



June 1, 2019

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

On Sunday, April 28, 2019 a "minyan" of Hillcrest Jewish Center members visited the Holy Family Roman Catholic Church in Fresh Meadows to stand in solidarity and to extend condolences for the murder of 253 people in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. I was invited by Father Fornari to share a few words, which I would like to share with you as well, hoping for the day where no need to comfort each other would be necessary.

**Invocation at Holy Family Roman Catholic Church in Fresh Meadows
By Rabbi Manes Kogan**

Dear friends,

Thank you so much for allowing me to share a few thoughts with you this morning.

Last November we were horrified when Jewish worshippers were killed in a synagogue in Pittsburgh. Only a few weeks ago we watched in dismay on the news how Muslim worshippers were killed in New Zealand, and last Sunday, the horror repeated itself, when 253 people were killed in Sri Lanka, most of them Catholics who were celebrating Easter.

Pastor Martin Niemöller left us one of the most powerful statements of human responsibility.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

The Jewish people know too well how it feels when nobody speaks for you, how it feels to be a persecuted minority, how it feels to practice your faith at the risk of your life.

The Torah commands us (Deuteronomy 10:19): "And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." In other words, the Torah wants us to take our own experience of suffering, of persecution, of loneliness, and exploitation, and translate it into action, into love, into welcoming, into empathy.

When the shooter in Pittsburgh entered the Tree of Life Synagogue, shooting right and left and killing 11 people, Muslim and Christian leaders in Fresh Meadows and Jamaica Estates visited Hillcrest Jewish Center to express words of comfort and to stand in solidarity.

And it is with the same feeling that I stand with you today, accompanied by members of Hillcrest Jewish Center, to share with all of you our feelings of deep sadness and utmost consternation for the killing of innocent people in Sri Lanka, most of them Catholics, like you, who only wished to worship in peace.

I am here to tell you that if and when they come for the Catholics, I will speak out.

And if and when they come for the Muslims, I will speak out,

And if and when they come for the members of the LGBT community, I will speak out,

And if and when they come for those who proclaim they have no God, I will speak out.

And yes, if and when they come for the Jews, I will continue to speak out.

And I take comfort in knowing that if and when I speak out, I won't be alone. I know that all of you, my neighbors, my friends, men and women of peace, regardless of your religion, color, and belief, will be with me, the same way you have been until now.

Because only when we are united in peace, love, compassion, understanding, and kindness, can we defeat those who advocate hatred, separation, and intolerance.

And it is because I believe that it is not enough to talk the talk, but we must walk the walk, that I stand with you today.

May God bless all of us with faith, strength, and peace.