

**We had planned for this GO to be published in December, but were delayed by building our Interserve NZ website, and then the holiday period. So while we will normally publish two GO magazines a year – plus our new, bi-monthly GO NEWS – there will be three GO magazines in 2010.**

A while back now we decided on the topic of 'Islam' for this issue. It seems that while the felt impact of the topic gets debated quite widely, and it comes up frequently in the news media, there is still a dismal lack of real engagement. Positive, hope-filled and gracious responses to Muslims are too often drowned out by a cacophony of fear-inspiring, divisive and polarising voices. As one of our writers puts it, trying to navigate a truly Christ-like response can feel like standing in no man's land.

It is a difficult topic, and as we read the thoughtful reflections and stories of our Partners, that comes through loud and clear. Living and working amongst Islamic communities very quickly does away with any romantic notions, and no-one can accuse our writers of naïve or superficial responses. As I write, churches in Malaysia are being firebombed simply because Christians use the word 'Allah', as they have done for centuries across the Muslim world. In Iran followers of Christ are incarcerated and threatened, and in Egypt Coptic Christians mourn those shot dead in a mad, communal rampage by their Muslim neighbours. Yes, these situations are real,

as they have been through centuries past, and naïveté or political correctness has no place in the face of such tragedy and human suffering.

Yet if we genuinely believe that Jesus Christ is the great reconciler, the only one who saves, the true hope of all ages, the Messiah of God, then we cannot simply continue doing what we have done for far too long, with such poor results. We have avoided real relationship and engagement with our Muslim neighbours, while stereotyping and lumping all Muslims into an easily identifiable, threatening and unwelcome bundle that needs anti-terrorism treatment before we can truly make any effort to share the love of Christ.

Two images come to mind. My home town in Germany, once a staunch bastion of the reformation and evangelicalism, is now home to a growing Islamic community – streets with halal butcheries, Turkish travel agencies, mid-Eastern restaurants and mosques. Forty-odd years after importing the first generation of men as cheap labour to fuel our post-war economic revival, we now have second and third generations who count Germany as home, yet live in a world radically different from their German neighbours just a few houses away. The German church has largely ignored these people, and the command of Christ to go, love, serve, and make disciples, and has, in turn, missed out on the opportunity and the joy of seeing them embrace the love of

Christ. Now we wrestle with radicalisation, violence, crime, and an increasingly polarised society that many feel extremely threatened by.

The other image is just a few weeks old, a Christmas celebration at our home here in Auckland. Every December we invite a range of friends, many of them immigrants and international students, to join us for a BBQ and evening to sing, share the Christmas story, and play the 'gift game' – a fun event where everyone contributes. We were singing some of the deeply meaningful carols when my eye fell on a dear Muslim friend and her daughter. Earlier we had forgotten to provide halal sausages, so had to pick through the food offerings to ensure there would be no pork on her plate. But here she was, joining in wholeheartedly: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King!"

It actually doesn't have to be all that difficult, does it? Lord, open our eyes to re-learn the Jesus way.

*Jonas*

