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Special Visit



NYPD officers.
'Special bond'
(archives)
Photo: AFP

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Helping you to help others



NY Catholic, Jewish, Muslim cops tour Holy Land

Police officers go on first of what they hope will be annual visits to Israel, Palestinian territories to get to know each others' religions – and each other – better

Reuters

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Brian Reilly's visit to Jerusalem had a special touch this year because Jewish and Muslim colleagues joined him at the site believed to be where Jesus Christ was crucified and buried.

On the same trip, Ahmed Nasser showed Christians and Jews a mosque in Haifa decorated with a Koran quote about the Virgin Mary and a Star of David in the Mohammad Ali mosque in Cairo.

Lawrence Wein struck up a conversation with a Palestinian policeman in Bethlehem who invited the group of visiting Jews, Christians and Muslims to his station house for tea and talk about how their job can be the same the world over.

The three are officers in the New York Police Department (NYPD) who went on the first of what they hope will be annual visits to the Holy Land this year to get to know each others' religions – and each other – better.

The trip, from May 20 to June 3, took the group of 47 – NYPD officers, relatives and three Franciscan friars – around [Israel](#), the Palestinian territories and [Egypt](#).

Jewish and Christian officers have been taking Holy Land tours together since 2005, all at their own expense, and this year was the first time that Muslim colleagues joined the tour.

Sitting in his office on the Lower East Side, Sgt. Reilly, 49, commanding officer of the NYPD chaplains unit and a past president of the Holy Name Society for Catholic police, said he gets inspired every time he takes the interfaith tour.

Working Together

Different faiths, shared goals / Dan Verbin

Sixth annual World Religions Summit in Winnipeg attended by people from Aboriginal, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, and Sikh religious traditions, all working together to encourage world leaders to fight for betterment of humanity and planet

[Full story](#)

At the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, he said, "I looked around and I could see the Muslim guys and the Jewish guys. It was a great feeling to share this."

Sharing with others

It was the first time in Israel for Yemeni-born Detective Nasser, 44, who said it was "a wonderful experience to see the Holy Land" even though he and two Palestinian-born officers were interrogated for two hours by Israeli security on arrival.

The trip took the group to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Cairo, Alexandria and Memphis. Along with churches In Jerusalem, they visited the Western Wall and saw the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Reilly started the interfaith tour in 2005 by joining a trip to Israel organized by the Shomrim Society, the NYPD's fraternal group for Jewish officers, and then getting fellow Catholics to join in following years.

"I decided this was a place I wanted to share with others," he said. The 2006 tour went to Israel, Greece and Italy and the following year, the group visited Israel and Poland, including a stop at the Auschwitz death camp.



Church of Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. 'Great feeling' (Photo: Ron Peled)

Around this time, Reilly invited the Jewish officers to join Catholics volunteering at a soup kitchen for the homeless run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in the South Bronx.

When the Muslim Officers Society started up, they joined the weekly soup kitchen detail as well. It wasn't long before the Catholics and Jews were telling them about the Holy Land trips.

"We felt the bond between the Jews and the Catholics was so strong, we wanted to share that with the Muslim officers," Reilly said. "That's where this trip was born."

Nasser, 44, head of the Muslim group, said he was unsure at first how the trip would go, but he and four other Muslims signed up. "For the first time, that was good," he said. "We'll probably have a better turnout next year."

'Cop talk'

Detective Samuel Miller, 55, former head of the Shomrim Society, launched the Jewish group's trips to Israel in the 1990s as visits to Israeli police and soldiers. "It got more into religion later," he said.

But religion didn't get in the way, even with the Palestinians. "It was basically cop talk," said Detective Wein, 40, current head of the Shomrim Society. "We joked around, had tea together and exchanged stories about being police officers."

Reilly said the NYPD always taught its officers to respect the many religions in the city, but the trip gave them an added dimension. "Having respect and understanding a culture are two different things," he said.

Coming from an Irish Catholic background, he said, there were details about Ramadan fasting or Jewish practices that he only learned about on the job.



"Now I'm religiously in tune," he said. "And to be religiously in tune is to be part of the community, because for a lot of people their faith dictates how they live."

Even the mere fact that he's

been to the Middle East can help his everyday work, he said: "What I like to do is tell people where I've been. It's an icebreaker, it's instant trust.

"If I speak to a Muslim and say I've been to Egypt, they say really? If I speak to someone from the Jewish community and say I've been in Israel, seen this and that, it's a connection."

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