

## **Views from the Pews – Islam and Us – 2024**

Diane and I recently flew Emirates Airlines to the UK via Dubai airport. By some measurements, they are respectively the largest airline, and the largest airport, in the world, and you do not have to look far to see evidence of a socio-economic shift in world affairs, a change that may yet be accelerated by the Gaza situation. This will come as a shock to many, brought up with the idea that the Judeo-Christian world was inherently superior, and/or that the Islamic world was a metaphor for disorder, disruption and for what we now call terrorism.

But the Muslim world is clearly here to stay.

Is there an opportunity here, particularly for nations or churches who see that world not as a threat, but as a basis for co-operation?

Two examples spring to mind. Firstly, 99% of Turkish people identify as Muslim, yet, every 25<sup>th</sup> April, they welcome us at Gallipoli. That gathering has rebounded since COVID19, which suggests a degree of resilience, a wish to build a current and future narrative, and a rejection of past dogma.

Secondly, after the Christchurch Massacre, our then Government led a pastoral initiative towards Muslim groups both in the city and beyond; again, an opportunity was seized to create healing out of pain. Is this initiative still on foot? If not, it represents an opportunity for outreach to a minority community who may still be feeling threatened by world events way beyond their control.

It is an opportunity presented to those churches who do not align with extremist Zionism (or for that matter extremist Islam), to seek out partnerships - we have a great deal in common. In particular, we have a common interest in avoiding the misinterpretation of Scripture. The Koran, like parts of the Bible, can be hijacked by the forces of violence and fear. A dialogue is well overdue, and there is a middle ground in which we can all be made to feel safe.

After all, you could get alcohol on all our flights, the female cabin crew never complied with the usual stereotypes, and the only sign of Islam was a compass as part of your flight data – pointing towards Mecca and advising when the next round of prayer was due.

There's a Mosque in Hamilton – how many of us even know it is there?

Richard Swarbrick