

The Voice

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Australian Peacekeeping - a time to reflect

The following address was given by Matt Burke OAM, Past President, Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans' Association (Vic) at the recent St. George's East St. Kilda Uniting Church Annual Memorial Service. Matt had a 25 Year Military career (Army) as a Force Sergeant Major serving in Morocco, Algeria, and Western Sahara.

Distinguished guests, ladies, gentlemen and young people, I particularly acknowledge Mr. Gordon Traill, past vice president of the APPVA. Good morning. I thank Rev John Bottomley and Rev Angela Tampiyappa for inviting me to be your guest speaker, and speak to you today, about Australian Peacekeeping.

During this week in:

- 1990 UN Security Council resolution no 665 had Australia contribute a Naval task force to Iraq.
- 1994 The Australian Medical Support Force lands at Kigali, Rwanda, in response to the human disaster.
- 1999 NATO establishes the Kosovo Force under the UN Security Council resolution no 1244.
- 2003 Australia deploys the Special Operations Task Group to Afghanistan.
- 2008 Joint Task Force No 637 returns from Kiribati Group of Islands after destroying 370 pieces of ordinance.
- Last Tuesday we remembered Vietnam Veterans Day-18th August- the 43rd anniversary of the Battle Long Tan.

So today is a special day - where we remember and reflect. So my title, 'Australian Peacekeeping - A Time to Reflect'.

Australia's peacekeeping history

Peter Wilson, in his book 'The Domestication of the Human Species' tells us that, since our evolution as humans, we have developed abilities such as language, tool making, and culture. This means human relations of interaction, adaptation and dialectics with our environment must be tripartite, all working together. Sadly the reality of violence and war means this is not the case in our world today.

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On 14 September 2007, Australia celebrated the 60th anniversary of the first deployment of four Australians. These were Brig L.G.Dyke (RAA), Commander H.S.Chesterman (RAN), Maj D.L.Campbell & Sqn Ldr D.T Spence, DFC. All are noted as the first Australians and world's first ever Peacekeepers to deploy into the field to Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) under the auspices of the United Nations Good Offices Commission.

Since 1947 Australia has contributed over 66,000 Australian military and police to more than fifty-five peace operations in 73 countries around the world, from the Middle East and Sudan to places closer to home such as East Timor.

Australia's excellent reputation, and now its 62nd year's history in peacekeeping, is a proud one but tends to go largely unreported. Australia contributes significantly to today's peace operations (Peacekeeping, Peacemaking & Peace Enforcement) with military and police contingents and with civilian experts in a wide range of supporting roles such as governance, institution building, electoral reform, and border control. Australia is presently supporting UN missions in the Middle East, in the Sudan, Cyprus, and Timor Leste, and is a partner in coalition peace operations in the Sinai, in the Solomon Islands, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Most recently Australia has now withdrawn our troop involvement to Iraq.

... the old inequalities are now magnified, globalised, and open to manipulation by those savvy in the use of culture and communications. Warfare cannot stand aloof from the influences of globalisation.

- Peter Cosgrove

In the autobiography on General Peter Cosgrove AC, MC, it states "there have always been the haves and have-nots in the global community, but the old inequalities are now magnified, globalised, and open to manipulation by those savvy in the use of culture and communications. Warfare cannot stand aloof from the influences of globalisation."

Peacekeeping has been a long standing commitment for the ADF with a variety of smaller contingents and individuals deployed across a wide range of missions over the years. This increased in the 1980s and 1990s with some significant unit sized contributions to peace operations in Africa and Asia, and this has been followed recently by our major contributions in the near region in Bougainville, Timor Leste, and the Solomon Islands. Our record from these operations is very sound and Australian military are well renowned as effective and flexible peacekeepers.

Australian police also have an excellent and long term record in international peacekeeping, with contingents in Cyprus continually since 1964, but recently with much larger contingents deployed in the near region, including to Timor Leste, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. To respond to this surge, the Australian Federal Police has now created an International Deployment Group, comprising police from federal, state and territory police forces, which are being specifically trained and prepared for offshore peacekeeping and stabilization deployments. We have seen the benefit of this capability in their partnership with the ADF and other actors in the recent regional peace operations.

