

Susantha lost his wife, his two beautiful daughters and seven-year-old son in the deadly Colombo Easter Sunday bombings.

Will you please join other caring Australian Catholics in helping him overcome this devastating trauma?

Will you give a gift to help fund urgently needed counselling and support for bombing survivors?

Dear friend,

I am Father Brian Lucas, National Director of Catholic Mission and I've recently returned from what, I must confess, is one of the most confronting visits of my priestly life.

I have been to see the survivors of Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday bombings – innocent people whose lives have been ripped apart.

It has been months now since that terrible day and much has been done to help those in need. But I can barely tell you how much there is still to do.

The plight of those who remain has moved me greatly and inspired me to write asking for your help as a caring member of our Catholic community.

Will you please open your heart this Christmas to survivors of the Easter Sunday bombings with a gift to help fund urgently needed trauma counselling and support?

While in Colombo, I met Susantha.

I took a photo in the mass graveyard in the grounds of the Chapel of Martyrs at St Sebastian Church Negombo.

The tombstone that he is kissing – his son's – stands alongside those of his wife and two daughters.

Susantha's pain is unimaginable. Profound. And he is reminded of it day after traumatic day as his work as a taxi driver forces him again and again into the area where this horrific tragedy was perpetrated.

I prayed with Susantha at his family's graves, together with my colleague in Sri Lanka, Father Basil Fernando and his team.

He will need many more prayers, I am sure, but like so many of the bombing survivors he will also need professional trauma counselling and support.



This support is not only expensive and likely needed over many years, it must also be highly tailored to the special needs of the individual victims.

Your support is such an important part of the Catholic Mission effort. Will you please help again so these people who are so traumatised following the bombing can get the special care they need?

Father Fernando's team is, on advice from their trauma counsellors, right now organising for Susantha to spend some time recuperating away from his traumatic memories.

And they are doing so much more, for Susantha and other victims.

On Easter Sunday this year, three churches in Sri Lanka and three luxury hotels were targeted in a series of coordinated terrorist suicide bombings.

At the Shrine of St. Anthony, where I visited, there is a beautiful memorial where you can see the names of 115 victims, lives brutally taken at that one church alone.

Across the country, no less than 259 people died that terrible day. At least 500 more were injured.

And the number of people directly impacted beyond that – the surviving mothers, fathers, children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, and colleagues – is incalculable.

I am trying to raise money for these people. Will you please help?

A memorial chapel is being built in honour of victims in the grounds of St Sebastian Church, with funds donated by concerned Catholics from across the globe.

I only pray that together we can be so generous in helping to rebuild the lives of people like Susantha.

Father Fernando told me about some of the Colombo diocese's efforts to date.

They have secured the services of trauma counsellors, Thomas and Kamilla de Silva, from the Emmaus Centre in Colombo to support survivors.

The victims are fortunate to have access to this incredibly qualified and extensively experienced team. It's a sad truth that trauma counselling has been in high demand in Sri Lanka over the past few decades, because of the Tamil War.

Thomas and Kamilla have had many years working with victims of the Tamil War. Indeed, one highly successful support program they are running calls on these very victims.

The program is called "On the Road to Peace" and it involves Thomas and Kamilla bussing Easter Sunday bombing survivors from Colombo to the north of Sri Lanka for group therapy sessions with Tamil War survivors.

"Overcoming trauma can seem impossible when you're in the middle of it," says Kamilla.

"In this program, our patients meet people who have seen and experienced trauma and violence that is at least equal – sometimes much worse – than their own. And survived! People who are now happy and living full, rewarding lives. It shows them they can have hope. That they can find a way."

Can you make a gift to help support incredibly valuable work like this?

One of the things that moved me greatly in Colombo was meeting survivors in person.

I've already told you of Susantha. I also met Thilina during a hospital visit, a 34-year-old woman who will likely need care for the rest of her life because of the traumatic brain injury she suffered that day.

I met whole families of children who had lost one or both parents.

If you could have met eleven-year-old Tenjuni, seen her hopeful smile and, just above it, the wicked scar that traced up and through her hairline, a souvenir of attending Mass on Easter Sunday, it would have broken your heart.

As it did mine.

Tenjuni is one of three siblings whose mother was stolen away from them in the bombings. Their father is doing his best but is himself deeply traumatised.

It would be a pity if this family was to put aside their future while they work to overcome the injury of the present.

We can't let that happen. Will you please help with a gift today?

A key focus of our efforts in Colombo will be to establish scholarships for the surviving children of bombing victims.

My colleagues have identified 271 children like Tenjuni who will need this kind of support – ranging from primary school-age to university-age.

Your generous donation can help fund a long-term program of scholarships, expected to run for eight to nine years (or longer if needed) that will give these children not only hope, but a future.

Your gift will also support similar projects in Sri Lanka and around the world.

I have only scratched the surface of what is being done, but I think Father Fernando puts it perfectly when he says:

"I am trying to launch programs to provide immediate relief to children and families affected by the bombing and to provide long-term trauma counselling and spiritual care for victims and their families.

"We appeal to you to come forward and assist us in carrying out these programs, however you can. We are taking every opportunity to be of help and support to the affected in every way possible.

"We kindly look forward to your generous assistance in our darkest hours."

Please, will you consider a gift before Christmas?

Yours in Christ,

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink. It consists of two parts: a stylized initial 'B' on the left and the name 'Lucas' written in a cursive script on the right.

Father Brian Lucas
National Director, Catholic Mission

P.S. The deadly Colombo Easter Sunday bombings cruelly stole 115 innocent souls from their families at the Shrine of St Anthony Church. Its devastation didn't stop there. The fathers, mothers, sons and daughters left behind must go on. Will you make a donation to help provide urgently needed comfort, care and counselling to the traumatised survivors?