

**2006 Report #8**  
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**ELCA Global Mission Volunteer**

All Saints Day, 2006

I have just returned from a three week stay at the Pendidikan Diakones School of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) church in Balige, Sumatra where I taught homiletics, conflict management, stewardship and pastoral care and counseling. 47 young female students plus four Deaconess instructors are crowded into the large rectangular, and two smaller, buildings plus an outdoor kitchen, guest house where I live and an outback bath house. It is a three year program plus two years of practical experience for those who know well "life together" and then are ordained to humble service. For the most part these students come from the more remote and less educated villages. We bound together in a very caring grandfatherly relationship.

They wash and sing in lovely four-part harmony all the day long. Each of the six years I have taught here there have been good improvements. A library now sits above the guest house. This past year a computerized language lab was erected. New class rooms were built above the dining room three years ago. It is a comfortable, well managed, clean, and well maintained institution.

These giants of compassion get up at 5 am and before dressing, re-wash and re-clean everything which will hold still until 6, bathe, dress, eat breakfast and sing until 7:30 when we worship together. Classes begin at 8 and run until 12:30.

In the HKBP 120 bed hospital across the road, where Tsunami victims were cared for, they practice their learned skills in Pastoral Care. Also in the afternoons they visit the elderly poor in the dreadful slums of this village. An alternating group of 4 to 6 travel to Siantar on weekends to live in the little house they purchased two years ago and visit the elderly sick. All is in common here: they purchase and prepare their own food, do most of the grounds work and all the janitorial work. Carol and I support 4 or 5 each year. who are called our Cucu (granddaughters).

The first year I taught here I had to stay in a tiny room outside the compound and sleep on a board shelf with only a blanket and rice straw mat. Now it is a comfortable slat bed which occasionally drops me to the floor with a thud. I do have a flush toilet but it is not plumbed to running water. "Never mind" the Bataks say.

Working out of the hospital across the road is Deaconess Mathilda Nainggolan, who came to John Muir hospital in Walnut Creek near us last year for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), a discipline they are just now learning about in Sumatra. Our re-union was so nice! She is doing a vital ministry in HIV /AIDS education and care. Next Sunday evening I will eat in her family home in Siantar.

I teach each day from 8 until 12:30, take a nap during the heat of the day, prepare translation material, then counsel and work with students and lecturers in the afternoon. The evenings are sometimes very lonely but other times are spent singing with Batak guitar (which I bought for them) and socializing with the students which I enjoy even more than they do. Three students had birthdays last week and I found a store which had a generator and thus ice cream for all.

In the village all the baches (taxis) are very old Vespa motor scooters with side car. In Siantar they are very antique Indian motor cycles. The drivers are well organized in each village and thus control the fee and model of conveyance.

Death and illness seem to be everywhere and very frightening to all the people and the students. Last week the 40 year old father of one of the students died and I revised my lectures to include Westberg's 10 stages of grief. On Friday I ate Ikan Teri, hard fried whole minnows in hot spice sauce and then ground cassava leaves over rice. I became ill and did not eat all day Saturday which scared the students. To

them illness + old = death. At the hospital across the road there is much death as a result of illnesses we would take in stride. Many of my students have lost at least one parent. This culture has rightly inherited a real fear of death.

My friend, the General secretary of this church, sent a car for me and we had lunch in his home talking about future scholarship possibilities from LWF and the ELCA. They lean on me to select the best possible students for these grants.

My doctoral son, Deonal Sinaga whom we put through the Hong Kong Seminary's Th.D. program, picked me up early Sunday morning and I preached to about 400 in the large church in Pearaja built by the famous German-trained missionary, Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen, called "Apostle to the Bataks." A young Deaconess graduate we supported through school was at the Nommensen church and was so glad to meet me that she jumped up and down in place.

Nommensen came here in 1862 and stayed for 56 years, building this into a 3+ million member church. 6 choirs sang in the two hour service. The Batak choirs are organized in neighborhoods and are effective evangelism tools. Nommensen is revered as the founding father of HKBP even though the Dutch and Germans preceded him. And two American missionaries came much earlier in 1843, Lyman and Munson, only to have the then headhunter Bataks kill and eat them. (It was their first taste of religion!)