Praying for personal and world peace

My own service was in the Western Sahara, back in 1993/94, where I was the Force Sergeant Major to a multi-national force comprising 27 nationalities and 4000 troops and civilians. Our job was to monitor a 'ceasefire' between the Moroccan Armed Forces and the Polisario (Freedom Fighters), and to set up a referendum where voting and democracy would prevail. Sadly, even today there is still no referendum in the Western Sahara!! My mission lasted 7 months, from Nov 93 to May 94. It spanned the Christian calendar for 'Christmas and Easter'; times when I really missed my family.

There were many times when I thought "Will I ever see them again?"

Our first reading today is from 1 Kings:8, where Solomon's prayer asks 'Where is God?' and 'Who is God with?' In particular verse 28, 'Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day'.

I prayed daily, at night. I asked God to forgive me, but also to 'Hear my prayer', for my safe return home, and to keep my family safe. I also prayed every time I went out on operations by land and air. My faith in God assisted me to cope with the rigors of my tour of duty.

Today's peacekeeping activity around the world is more significant than ever before. At the moment, there are some 18 United Nations "Blue Helmet" Peacekeeping Operations active, involving over 105,000 military, police and international civilians from 117 countries. Sadly

over our Peacekeeping & Peacemaking history we have lost many. We have a vale to 50 veterans since 1947, and animals like our sniffer dogs.

I ponder over the 2nd Reading today from Ephesians Chap 6, 'Put on the armour of God, and be prepared to follow God's holy war'. Australian Peacekeepers have been 'putting on the armour of God' for 62 years, and continue to do so. They do this so that mankind will live in Peace and Harmony, so that nations can rebuild communities from the ravages of war, so that the values of society can be upheld, and so that law and order may prevail.

I recall putting on the armour of God on my mission, when on a significant military day like ANZAC Day; I put together a small service. Yes we had a Dawn Service. I read some scripture. I believe it was the 23rd Psalm, 'The Lord is my shepherd'. We prayed the Lords Prayer, and we stopped and paused a moment for our past history. No long sermon was necessary, but they all knew I believed in God

Remembrance

Our Peacekeepers are proud to march on ANZAC Day, and we celebrate the following key dates as well:

- 29 May International Day of PK
- 14 Sep Australian Peacekeeping Day
- 24 Oct United Nations Day

This leads me to my next and final theme, the Construction of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial

The proposed Australian Peacekeeping Memorial will be designed to commemorate the courage, sacrifice, service and valour of Australians, given in the same spirit of service on peacekeeping operations, as do the other cenotaphs and memorials across Australia and on ANZAC Parade in Canberra. It will celebrate Australia's long and distinguished contribution to international peacekeeping over the past 62 years.

The hundreds of Australians involved in peace operations worldwide and their families will take a moment to reflect on the contribution they are making to restore order and security to communities affected by war and civil unrest and to remember those who have given their lives for that cause.

This Memorial will commemorate and celebrate the past and present role of Australian Peacekeeping around the globe, and the very real contribution by Australian military and police in the often dangerous situations they face. The Memorial seeks to show that Australia's contribution to peacekeeping exemplifies Australian values of openness, fairness, egalitarianism, mateship, initiative, and respect for diversity and social justice for all people.

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Our Target is \$4M, and the date: 14 Sep 2012. The site allocated on Anzac Parade for the Memorial is the one nearest to Constitution Avenue on the Campbell side. We had over one hundred entries from around the world submitted for consideration for the Memorial Design.

Entries for the design of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial were requested to ensure that the proposed Memorial portray appropriate messages about Australian peacekeeping. That the Memorial should record with pride the achievement of our peacekeepers, that it should recognize the difficult and often dangerous nature of peace operations, that it should acknowledge the sacrifices those peacekeepers and their families have suffered, and that it should educate the community about the noble and positive impact of peace operations around the world.

You can find out much more about the plans for the Memorial by visiting the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project (APMP) web site at www.peacekeepingmemorial.org.au.

Conclusion

Peacekeeping is a difficult and often dangerous assignment. Australian contingents led by young Australian military officers and NCOs from all 3 services, Navy, Army & Air Force and police, supported by civilian experts, have performed very well over many years in these difficult circumstances. Unfortunately; as in other dangerous overseas operations, Australian peacekeepers have also suffered casualties. Some have died or been injured, and many have been traumatized by peace operations. As Australian Defence Force personnel and Police and Civilians continue to 'Put on the Armour of God, to uphold the values of Law and Order, and to re build communities affected by war and civil unrest' let us reflect and remember them and their families. "We will remember them". "Lest We Forget". Thank you and God bless.

