

## Report from Asia: Indonesia

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On May 3 I flew on Singapore Airlines out of San Francisco to Seoul Korea and then over the South China Sea along the coast of Viet Nam and Thailand to Singapore. There I boarded a smaller plane which took me to Medan, Indonesia. The entire trip took a boring total 27 hours.

I was met at the airport by Jon Sipayung, a former student at the Hong Kong seminary and Cucu now teaching New Testament at a seminary in Medan named Abda Sabda. (While earning his doctorate in Hong Kong, Jon's wife lost her job and we supported his family for a couple years until he could return home with a Th.D.) At Abda Sabda, a seminary of nearly 500 students from 5 different tribes, I preached to about 400 students and faculty in their Friday chapel service while I was still in a fog of jet lag, and then again on Sunday to a large congregation of Simanlungun Bataks.

On Saturday I met with Jon's "Table Talk" group (he was in mine modeled after Martin Luther, while in LTS, Hong Kong). They are translating my book, "Advent and Christmas Saints," into the Bahasa Indonesian language for publication to sell next November and December. (Picture below.)



On Saturday evening I took my 3 other Cucu to a Medan restaurant in a bache (a motorcycle with covered side-car) as is our custom. They cannot afford this on their own so it has become a custom each time I teach there and is always a treat for them. Also on Saturday I met with my Master's student, Lestina, who has been living and working in an institution for the blind, as well as those mentally and physically challenged. Carol and I have been buying her books and paying her tuition so she can specialize in this compassionate ministry.

A surprise visitor to my room was Deaconess Tio Sihombing, now on the teaching staff of the Deaconess School after getting her M.Div. in Hong Kong while I served as her advisor. She was on her way to the airport to fly to Germany where she took part in a special Diaconal Ministry academic program. Because she is an orphan, Tio brought with her to meet me a boyfriend Pastor from Balige.

The overland trip to Pematang Siantar took about four hours over roads which could be described as a string of pot holes and washouts strung together. I told the driver that if he missed any of the holes - not to worry - he could hit them on the return trip! I received a wonderful reception at the HKBP Seminary in Siantar from my former students now teaching there: Dewi Sinaga (the first female doctorate in the 3 million member church) who teaches New Testament, Benny Sinaga who teaches Greek and New Testament and Wilda Simanjuntak who teaches Hebrew and serves as head Librarian. Wilda's degree is a speciality at Hong Kong as we prepare theological Librarians for seminaries all over Asia. My reunion with them and their now husbands was so heart warming.

As is usually the case, they gave me a very tight and heavy teaching load at this seminary: Pastoral Care and Counseling; Homiletics; Liturgics (new for me); and New Testament. In these instances I must pay special attention to my teaching techniques as they will be heavily copied. I stayed in a familiar guest room where I used a squat toilet and over-the-head bucket shower. The electricity was on most of the time, but there was no air conditioning in this place which is right on the equator.

Deaconess Mathilda Nainggolan and husband Nando came on their motorcycle to visit me. I married them in Silboga following an earthquake there which dumped me out of my bed on the floor. She is in Nomensen University studying to be an English teacher. I got them the motor cycle so he could find work which has not happened yet. It sometimes takes years to find employment in this culture.

This is a Huri Kristen Batak Protestan School and HKBP is celebrating their 150th year Jublieum dating back to 1861 when Dutch missionaries greeted the Germans who had come to evangelize the Bataks. The Americans had tried in 1834 only to have their two missionaries from US East Coast's Andover seminary, Munson and Lyman, murdered and presumably eaten. It was the Batak's first taste of religion!

On May 15th I was transported to Balige along the coast of beautiful Toba Lake's west shore. This lake is the result of the largest volcanic eruption ever in our world causing the sun to be shadowed and the ice age to begin. It is now a beautiful lake where the Bataks believe their "Tondi" (Soul) comes from.

At the Balige school I usually have comfortable quarters, no longer having to sleep on a board shelf cushioned with a palm leaf mat like my first time here. This year it is a comfortable "spring bed." Still, the flush toilet is un-plumbed and there is no air conditioning. The electricity and water go off each day. Tio teaches and serves as house mother here to the 60+ students after getting her M.Div. in Hong Kong. Eleven Sihotang returns from Hong Kong and will organize a theological library and teach homiletics.

While at the Deaconess School\* for 9 days and a gracious and exuberant welcome, I taught Homiletics, Pastoral Care, The Miracles of Jesus, Liturgics and Stewardship. While there I preached for their big 40th anniversary and the HKBP's 150th. These students are for the most part from the poorest of poor families and villages. They are prepared to do acts of compassion on God's behalf. There isn't anything too ugly or low for them to tackle. There is a strong emphasis on health and their uniforms look much like that of a nurse. Florence Nightingale was a student in the German Deaconess School where the movement began. (Picture below.)



\* For pictures and more narrative about this school, go to [www.stjohnsantioch.org](http://www.stjohnsantioch.org), click on Bulletin Board for the article, "Giants of Compassion."

The school is clean as they are up at 5 am each day washing and sweeping everything that will hold still. Their life together is completely communal. Their director is strong and runs a "tight ship."

On Sunday I rode with the students on their bus to a service for ordinations in HKBP. This church ordained 9 Preacher/Teachers, 13 Deaconess, and 20 Bible Women. Since many had been my former students, it was a great time for me...and them.

On May 23 I was transported further south on this South China Sea island to stay for a couple nights in the church guest house and teach what I call “New Paradigms for Ministry” to the Pastor’s School all morning at Sipaholon. In the afternoon it was “Stewardship” in the Preacher/Teacher School at the same location.

Nearby in the large assembly hall a large group of seminary graduates who passed the exam for internship were being trained for a month getting ready for their 2 years as “Vicar.” Three of my Cucu were in the group including my Santi, Rene and Debora. It was another moving reunion. I also had time with my first Batak Cucu, Rospita, who now works in the headquarters of HKBP and was supported by my sister Doris and myself. I married her and Donny some years ago. Both are ordained. Rospita was in charge of my next adventure - the continuing education of 31 Panditas (Pastors) who have been in the ministry over 10 years. There were 5 women and 26 men.

We left for the retreat site called Jelun Silangit before sunup and arrived about 7:30 am. I was housed in a “VIP guest room.” And, as usual, they started to prepare for me after I arrived. They were very proud of the “spring bed” they had purchased just because I was coming to teach them. The contour sheet was too small and slid around on top of the plastic mattress covering. I nearly landed on the floor several times. I was hungry having had no breakfast but had not one piece of silver ware as Bataks don’t use it. So I ate my always present peanut butter off of my shoe horn. It seemed to improve my “under-standing!” (Picture below.)



I taught two very long classes each morning and afternoon on conflict management and then a day on homiletics. They especially delighted in the explained narrative preaching styles. Friday morning we left this mosquito infested, cold at night, very rustic retreat site for Medan and my first night on this trip in a hotel. It took all day to get there and only 10 minutes for me to jump into the pool...and then into a warm shower with soap and shampoo. The sign on the bathroom door said “Please do not bathe outside the bathtub.” Early next morning I flew to Singapore in a small plane and then on to Hong Kong.

To be continued...

Part 2 will be about teaching in Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong.

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