After lunch in Taratung we went to Sipoholon where a congregation was celebrating its 125th year. I was presented with two Ulos and we ate sac sang, drank tuak (a palm wine) and danced the TorTor... Then it was announced - to my surprise - that I would give the speech of the day to the 600!

After that it was over to Sahat's house, a former Hong Kong student, now principal of the new school for Preacher/teachers wanting to be ordained as Panditas. It was so nice to greet his wife and son I knew well in Hong Kong.

My only connection to the outside world is my little battery operated short wave radio on which I often can get the BBC. In Balige I can't receive Voice of America which is often slanted anyway. There is satellite TV in the guest house but it is "broken" like last year too.

October 22 I preached in Tambunan to about 500 including our "Kore" from the deaconess school who surprised me with their presence. Confirmation was administered to a young woman so she could marry in the church (one of the many, many HKBP rules). Because it was a Muslim holiday, many older deaconess and some of my former students returned and stayed for the entire week. I taught them stewardship all week long, all morning and afternoons. It was a hard week and really wore me out; but I survived and all the lecturers enjoyed the week off.

Before my departure from Balige I held a communion service (HKBP only celebrates communion twice a year on Christmas eve and Good Friday) for all the students and included anointing of oil and prayers for healing for five who were ill. The students had killed a pig that morning so we then ate SacSang. Each class performed something and we danced the TorTor for our farewell. Tears were shed by many students, the lecturers, and this old Ompung (Grandfather) as we said "Horas be ma" to each other. (May both our souls remain strong).

On Friday evening Deonal came after me again and we returned to Sipoholon where all day Saturday I taught about 120 Panditas (pastors), Bibel Frau (Bible women), and Preacher/teachers about Congregational Conflict Management. I learned a lot as well. A major conflict in many congregations now is that the grandchildren of those kind people who gave land to the schools and churches are now trying to reclaim it for their own. Of course, there is little or no documentation of the gifts given at least 100 years ago.

I also held a workshop for about 200 elders in this district and preached on Reformation Sunday in Pearaja Cota where I saw a new musical instrument used by many of the children. It is called a Pianika, combination piano and harmonika. They blow into a plastic hose and play the miniature keyboard on their

lap.

This church is divided into "Resorts" which is a grouping of around 20 congregations with one ordained Pastor who serves more like a Bishop. The congregational ministry is done mainly by Preacher/teachers and Bibel Frau and the ordained Elders. The Resorts are organized into Districts with a "Praeses" over them. By now most of the Praeses know me and there is fierce competition for my work in their district. I am the only ELCA missionary in Sumatra.

No comment on these frequently seen road signs: *Pispat* = a place for oil change. *Door smeer* = car wash. *B1* = Dog meat for sale. *B2* = Pig meat for sale. *Halal* = OK for Muslims to eat; no pig here.

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All Saints, 2006

About missionary Nommensen from **Wikipedia**, the online encyclopedia:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig\\_Ingwer\\_Nommensen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Ingwer_Nommensen)

<< Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen, a Lutheran missionary, was born in 1834 in Schleswig-Holstein (a district long disputed between Denmark and Germany, and at that time Danish).

In 1857 he began training for missionary work, and in 1862 he went as a Lutheran missionary to Sumatra, where he worked in the interior among the Bataks, a people previously untouched by either Islam or Christianity. (Note that Islam is widespread in Indonesia and has outposts as far east as the Philippines.)

After some initial troubles, the mission began to succeed, with the conversion of several tribal chiefs and their followers. By 1876 there were 2000 Batak Christians. Nommensen translated the New Testament into Batak by 1878. He undertook to preach the Gospel without replacing the native culture by a European one, and to develop native Church leaders and a native order of worship.

Nommensen died on 23 May 1918. The Christian community he had planted grew and prospered. With the coming of World War II, the missionaries were driven out or imprisoned, and the Batak people completely took over the management of their own church, which is now the largest Christian congregation in Indonesia.