

2009 Report #4 from Sumatra, Indonesia
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"Suffering" is her name. She is a third year seminary student. The seventh girl child in her family, her father died while she was still in her mother's womb. Because she was too short to be accepted into the HKBP seminary, she told me the following story with a delightful twinkle in her eyes. When she went to the hospital to have her physical, she purchased a pair of jeans too long for her. And when they measured her height she stood on her tip toes which were hidden by the too-long pants. Then she was tall enough to take the rest of the exam. It is unclear to me whether this was an oversight intentional or not. But delightfully cute and short, Suffering is sure she fooled them! I bought her fried chicken for this story.

Some other Batak names: Ganti oil Pisspot = Oil Change. Because of men = Maternity hospital. Place of contemplation = Toilet. Door smear = car wash. Ompung's pig = The one which will be butchered when I come to the Deaconess school. Kilbat = the direction to pray for Muslims which is painted on the hotel room ceiling.

As I do every year I took students to Simasir Island on Lake Toba for a spiritual retreat. There is a narrow beach where we swam. We studied the Beatitudes and 10 words which describe the church. There was a huge wedding party at the hotel and we all were invited to take part in the food and dancing the TorTor. The two musical groups were famous TV personalities whom the students were thrilled to meet.

One Cucu who used to go on these retreats is now married, graduated from Hong Kong seminary and is serving at the STT-HKBP school as teacher of Hebrew and head librarian. She had her first child while I was there, a girl. I gave the baby her second name, Grace. Her full name is now Tabitha Grace Queensie Manalu. I had already named 3 whom I baptized "Katie" after Luther's wife so thought I better give this one a different name.

We now have 3 full time faculty at that school whom we helped with further education, one full time at the Deaconess School and two more studying at Hong Kong.

Elfrida came to me for counseling as she was the girlfriend of the latest student to die at the seminary. She confessed that her father had never held her hand or kissed her. She was in so much need of affection and the deceased student was helping. It is a gender thing still. Women just don't count.

The teaching goes well at the seminary. Homiletics, Conflict Management, Pastoral Care and Counseling classes total 10 in 5 days. I have preached last Sunday and will this Sunday and also preach in the seminary chapel to 400 students on Friday. We will use keyboard, drums, guitars and 3 lead singers.

This Medan seminary is the largest in Asia and includes 5 kinds of Bataks: GBKP; GKPS; GKI-SU; BNKP, HKI, and GKPA. Most are members of Lutheran World Federation. STT-HKBP where I spent 5 weeks is almost entirely Toba Batak, and use that language a good bit of the time. However this school is much more up to date. They have a modern computer lab, one half of the students are women, and they can wear pants on campus, even jeans! Rev. Jon Sipayung, Th.D., teaches here and was our student at LTS, Hong Kong.

At the church where I preached last Sunday, they used a formal rite I found interesting. An Elder received a woman back into the GKPS Christian faith who had turned Muslim some years ago. She had to confess to the congregation that she had sinned and was wrong and some other question I could not understand.

After worship when I was greeting the congregation it was obvious she was being shunned by these people. I hugged her with big tears drying on her brown cheeks. Many were surprised, including her. Then all the people gathered around her and welcomed her back. This culture is very, very judgmental!

Dr. Phil Baker of the ELCA Global Mission has been on the Island visiting the educational institutions this week exploring how we in the ELCA can partner with them. He works out of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

It has been such a joy as graduate students and Cucu have traveled many miles just to say Horas to me, their old Ompung. They most often cry with joy when they find me.

The Bataks are already preparing for Christmas (Natal) in their churches, starting the observance December first. I think I understand why it is a month long celebration. The Muslims celebrate Ramadan for a month, usually around September. They begin and end with a special meal. So the Christians begin and end with a special meal ending on Christmas eve with communion (which they hold twice a year).

Report to ELCA Global Missions
September 23 - November 24, 2009
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- o *September 24 & 25:* Visited two Bataks now studying at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong and prepared comprehensive exams for a couple Myanmar students.
- o *September 26 - October 12:* Taught at the Balige Deaconess School.
- o *October 11:* Represented ELCA at the Bible Woman's school at Lokabodi at their 75th anniversary.
- o *October 12 - November 14:* Taught at STT-HKBP Seminary in PematangSiantar: Homiletics, Conflict Management; Stewardship, Pastoral Care and New Testament.
- o *November 15-21:* Taught at Abdi Sabda seminary, Medan: Conflict Management, Homiletics, Hermeneutics.
- o *November 16:* Conducted a day long seminar for 30 Pastors and Bible Women in Medan.
- o *November 17:* Met briefly with Dr. Phil Baker and the principal of Abdi Sabda.
- o *November 24:* Returned to U.S.

Preaching:

10/09 Deaconess School
10/18 Compo Christian in Pemantang Siantar
10/25 Sukadme, Pemantang Siantar
11/01 Banda Bunto HKBP
11/09 STT-HKBP Chapel
11/15 Medan GKPS KM7
11/20 Abdi Sabda, Medan
11/22 Medan HKBP

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