



May 2026

1- The Upper Room

We return to the Upper Room
searching the meaning for now
and how our hearts need grace
to welcome the bright-winged Spirit.

Within the Upper Room
we are waiting for
that which small fires reveal
like writing on walls.

We feel flames fanned
by the passage of Spirit
and ancestors
who remind us that
Upper Room is
heart-space
blessed, broken, shared.



Anne Powell

2- Our Lady of the Cenacle in Unexpected Places

In our Waikanae Cenacle community, we wanted to do something in response to the massacre at the Al Nur Mosque in Christchurch on 15 March 2018. Together with our Cenacle Family and others, we made a book of messages of prayer and solidarity. We planned to post this book to the community of the Mosque in Christchurch. However, in May, Mary and I had to travel to Christchurch for some ministry.

So we decided to take this book and a donation, to the Mosque and hand it over personally.

When we arrived at the Mosque, we were met by two police officers on guard with semi automatic weapons- a disturbing, unfamiliar sight in our country. Having explained why we were there, we were led onto the grounds and waited for one of the Moslem leaders to come and meet us. We were not allowed to enter the Mosque without being greeted and welcomed. When the leader came, he apologised for the dirt on his hands. *I've been planting roses*, he told us. *They were given to us and I didn't want them to die!*

We gave him our offerings. He asked would we like to come inside and we said yes. As we took off our shoes – as on a Maori Marae- and stepped into the passage, he pointed out the site where the first man was shot and killed. Then the second. When we entered the men's prayer room, he told us, *“and this is where many were killed, over there and in that corner. I was saved because I was beneath a pile of bodies.”*

Vulnerability.

The awfulness of his story was numbing. This brave and kind man who was holding our small book of messages, told us : ***“God is One, God is love, God is merciful. God is kindness, not violence.”***

We asked if we could pray and then he called an older woman, Fatima, to come and lead us into the women's prayer room.

Such a bare room. Such a peaceful space. You wouldn't know that in the passage outside this room, and just through a thin wall, 45 people had been killed.

Fatima unrolled her faded prayer mat and knelt, in the Moslem way, on the felt underlay which protected the patterned green carpet. Anne knelt beside her until her knees felt like they would split.

Fatima prayed in her own language and we silently joined her for a long time.

All this while, we both had such a strong sense of Mary, Our Lady of the Cenacle, urging her ***“We are all brothers and sisters.”*** She kept repeating this and her message pierced our hearts.

Prayer and solidarity. Prayer and communion.

After our prayer, Fatima told us some of the story of her life, beginning with her years in Bosnia during that war. She allowed us to see her vulnerability and her faith.

As she spoke, more women arrived with babies and children. They came to break their fast at sunset as it was the month of Ramadam. Each one came to greet us warmly.

Then Fatima asked if we would like to join them to break their fast. We helped Fatima place a blue tarpaulin on the floor to protect the underfelt which protected the carpet. Such care of their few furnishings in the women’s prayer room.

Fatima and another woman knelt beside a pile of paper plates. On each one, they placed one date, a small piece of banana, a quarter of an apple and a small spinach croquette. I remember wondering if this was the whole meal. Plates were passed around everyone in the women’s prayer room.

Welcome and hospitality.

After this simple meal, all the women stood to pray their ritual prayers. Their clothing, their gestures and words were prayer. The children continued to run around shrieking, laughing and playing in the same room. Prayer and life together We thought of how this is like a Maraethe karakia (prayer), the children laughing and playing.

After this ritual prayer, big pots of beef stew and rice were carried in and spoonfuls piled on our plates. **More hospitality. More conversation. More communion.**

When Mary and I finally left the community of the Mosque, and stood outside in the dark on the footpath, we realised we'd been there for 4 hours.

We both felt deeply humbled by the privilege of being among these women whose stories are very different from our own, yet we shared a beautiful common humanity.

There is no distance between the Mosque and the Upper Room. There is the gathering of people marked by **prayer, solidarity, hospitality, vulnerability and communion.**

A fresh insight into the role of Mary in the Upper Room was given to us by Justin Taylor, SM at our Cenacle Family retreat weekend some years ago. He suggests that *“Mary’s role in the Upper Room was to bring together two opposing groups, blood relatives of Jesus and friends of Jesus. They were disagreeing over which group was the more important, now that Jesus was no longer present with them. There was the group related to Jesus by blood ties, and the group “related” to Jesus by ties of belief and faith. Mary as Reconciler.”*

In this Upper Room filled with argument and uncertainty, we encounter Mary, Our Lady of Reconciliation. From the moment the young Mary said “yes” to the call to conceive Jesus, her entire life, with her pierced heart, was a following of her only son from birth to death. This journey led her to this threshold moment in a gathering of irreconcilable differences, uncertainty, potential fragmentation. She experienced that spirited impulse towards discernment and reconciliation.

16 April 2025

Anne Powell & Mary J.Kay