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The grill

Reverend Uin Taj, senior chaplain at Sydney Mission to Seafarers, talks about Mission work, languages and the sense of inner peace that comes from playing the piano

What is your role with Mission to Seafarers Sydney?
My role is senior chaplain, or equivalent, to CEO in a corporate environment. The overall in charge of fundraising, corporate relationships and welfare of seafarers. I've been in the role for two and a half years but have been with the Mission for 16 last years and a half year.

How did you get into this role?
My previous role was in a multinational company. They wanted a replacement and I was asked to apply. I had a friend of mine who was an Anglican minister referred me. I said "yes I'll give it a go". I think it really suits me well. I speak six languages (plus dialects: English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Indonesian, Malay and Tagalog). Most are the languages of the seafarers so I am able to 'click' with them. Most seafarers are from Asian countries and speak good English. With me speaking their language it helps me to connect with them. It makes them feel very much at home. They are so close to the Mission. It's how you hear someone who speaks your own language from me. But we both agree language is a communication tool for Mission work.

What makes Mission work rewarding?
I think it's rewarding because we are able to assist seafarers who are facing difficulties – whether they are dependent on us or not. One week I went up to assist them at Christmas time to the eight people who can help. We had one seafarer stuck in Australia for 12 weeks. He was very happy through our work and was able to return his spirits and I was glad to see a smile return to his face.

How did you become a priest?
I have been involved in the Anglican Church for many years. I was not ordained until January 2019. It was one of the experiences of the year. To be ordained was one special, as it followed a lengthy period of study and preparation as well.

Where did you grow up?
I grew up in Malaysia, which is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious. This has made me versatile and has given me a great base for Mission work. I came to Australia in 2008 from New Zealand. I came to Australia – or "Aussie" – six months ago for the last 40 years. There in New Zealand, one in New Zealand and two in Sydney.

What do you enjoy about living in Sydney?
Sydney is beautiful city. The environment, the people, the restaurants, such a beautiful coastline. Coastal Quay, that building, a beautiful place. The people friendly. There is such freedom in terms of religious and expression, our thoughts, our beliefs. It is a vibrant meeting place with the chance to meet interesting people and not just from Sydney and Sydney but from all over the world. We have such a variety of cultures from China, India and the West – so many international.

What do you enjoy doing outside of Mission work?
At home I like to help my wife in the gardening and housework responsibilities. We grow things like Chinese vegetables, as well as other herbs, vegetables and others.

in table things especially. I like late reading. I read a construction from politics to architectural design. One book I read that I enjoyed was historical fiction. I was set in California with a young African American who started as a slave soldier but turned about property and was able to start his own and make companies and even bought a house. In so doing he was able to raise the living standards of people. I find the principles of overcoming adversity are similar with some seafarers who sometimes face tremendous challenges, particularly during the pandemic.

Who do you find inspiring?
Mother Teresa. She was such a great example for me personally. I admire that she was willing to lay down her life to serve the poorest of the poor in India, without complaining in the spiritual work. I admire Queen Elizabeth II. My wife and I have been watching The Crown on Netflix. It was fascinating to see how she came to the throne at a young age and has withstood the challenges over the years. Today, she is 94 and still on the throne. I really admire her tenacity, her character and strength.

Tell us about your love of music?
Piano is my main instrument. The laptop will help, although no matter how good the piano is, I desire a lot of joy out of playing at home. It is my relaxing and enjoyable hobby and helps me get out of the challenges of work. I like to play James and Christian songs and hope to write more. I also play Chinese songs, the traditional and the folk songs. I can't get your the guitar but hope to eventually. 🎸



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