Margaret and the Prophet

CMN Board member Barry Mitchell offered this reflection to begin the August Board meeting.

I was asked to prepare a reflection on Isaiah 56, but resisted at first because I usually have difficulty relating the words of the Prophet to everyday life. However, when I read the verse about not having sons and daughters, I suddenly thought of my aunt Margaret, who died recently at the age of 90.

Margaret married late in life and had no children of her own. There were many trials and traumas in her life, beginning with the death of her mother when she was just 3 years old. Her father, my grandfather, arranged for her to live with friends after her mother's death, and she grew up having little contact with him, and separated from her two older brothers. She lacked confidence in herself, and struggled to find her place in the world.

At the age of 42 she married, but continued to have very little contact with her father and brothers, finding them difficult to relate to, and often getting very angry with them. In later years she struggled with personal demons and health problems including deafness and the onset of dementia. The only member of her extended family to have any meaningful contact with Margaret was my sister Lyn who managed to engage her, from the early 90's onwards, in collating information on the Mitchell family tree.

My own contact with Margaret was spasmodic until December last year, and this is where my story takes shape. Margaret was by now a resident of an aged care facility in Somerville, her husband having died the year before. For reasons we do not know, she decided she wanted to buy a Christmas gift for each of my six grandchildren, aged between 10 and 2. With the help of a member of staff, she went shopping and chose a book for each of them, had them wrapped, and attached a label to each saying Girl 10, Boy 6, etc. She didn't have their names; in fact she had never met any of them, but clearly, in her mind, they were members of her extended family.

Before handing out gifts to the children at our family Christmas gathering, we reminded

The Lord says to his people *"Do what is just and right, for soon I will save you. I will bless those who always observe the Sabbath and do not misuse it. I will bless those who do nothing evil."*

A foreigner who has joined the Lord's people should not say: *"The Lord will not let me worship with his people."*

A man who has been castrated should never think that because he cannot have children, he can never be part of God's people.

The Lord says to such a man: *"If you honour me by observing the Sabbath and if you do what pleases me and faithfully keep my covenant, then your name will be remembered in my Temple and among my people longer than if you had sons and daughters. You will never be forgotten."*

Isaiah 56:1-5 (Good News Bible)

everyone who Margaret was, and took the opportunity to explain the difference between a present and a gift. Later, we took a photo of the children holding up their books, and sent it off to Margaret, together with a thankyou note from Sarah, our oldest grandchild.

I also received a gift from Margaret on 2nd June this year when Lyn and I visited her. She was recovering from a hip operation and was very frail and confused. Lyn and I spent a couple of hours with her, feeding her, hoping she would



Margaret Mitchell circa 1945

remember who we were, talking about things of the past, and showing her a photo of herself as a young ballet dancer. (As children, both Lyn and I remember attending performances of the Borovansky Ballet where she danced in the Corps de Ballet.) Margaret responded from time to time, but it was difficult to understand what she was saying.

When we stood up to go, I leaned over to kiss Margaret on the cheek. Suddenly she put her arm around my neck and gave me a warm hug. It was a very special moment for me. I don't know who she thought I was, but I like to think I represented her father or one of her brothers.

Five days later, she died.

Margaret's story is a story about re-connecting with her family, about making her peace, about healing and reconciliation. In the words of the Prophet: "Your name will be remembered among my people longer than if you had sons and daughters. You will never be forgotten."

Deep wounds, deep love, deep healing

*Based on a sermon by Rev. Steve Crump,
chaplain at Srathdon Community*

Matthew lived in a community residential unit with five other men of similar age. Since the age of fourteen, Matthew's life has been one of living on the streets, or in boarding and rooming houses. His life has become a chronic cycle of violence, depression and self-harm. Matthew's life cycle has left him with many physical scars. One of these scars is a 7cm wound in his side.

One thing that gave Matthew meaning in his life has been the selling of the "Big Issue" which is a magazine sold by people who are unemployed and/or homeless. Matthew has set himself the goal of selling four or five copies a day.

In John's gospel, we are told that the disciples had locked themselves in their homes for fear of the Jews. They feared for their safety. In the last couple of days, Jesus their leader and teacher had been crucified and buried. They were afraid that they might receive the same

fate. If they went outside, they might be identified as followers of Jesus.

