

NEWS FLASH.

PEACE BREAKS OUT AT THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS.

The Parliament of the World's Religions, the world's largest interreligious gathering, has just taken place at the Melbourne Convention Centre, involving ten thousand participants from over eighty countries. What a bubbling cauldron of unrest and disputation that would be, right? Did you read about it in the papers? See it on the News? The street violence and ugly protests, the smell of tear-gas on Melbourne's streets? Protesters blasted with water-cannons? Muslim against Jew, that sort of thing? No?

But surely, if you bring together all the major religions and many of the different ethnicities of the world at one venue you can expect trouble, can't you? So what happened here? Why didn't skirmishes break out and why didn't intolerance flare into violence and why didn't the whole thing turn into a black eye for Melbourne? How did peace and good-will prevail instead?

Charter Security was chosen as sole security provider at the Parliament of The World's Religions. We had forty men on site each day. Any moment now we're expecting a call from The United Nations Peacekeeping Council to ask us how we do things. (They're having a spot of bother here and there.) We expect they'll be begging us for some secret formula, some voodoo, some mind-altering substance or some cure-all philosophy learnt from the Holy men. "Man, peace reigned. How did you guys at Charter pull this off?"

Well, here's the secret, you United Nations people. We'll save you the call. Here's the secret, free of charge, are you listening? We smiled. That's right, we smiled. Anything's possible when you go into something with the right spirit. Many of the delegates to the Parliament come from places where security is a malign presence, places where they are stood over and threatened by security operatives, so it was our job to let them know we were different. It was our job to set the mood of the gathering up front. To let them know we were friendly peacekeepers, there to help in any way we could. And an act as basic and human as a smile is, in a circumstance like this, the most powerful one you can commit.

But for us, a smile is just the outward manifestation of a whole philosophy. Because Charter Security operatives have been conditioned to be aware of what other religions are, and to understand other ethnicities, and how their sensibilities and behaviour might differ from our own.

Mark Lowe, the Event Security Manager says, "We were charged with making the Melbourne Convention Centre a place where all beliefs could come together in tolerance, friendship and safety. And we did. We had delegates feeling so at ease they would stop and bow to us and chat before going inside. There was this one Imam from Jerusalem who stopped every day and said hello and had a talk. It was like he was trying to check if we were real. Like he couldn't believe people in uniform could be this pleasant.'

'We extended the hand of friendship in whichever way we could. We did that little bit extra, like carrying boxes of pamphlets up to a seminar room, helping the disabled, and giving directions. We had monks from Korea give us their business cards and invite us to come and stay at their monastery.'

Mark Lowe himself was in charge of the special Charter Security unit attached to the Dalai Lama, working with his Close Personal Protection team. Client confidentiality, political protocols, and Mark's own gentlemanly manner prevent us from saying too much about His Holiness. But we can let slip that the Dalai Lama is every bit as humorous, friendly and big-hearted as shown on TV. 'A ripper bloke,' in Mark's words.

So, farewell to our international dignitaries; the Priests, Imams, Monks, Nuns, Mullahs, Llamas, Missionaries, Evangelists, Philosophers, Bishops, Rabbis and Holy men and women of every variety. We wish you well. And from all of us at Charter Security, thank you for visiting Melbourne, it was an honour to be of assistance.