

Over my working lifetime I have been privileged to work on Australian Federal Police and United Nations missions in a number of countries. I was exposed to dozens of nationalities, cultures, beliefs and a range of faiths. Often the environments we worked in were post-conflict, troubled, disturbing and dangerous. My colleagues and I worked in places where sometimes there was just two of us as a 'Mission' and on other occasions there were large contingents that were usually dispersed, often in pairs across vast or difficult geographical spaces.

Depending on where we were, we worked side by side with our country person, or we worked in different roles but were co-located in a team site or sometimes in accommodation. Sometimes, depending on the role we were assigned we may have gone about our work 'one up'.

At some other time, I will tell more about my faith journey and how being a Peacekeeper impacted me. The important part I wish to share here is that I have both lived and worked in a variety of places. The salient word is that I *lived* in those communities.

In Cyprus I lived at Ledra Palace (don't be fooled by the name) in the buffer zone being awoken by the Call to Prayer every morning. I lived in Amman, whilst I was training Iraqi Police officers at Jordan International Police Training Centre and I worked in Sudan where I again found myself in a Muslim dominated area. (These were not my only missions but are the ones relevant here)

My role in Cyprus was as Humanitarian Officer. I worked mainly with the Turkish people in North Cyprus. I arranged family visits for those who lived on opposite sides of the buffer zone to their family whom they were split from when the divide occurred decades before. There were communities of Maronites (including nuns) that lived in the North West who received regular Humanitarian supplies, there were medical evacuations from the North to the South as the facilities were better, especially Natal care, and each day I obtained prescriptions from a Greek pharmacy to assist those in the North with medications that were difficult to obtain. During my time there I went to Nicosia language school to assist me to communicate with the Turks. They loved us and truly respected Australians! The Turkish and Greeks were always keen to answer my questions of faith and their culture.

My work in Jordan some years later was a short teaching mission of only 4 months during the 2nd gulf war but I lived in the community of Amman. There were dozens of police instructors from around the world. When I wasn't teaching (through interpreters) I spent many hours talking about faith and learning more about the culture, especially from our female interpreters, I could ask them all the questions a white Christian woman hoped to learn to understand from a Muslim woman.

During my time in Sudan in 2008, I was a UN Police Sector Commander and was once again living amongst a mainly Muslim community, and many of our UN counterparts were from over 40 countries around the globe. I was further exposed to learning more about different faiths and had many hours of discussions with Muslims and Christians from across Africa and around the globe.

I have also sat a number of times with people who were dying and I have prayed with them and help them to find comfort prior to their passing. So, although I personally felt very distressed at the thought of people having their lives taken from them whilst innocently praying in Christchurch a part of me felt happy that they were at worship, following their faith journey when they transitioned from this life.

I felt it important to me to be at the Peace Park on Tuesday last week to be present, to pray and be respectful. It was so poignant to hear the Peace Bell sound for those who lost their lives.



The enormity of the events in Christchurch was enhanced with seeing 50 empty prayer rugs, lined up, with a Candle on each rug. I nearly came undone seeing two little prayer rugs sitting amongst the beautiful colour of those woven rugs.

*50 Bells rang out across the Lake
50 Prayer rugs lay empty
50 Beautiful souls remembered
They are Us*

On Friday 22 March, one week after the Christchurch murders, I attended at the Canberra Mosque on Empire Circuit alongside a number of Uniting Church Ministers, members, family, friends and some local residents. We got there early and were present as the Canberra Muslim Community slowly gathered.



Pictured on the left is Javad an Iranian who came to Australia in 1976 with members of UCA, their families and locals who wanted to show support.

I listened intently as I heard the familiar call to prayer from within the Mosque, it was quiet and seemed strange to hear it so quietly when I am used to having heard it hailed from Speakers high upon Minarets, loudly calling to those people who scurried not to be late.

I listened intently as I heard the Imam talking in English to those who were gathered, those who were in their community of prayer for the first time since Friday the 15th of March. I heard him mention us being outside and how much it meant that we were gathered to show love and support so they could pray in peace.

I watched the familiar movements and rituals as they shifted to Arabic and undertook their usual prayers. Movements that I had seen in Cyprus, Jordan and Sudan and other countries where I had worked with Muslim counterparts.

I thought about the prayer rugs I have at home that were that were gifts to me. I think of that young 3 year old from Christchurch and I am reminded of the baby that didn't make it that I had to return to the Muslim grandparents in Nth Cyprus. I am reminded of the grief I have seen following mass deaths in East Timor and tribal wars in Sudan. Watching and listening to the rituals of others in prayer and grief reminds me that grief is universal.

Then the Friday prayers were finished. I was overwhelmed at the number of people who came to us afterwards they were from so many nationalities they were African, White, Arabic, Turk, Indonesian, male, female. Some shook hands, some touched their hands to their hearts, some hugged us. I greeted and I thanked them from the broken pieces of languages I remembered.

One man paused at Anne Ryan taking her hand "Thank you from the Turkish Muslim community" "Tessekkur" I responded. His face displayed shock at first and then he took my hand and kissed me in a manner that I am familiar with first one cheek and then the other.

So many people “Marhaba” “As-Salaam alaikum”, “Wa-aliakum Salaam”, “Shukran” it was overwhelming and so touching. It was hard not to cry. They were so grateful, so gracious and I felt so humble and undeserving of such thanks.

All I had done was to stand there.

Today I stood outside a Mosque with nothing to give but love & grace.

Today I was showered with abundant gratitude.

Thank you’s, handshakes, hugs and tears.

Words, kisses, no words but hands on hearts.

Today I found humility and humbleness by just standing outside a Mosque

Delia Quigley

Co-Chair

Canberra Region Presbytery