And Jesus came and stood among them and said "Peace be with you." After he showed them his hands and sides they rejoiced. They rejoiced that Jesus was not dead, but had risen from the dead. Jesus had come back to life and was with them again. Did they finally now believe, did all the teachings of Jesus about "being sent by the Father" and that Jesus was the "living bread that came down from heaven" - did this now make sense to the disciples? Did they no longer lack faith? Were they no longer afraid?

When are the times that life doesn't seem to make any sense to us? When are the times when we seem to lack faith and are engulfed and overwhelmed by fear?

Matthew's life had been a battle with mental illness, disability, self-harm and depression. When he is depressed, Matthew has a tendency to pick at and open up the wound in his side, then he goes to the local park, and puts leaves, dirty bottle tops, razorblades - whatever he can find - in to the wound. He then returns to the residential unit where he lives and informs the house staff member that he is unwell and needs to go to hospital - Matthew then lifts up his bloodied shirt to show his wound.

The staff member's reaction - especially if they have not experienced this behaviour in Matthew before - is one of sheer horror. 'Freaking out' would be the best way to describe their reaction.

Matthew then goes to hospital and has the wound cleaned out. However as the wound is not considered to be life-threatening, the doctors give Matthew the option - do you want us to treat your injury? Do you want the injury to be healed? Matthew's response to the doctors is always a "No". Therefore the cycle I have just described repeats itself over the next few years.

Matthew's 'no' to the medical staff is the same 'no' that he offers to God. Matthew's 'no' to God shuts the door on the gift of God's healing grace and leaves Matthew stuck in a cycle of depression and self abuse. Shutting out God means that Matthew does not allow anybody in. Matthew's shutting out others creates a series of broken family relationships, and volatile relationships with residential staff and the community. Just as the disciples have shut out Jesus, so has Matthew.

How easy is it for us to shut others out? Are we able to let go of our fears and share our vulnerability with others? Are we able to open ourselves to accept our human frailties and to share our sorrows with Christ - the fully human and divine one?

When the disciples tell Thomas, "We have seen Lord", Thomas says "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Thomas does not believe.

Matthew's lack of belief and trust in the medical staff to treat his wound may have a resonance with the lack of belief that Thomas demonstrates to the disciples. Matthew does not believe in the healing power of the doctors and nurses and Thomas does not believe the disciples until he can feel and see Jesus' marks for himself.

A week later, John's gospel tells us the disciples again had the doors shut. They are again shutting out Jesus and turning their backs on him. However, Jesus came and stood among them and said "Peace be with you." Then, he said to Thomas, "put your fingers here and see my hands, reach out your hand and put it in my side". Jesus says to Thomas to not doubt but believe. Thomas answered him - 'My Lord and my God'.

Jesus appearance to Thomas reminds us again that Christ's Cross and Resurrection is a victory over suffering and death. It is through the cross that our wounds are not only known to Christ, but it is through the cross which is a sign of God's love and a sign of God's hope for the world that healing is possible. It is through the Cross that Matthew's wounds are not only known to Christ, but are embraced. Christ reaches out and touches Matthew's wounds and offers healing.

What is the healing that Christ offers Matthew? Is it a physical healing for his scarred and abused body? Is it a spiritual healing that brings Matthew in touch with his own broken humanity and the broken humanity of others?

Two years ago, Matthew received a phone call from his Mother. "Matthew, I have some bad news - your stepfather has had a massive heart attack and has died." Matthew's relationship with his stepfather had been characterised by violence and abuse which led to Matthew

leaving home at the age of thirteen to live on the streets.

In the next seventeen years, Matthew rang and spoke to his Mum fairly frequently but he never visited. However, after the death of his stepfather, Matthew was able to support his Mum in her grief and loss and he was able to talk to his mother for the first time about his anger and hatred towards his stepfather's treatment of him. After seventeen years, Matthew was finally going home.

Over the next few months, Matthew experienced a lightness and a joy that he had not previously known. Matthew came to realize that his depression and anger was due to his unresolved grief at the profound loss of his relationship with his mother. And his unresolved anger at his stepfather. Like in the parable of the lost son, Matthew asked for his Mum's forgiveness, and opened himself to her love and compassion. Like the forgiving father, Matthew's Mum forgave him and welcomed him home. Matthew was also able to forgive his Mum for past hurts and injustices.

Christ's healing may come from letting go of past hurts and injustices and seeing where the spirit is at work in our lives. It is also clear that the opposite is true, that holding on to past hurts and injustices can lead to us being 'a creation in chains'. It hinders us from being in healthy relationships with others and it hinders us from being open to God's healing grace.

