News

Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilo

Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of the Holy Family Church; Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem; and Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III visit the Holy Family Church in Gaza City July 18. A day earlier, the Israeli army struck the church in an attack that killed three and injured others. (CNS/Courtesy Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem)



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An Israel Defense Forces investigation concluded that the strike on the Holy Family Parish compound on July 17 was the result of an accidental mortar round that veered off course during "operational activity" by IDF troops in the area of Gaza City, the IDF said in a July 23 statement.

Three elderly people were killed and 10 injured in the strike.

The statement — posted on IDF's Telegram channel July 23 — noted the damage to the church structure and the injured, but made no mention of the three elderly civilians who were killed. Two severely injured victims of the attack have been transferred to Israeli hospitals for medical treatment.

"Following the incident, guidelines for opening fire near religious buildings, shelters, and other sensitive sites were further clarified," it said. "The IDF directs its military strikes solely at military targets and works to mitigate harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure as much as possible, including religious institutions. The IDF regrets any harm caused to civilians," it added.

The Latin Patriarchate said it had learned about the completion of the inquiry only through the press and reiterated that the findings "underscored the grave dangers" involved in carrying out "military operations in the vicinity of religious and civilian sites."

"They once again highlight the vital importance of upholding the principles of international humanitarian law," the patriarchate said in a statement sent to journalists July 23 and signed by spokesman Farid Jubran.

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While the IDF stated it had "facilitated entry" of humanitarian aid into Gaza at the request of the patriarchate, the patriarchate clarified — amid ongoing confusion — that although it received authorization to deliver food and medical supplies to the Holy Family compound, the aid had not yet been transferred.

"Upon completion of the necessary dispatch and access procedures, and once the aid reaches its destination, it will be distributed to support the residents of the compound and the surrounding neighborhoods," the patriarchate said in its statement.

During a July 22 press conference, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who visited the Gaza Strip and Holy Family Parish July 18-20, called on U.S. President Donald Trump and other world leaders to be "proactive and to take an important role in order to stop this devastation" to put an end to the 22-month-long war.

"It is time to end this nonsense, end the war and put the common good of people as the top priority," he said.

"Christ is not absent from Gaza," Pizzaballa told journalists. "He is there — crucified in the wounded, buried under rubble and yet present in every act of mercy, every candle in the darkness, every hand extended to the suffering."