

REFLECTION ON A CHEQUERED CAREER



Rev Mick O'Donnell, Former Chaplain to the Australian Federal Police 2004-2009.*

Five years and an incredible ministry as Chaplain to the AFP in the International Deployment Group [IDG]. During this time I was away from Australia in an AFP deployment mission every six weeks or so - a lifetime of amazing experiences and memories as I pastorally responded to several terrorist bombings in Jakarta, the tragic Garuda crash in Yogyakarta, repatriation of deceased police officers, dozens of funerals and weddings, the aftermath of murders in the Solomon Islands, riots in the capital of Honiara, civil unrest in Dili, East Timor, suicides closer to home including conducting the funeral of Assistant Commissioner Audrey Fagan at St Christopher's, and simply being a confidential and readily available presence of God to this vital element of the AFP family.



I was the first Catholic chaplain to be appointed to the AFP by Archbishop Francis Carroll, and commissioned by Commissioner Mick Keelty with the equivalent rank of Superintendent.

My home base was at our Training Base at Majura which has a very large supporting staff. My liturgical 'home' was St Christopher's Cathedral for preaching, baptisms, wedding and funerals.

IDG became my 'parish,' and pastoral 'family'. Put this into context – in 2003



there were around 40 AFP police officers serving overseas in Cyprus and East Timor. In 2009 there are over 700 police members with the UN in the Middle East, Africa, Afghanistan, several Pacific Islands and in the Northern Territory – and still only one chaplain, although I was sometimes able to utilize the various State police Chaplains to assist me - many of our peace-keeping missions are composed of State and Federal police members - there are still around 300 personnel in the Solomon Islands, many of these have been sworn into the AFP for the duration of their deployment – often up to 100 weeks.

I was privileged to accompany Commissioner Mick Keelty on a number of

tours including a three day pre-Christmas corporate flight to Ularu, Alice Springs, Darwin, Dili and Honiara. What an extraordinary experience to support these dedicated



police officers working in the most demanding and often quite dangerous conditions.

A 30 day contemplative meditative retreat gave me insight to discern the future direction of my ministry after 17 years ordination - I turned 65 that month and on return to work, I choose to retire from this incredibly intense and reactive ministry and hand the mantle to a younger person. At my farewell, Assistant Commissioner Frank Prendergast presented me the Police Operations Medal and a large pictorial montage of my time with the AFP. One of my colleagues reiterated my thoughts at the time – *'What a ride!'* he said. Indeed it was. Amen.

*Rev 'Mick' Roger O'Donnell was awarded the Police Overseas Service Medal [clasp- Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands - RAMSI] for his chaplaincy work with the International Deployment Group by the Governor General, and the Police Operations Medal [clasp- East Timor during the civil unrest of 2006] by the AFP Commissioner.

He previously served 20 years in the RAN, retiring as a Warrant Officer, and is a Vietnam Veteran. He was the Head of Information Data Services, Bureau of Criminal Investigations with the AFP prior to commencing his theological studies at the Marist Seminary, Hunter's Hill, Sydney in 1988-1990

He was ordained as a married Deacon in 1991 by Archbishop Francis Carroll in 1991. He holds a Bachelor of Theology and a Masters of Arts in Theology.

His previous appointments have been administrator of the Adelong & Batlow, parishes in southern NSW, Archdiocesan director of Missions and Deacon of the St Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra for 8 years, and is currently assisting at the Holy Spirit Parish, Amaroo. He was instrumental in the creation of the National Guidelines for the Permanent Diaconate in Australia. Roger has been married to Cora for 45 years – they are blessed with 3 married off-spring and 10 grandchildren.