In John's gospel, Jesus sends the disciples, just as he was sent. This is discipleship - it sets our agenda by directing us to what Jesus did. Jesus offers light and life and truth through relationship with himself, through our relationship with God.

Matthew was able to offer light and life and hope in his relationship with his Mother. Matthew's acknowledgement and acceptance of his deep sense of loss allowed God's healing grace and the gift of the spirit to enter his life. Matthew realised that he was loved and accepted by God even in the darkest and most bleak periods of his life. He knew that gift and the spirit of God's transforming love that heals the brokenness of our lives and relationships.

As Christ said, there is no need to be afraid. As God's people we may know that the gift of the Holy Spirit equips us for what we need. When you know that gift, you may respond with thanks and praise. This is Good News. Thanks be to God.

The Shark in the Fishbowl: A PLAY-READING

Wednesday 9th December 2009, 3.00 pm – 5.00 pm

Wyselaskie Auditorium
UC Centre for Theology & Ministry
1 Morrison Close, Parkville



There's a shark in this fishbowl and nobody's doing anything about it.

This work-in-progress reading will be performed by Tiresa Ballard, Steven Smith, Janine Watson and Elizabeth Welch.

Dramaturgy by Jane Bayly.

Written and directed by Chris Thompson

Welcome to Joe's Aquarium Supplies. Joe's the boss. He's a dolphin. Likeable. Harmless. We all like dolphins but they don't make great bosses. Joe tries to please everyone and ends up pleasing no one. Alison runs the office. She's a Pike; a predatory fish that likes to ambush its prey. Alison likes to think she's the big fish in this pond. Ruby's a sucker-fish. Whatever power they have is leached off the big fish they suck up to. Ruby is the Assistant Officer Manager except on Alison's flex-day when she's in charge. She likes to get her own way, no matter who gets in her way. Kathy's the Office Assistant. She wishes she was an angel-fish, but mostly she thinks of herself as a jellyfish; a spineless mollusc hiding in its shell. Today, that shell is the stationery cupboard. Kathy's locked herself in there and she's not coming out.

Since 2005, Creative Ministries Network has been supporting the development of this performance project based on a real account of workplace bullying. This latest development will examine the potential of adapting the script to an audio or radio-play style performance.

Please join us for a rehearsed reading of the latest development of this performance project that takes a look at workplace bullying through the eyes of three people who each contribute to the problem in their own way. Who's the perpetrator? Who's the victim? Who's guilty? Who's innocent? Who can do something about this? The answer's not always as easy as it might seem. Come along and decide for yourself, and give us some feedback on how you think the project's going.

RSVP and inquiries: 9692 9426 or admin@cmn.unitingcare.org.au

Sri Lanka Partnership Program

CMN is a proud partner with St. George's UCA and the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Partnership Program raises funds for the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India. These funds will help alleviate the human suffering of those directly affected by the devastating civil war in Sri Lanka, and will support the Church's programs for healing, justice and reconciliation.

The project will receive once-off donation to alleviate human suffering and support the Church of South India ministry to those most affected by civil war. It will also ask supporters to pledge a monthly amount to support identified projects. To receive information on how the Project can debit your account automatically, please email admin@cmn.unitingcare.org.au or telephone (03) 9827 8322.

Included in this mailing is an envelope for your donation to provide a Christmas gift to a homeless child in Sri Lanka. Your donation will be forwarded directly to the Jaffna Diocese, and distributed through the Diocese's schools and children's hostels. Following the CMN Director's recent visit to the Jaffna Diocese, CMN has been inspired by the Diocese's commitment to financial integrity in its receipt and distribution of overseas donations, and the passion underlying their ministry for justice, healing and reconciliation.

Coming up at CMN

Fifth Wednesday Faithful Conversations: 30th December 2009

'Fifth Wednesday Faithful Conversations' continues to develop a conversation for those interested in exploring more intentionally the faith foundation and questions that sustain and energise the Network's ministry.

The next conversation will be on 'Companionship: reconciliation as transforming journey' The focus of the conversations is not the CMN but the life questions, faith and doubts of the participants.

The evening begins at 6.30 p.m. with a take-in meal from one of our local take-aways, and the conversation will begin around 7.00 p.m. for about an hour and a half. The cost of the meal will be split between the group, so please RSVP your attendance by noon on the day.

We look forward to chewing the faith with you on the 30th, and ensuring 2009 ends in deepening solidarity.