



## DAL NOSTRO CORRISPONDENTE, 1 GENNAIO

At the moment there are 14 Churches in Colombo, Payagala, Kalutara, Wadduwa, Moratuwa and Negombo having refugee camps. Worst affected is the Payagala area. There are over 6000 people in the camp who have lost everything. Therefore more concentration is on this camp. According to the news reaching us today there are nearly 29,000 dead and still nearly 35,000 missing, either they are under the debris or misplaced. Catholic Church is highly involved with the relief work.

His Grace the Archbishop Oswald Gomis called an emergency meeting of the Council Fathers to plan out the relief and rehabilitation work. There are 3 Committees setup for the Kalutara, Colombo and Negombo regions. Archbishop also gave directives to



the Churches to avoid all the external celebrations in Church Feasts and to have the Prayer services during the Feasts to pray more intensely and to make aware the people to help the victims generously. He also has appealed to the youth groups in the Churches to come forward and join in the rehabilitation work. Yesterday Youth Groups of Waga and Hanwella Churches worked at Payagala. Many youth in Colombo were seen collecting dry rations and other materials to be taken to affected areas.

Yesterday being the day of mourning, Archbishop joined in the Religious Service organized by the President and appealed to all the civil leaders, political parties and other organizations to come together to rebuild Sri Lanka. He insisted at this moment no one should seek any political or financial advantages, but appealed to shed their differences to work together. People in Sri Lanka hope that the government will utilize the funds in a better organized way in the rehabilitation work.

Archbishop also appealed to the Fathers to have special prayers services for all the Dead and for all the victims. Archbishop presided at the special Mass arranged by the Archdiocese at St. Mary's Church, Nayakanda. Archbishop thanked the Fathers and the people for working day and night to help these people. School holidays have been extended. Children of these affected areas have nothing in their hands. Some children still haven't come out of their fear and dreadful experiences. It will take lot of time for them to settle down. When the schools start, they will find that they have lost their classmates, friends, teachers and that they have gone away with the tidal waves. What a tragedy !! We are very much concern of that too. I was in Galle and Matara on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec. '04 with the Archbishop and 7 priests. We saw lorry loads of dead bodies brought to the cemeteries for burial. People were crying and crying and crying. We saw bodies floating in the Matara river, police and voluntary people were helping to get these bodies out of the river.

Still there are bodies under the walls and rubbles. We just can't believe that this could happen within 10-12 minutes to bring unimaginable devastation.

Statue of Matara Church was taken away with the waves. When we at Matara, Parish Priest Fr. Charles Hewawasam told us that the statue was found again at another place under the bushes. Many people were flocking again to see this miraculous statue. They have found the statue without a single damage and even the crown was found without any damages.

Please remember the people in your prayers.

**Fr. Sunil De Silva**

*(Segretario dell'Arcivescovo di Colombo - Sri Lanka)*