

## Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

The other day I read about a remarkable 69-year old Roman Catholic nun and her inspiring ministry of reconciliation in her native Sri Lanka. As you will no doubt remember, on Easter Day there were horrific attacks on three churches and three hotels in that country. At least 253 people were killed and 500 injured.

One of the churches targeted was St Sebastian's Church in Katuwapitiya, Negombo, where 149 people were killed. The attacks themselves were devastating for those affected. Yet they also had a far-reaching effect on relations between the different religious groups in the country. For instance, the authorities have used counterterrorism laws to arbitrarily arrest and detain Muslims, and threats of violence forced refugees from Pakistan and Afghanistan to seek shelter at police stations and mosques. If anything the mood has since changed for the worse and the country's Cardinal and other clergy are advocating that their people distance themselves from Muslims.

That is not at all the position of Sister Noel Christine, though. As well as supporting survivors of the attack and the families of victims she now spends some of her time trying to heal those divisions stoked by Sri Lanka's religious and political leaders. Not only does she talk to members of her own Catholic community but she also holds discussions with Buddhists, Muslims and other Christian groups.

Her message is that of peace. With others she formed the Negombo United People's Alliance to help stop violence from spreading. Her help for Ahmadi Muslim refugees from Pakistan has angered some local Muslims. She thus sees conflict both between and within different religious faiths. Not all nuns and priests agree with her support for Muslims. Yet she continues fearlessly her work of outreach. According to a priest who has worked with her for 40 years she has never taken a holiday. As she has said: "The Pope says we have to be a contradiction to the world of injustice." – and this is surely an important part of her motivation.

Sister Christine credits the example and encouragement of younger Catholic nuns and interfaith activists for giving her the energy to continue. She has said: "The Church has to tolerate me. I'm almost 70. In Negombo, we have come together as a united group. This will make it easier to reconcile while many are still dividing Sri Lanka."

We give thanks for the determined and sacrificial ministry of reconciliation of Sister Christine and we pray that her efforts may bear fruit. Here is a truly inspiring example of a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ showing God's love in action.

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