

Your Honour and Mr O'Halloran, distinguished guests, friends,

Sharing stories is life and it is indeed our great privilege to be the custodians of the Fujita peace and reconciliation story, a story we fondly refer to as, the sequel to the bombing of Darwin.

I was at the commemoration ceremonies this morning at the USS Peary and the Cenotaph.

I go every year and every year while remembering and paying respect to those who fought here in WWII, I reflect on the importance for all of us to keep hearing the stories.

In my role here as the Community Engagement Pastor, I am blessed to be able to share the Fujita story regularly and it never ceases to have an emotional impact as the hearers imagine the forgiveness and the possibility of true friendship after hostility. They imagine what it was like for the people of Darwin to welcome the 121 strong Japanese contingent so close to the end of the war and they are able to appreciate the bravery and work of the Japanese crew, led by Mr Fujita, in wanting to repair damage, not just the physical damage of clearing the shipwrecks, but clearing the emotional damage of fear and hate.

They begin to imagine what forgiveness and friendship and hope could mend in their own lives. That is the beauty of this story, it is not a static story of the past but a story that is alive now, a story that continues to have strong impact.

As I share the Fujita story, I am also blessed to hear parts of the stories of those who come as they share with me also. We have had many come through the displays who are relatives of those who fought here. Australian, American and Japanese. They say things to me like, I wish my dad/brother/grandpa/uncle were here to see this, they so needed to know this or it would have brought them so much peace and they walk away comforted and uplifted.

the people of Darwin memorial uniting church have committed to maintaining the displays and sharing the Fujita story with as many people as we can. Darwin locals, national and international tourists and school children from Darwin and around the country are able to physically come to visit the displays. We are blessed by some who just pop in while others come for a guided tour.

We will continue to explore other ways of sharing the story as well, and dream one day we will be able to have a full virtual tour on our website or someone creative will make a movie or write a book.

We thank the consul-general for his award of recognition today, we are honoured and humbled to be able play a small part in the continuing friendly connection between Australia and Japan. At the opening of this church in 1960, talking about the 77 crosses, Mr Fujita said he was **“grateful the gifts would help peace and goodwill between Japan and Australia.”** I’m sure he could not have imagined the continuing impact that gift would have. I would like to finish with a Haiku, written in our peace garden by Shayley, one of the school students from Mackillop on the occasion of the first school excursion to these displays.

Shayley wrote

let’s come together

peace here, peace there, everywhere

we are family