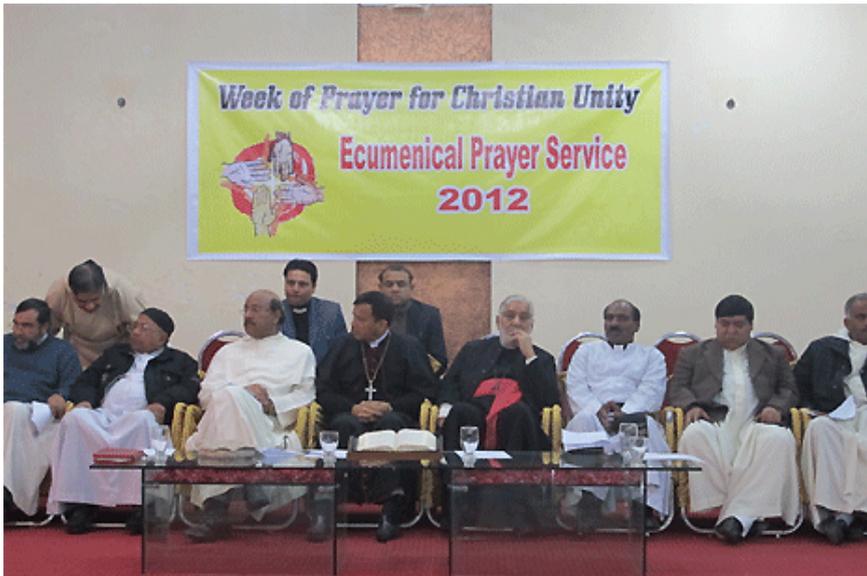


Leaders warn: ‘unofficial churches’ are dividing the community.



Christian Leaders in Pakistan warn that ‘unofficial churches’ are dividing the community at a time when unity is essential.

After complaining about their activities for years, Catholic and Protestant leaders yesterday demanded that action be taken against “unofficial” churches whom they accuse of dividing Christians and acting like businesses.

“We strongly recommend bishops separate unofficial churches from mainstream ones. An intra-church committee must be formed to counter the challenges they pose and fight for the rights of the community,” said Father Francis Nadeem, patron of the National Council for Interfaith Dialogue NCID.

He was addressing an ecumenical prayer meeting attended by 10 priests and 10 pastors yesterday at the “Peace Hall” of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Lahore.

Bishop Sebastian Shah of Lahore and Church of Pakistan Bishop Mano Rumalshah, the former bishop of Peshawar presided over the event.

“NGO type churches are hurting our image as a Christian people. Self-made pastors and bishops are a serious concern,” said Father James Channan, regional coordinator for the United Religious Initiative.

Both Catholic and Protestant speakers also highlighted threats to unity in the local Christian community and urged the need for joint meetings between the recognized Churches to deal with problems arising from the threats posed by terrorism, violence and depression.

Struggling against discrimination and extremism for decades, the Catholic Church in Pakistan has long been wary about the intentions of unofficial churches which are mostly based in slums and Christian villages.

Their leaders are often accused of “entrapping” Church members by offering money, land and even honorary doctorate degrees.

“Without a parish or even church buildings [in some cases], such people attract the poor. This unconsecrated form of preaching usually results in confusion, scandal and controversy,” Fr Channan added.

UCAnews