between Christians and Muslims.

The message was posted again, they said, after the priest's kidnappers made their demand.

"It was a tragedy," said Hazim Shaiya, 60, who had come to the memorial service to pay respects.

"Father Amer Iskender was a peaceful, kind religious man."

In a speech at a German university Pope Benedict had quoted a medieval Greek emperor saying that some Muslim teachings were "evil and inhuman" and that Islam was a violent religion spread by the sword.

Muslims worldwide staged violent protests in response.

In the West Bank several churches were attacked and in Somalia a Catholic nun was shot dead.



**Mosul was a centre of Christianity in Iraq prior to the US invasion**

## Christians flee Iraq

The news of the priest's murder came as the leader of an Iraqi Christian group said that more than 35,000 Iraqi Christians have fled to Syria to escape the violence in their country.

Christians are leaving because of individual threats from Muslim extremists and the general deterioration of security in Iraq, Emmanuel Khoshaba, the Syrian Orthodox head of the Assyrian and Democratic Movement, said on Thursday.

Christians are frequently attacked by Muslims in Iraq.

Islamic groups have carried out several car bomb attacks on churches and Christian areas.

Christian women have also been kidnapped in large numbers, and on other occasions been killed for not following Islamic social and dress codes.

Khoshaba's figure indicates an increase of 75 per cent from the 20,000 Iraqi Christians who were said to have moved to Syria in 2004, the year after US-led forces invaded Iraq and began the conflict.

Christians made up around three per cent of Iraq's pre-war population 26 million people.

Source: Aljazeera + Agencies