

## ***After the Shock***

### ***A clear message of hope in the face of terrorism.***

*Recent headlines have been hard to bear. On May 12, a group of armed jihadists burned a church down in Burkina Faso, and killed at least six people, including the priest, while the congregation was at Sunday Mass. An event that occurred barely weeks after the Easter Sunday bombings in the Sri Lankan cities of Colombo and Negomba, where Catholic and other Christian churches were targeted by suicide bombers.*

*But there is hope. Indrajith Sriwanka Gunasekera of Christ the King Parish, organizer of a special Mass for the victims of the April 21<sup>st</sup> terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, explains...*



*Fr. Peter Nemcek, parochial vicar of St. Mary's Cathedral, celebrated a special Mass on April 28 to commemorate the dead and injured of the Sri Lanka Easter Sunday suicide bombings.*

April 28. Families of the Sri Lankan Catholic community, supported by Sri Lankan Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims, attend a Mass to commemorate the 258 dead and 500 injured in the wake of Easter Sunday attacks. The church is full to capacity. Indrajith Sriwanka Gunasekera, who first conceived of the commemoration, is quite touched.

“I am very happy with the turnout. The Sri Lankan community is quite small. There are about 500 families in Manitoba. It was good to see so many Buddhist, Hindus and Muslims in attendance. In fact, there were more Muslims at Christ the King than Catholics! Their presence sent a clear message.”

According to the 2012 Sri Lanka census, Buddhist make up 70.1 % of the population. Hindus represent 12.6 %, while Muslims make up 9.7 % and Christians 7.6 %. They are predominantly Roman Catholic.

“Currently, there must be about 50 Catholic Sri Lankan families, notes Indrajith Sriwanka Gunasekera. Many are from the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, although a good 20 attend Mary Mother of the Church Parish.”



Originally from a town just north of Colombo, Indrajith Sriwanka Gunasekera is the Pastoral council chairperson at Christ the King Parish. “I teach catechism, am an extraordinary minister of communion and a Knight of Columbus. This is my spiritual home. So, I was particularly touched by Archbishop LeGatt’s written message to those assembled for the Mass.”

***The shock and uncertainty following the attacks has also been deeply felt across the world. Among Catholics and other Christians who were specifically targeted, but also among all people of faith and good will who reject intolerance, hatred and violence, this attack will leave lasting wounds. It will also call us to take up renewed efforts to promote dialogue and mutual understanding.***

- **Albert LeGatt**

Dialogue and mutual understanding began with several speakers from other Sri Lankan faith communities. Venerable Siriathana Opatha Thero of the Manitoba Buddhist Vihara, and Venerables Medhankara Thero and Sasana Sarana Thero, both from the Mahamevuna Buddhist Monastery, spoke of peace and nonviolence. The Reverend Venkut Machiraju, of the St. Vital Hindu Temple and Mr. Ismuth, who represented Winnipeg Muslim families, also shared their grief for the attacks and their solidarity with the Sri Lankan Catholics present.

“Theirs was a message of peace and hope”, notes Indrajith Sriwanka Gunasekera.

For the full version of Bishop LeGatt’s message to the Sri Lankan community, [click here](#).

For a photo gallery of the April 28 Mass, [click here](#).