

INDONESIA

## The Hardships of Life for Young and Old

*By Melva Barus, Senior English teacher at a Church School (GKPI) in Padang Bulan, Medan, Indonesia.*

Science and technology advance enormously day by day. Life is becoming ever more sophisticated and competitive. Everyone tries to be smart and skilful; otherwise they will become losers. No one wants to be a loser; on the contrary, everyone wants to be better than others. Everyone wishes for a better life. So we struggle and struggle.

In Indonesia, not only adults struggle for a living but also children and teenagers. So many children have to go to work to help their parents. Some of them have to stop studying because they do not have enough money to continue. Others keep studying while working after school.

Some of my students, for instance, have to work after school for many different reasons. They must help their parents to supplement family income, earn money to pay for their school fees or for buying books for school. Febrianto for example, a boy of 13 (grade 7), has to polish shoes at bus stations after school. Or Veronica, a girl of 16 (grade 10), has to work from 3pm to 10pm every Saturday and Sunday as a waitress in the Chinese restaurant so that she can pay her school fees and buy the necessary books.

These are two of many students in my school who have to work after school. They are not embarrassed to work as a cleaner, a farm hand working on a



*Some of Melva's bright and hopeful students at GKPI High School, Padang Bulan, Medan*

leased piece of land planting rice or vegetables, or selling some things at the traditional market. *I think this is not fair to them.* They are still too young to do those things. Working makes them have no time to play or to study seriously.

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Often my heart is touched when I watch them play, run, talk and laugh together in between lessons as if they had no problems. In fact, they have a hard life. Therefore, I cannot be angry when they come late to my class or have not finished their homework or do not concentrate when I am teaching. I know that anger and punishment will not help them. Understanding and care are what they really want.

I have asked about 150 of my students what they actually want to do with their lives. It is amazing, some of them want to be doctors and others teachers, lawyers, nurses, pastors or join a company. It is my task to encourage and strengthen them. Even though they are poor they mostly are determined and mentally strong. They have to be like that and study hard. I tell them, 'Where there is a will, there is a way'. God will prepare a way.

### Indonesia – crisis time for people and country

So many problems come into our lives and sometimes we don't know why. As you know, Indonesia is facing a crisis in all aspects of life. Prices rise unexpectedly, sometimes it is very hard to find petrol (fuel), corrupt people act arbitrarily with no clear laws to stop them, the number of unemployed is huge, a cause of all kinds of crime, and then there are the natural disasters which strike different areas.

Not only all of this, there is also a *crisis of Christianity*. As a minority, we Christians face many problems on many fronts. For example: We have difficulties finding a job or being promoted. In some places it is very hard for Christians to be able to worship. Many churches have been burnt down and pastors have been killed.

But one thing we should never forget: there is nothing that happens without God knowing and caring. God knows and cares about everything. He lets problems come into our lives to show us and teach us how great He is. What He wants us to do is to worship Him. No matter how hard the life is that we are all facing, please remain faithful to God and keep living in Him because we can do nothing without Him. In His good time, sooner or later, things will be wonderful.

# Mission is holistic Christian World Action

## 1. What is Christian mission?

Mission is not just preaching the Gospel and calling the world to faith but it is *everything*: all we do as Christians with and for our neighbour wherever in the world he or she may be. Our mission – or better God's mission through us (usually called *missio Dei* = the mission of God) – is always *holistic*. This means that it aims at meeting the needs of the whole person, the needs of body, mind and spirit.

Let me cite Rev. Ginda Harahap, Asia Secretary of the LWF, a former Indonesian bishop, as quoted in Dr. Ulf Metzner's book *He Hit my Head with Chopsticks*: 'Mission encompasses proclamation, nurturing of the baptised, service, advocacy for justice and peace, dialogue with people of diverse faiths and care of creation.' (Bangkok, October 2000) To me these words express beautifully the unity of all aspects of the Great Commission of our Lord (Matthew 28, 18-20). All this and more is mission, our mission.

One of the Lutheran Churches in Sumatra is organising an island-wide seminar on bird flu involving many parishes, thanks to funding from ASIA Focus, because the government is covering up and no one is doing anything. People live in ignorance and presently see their hens die in great numbers. I have seen it myself. This not very missionary sounding seminar is designed to have ripple effects throughout many parishes, towns and villages and can end up saving many lives. It too is mission. It spreads the love of God with the implicit or explicit message that Jesus really does care.

This shows that mission is never just a spiritual matter. Sharing the Gospel with a needy brother and saying all the right words to him including the words of love and peace while at the same time withholding from him the glass of refreshing water (Matthew 10, 22) is not mission. In fact, it is an insult to my brother and to God himself – a distortion of mission. *Christian humanitarian aid and world service is part of our mission to the world, part of Christ's Great Commission.*

## 2. Lutheran World Service and Lutheran World Mission: One and the same

Christian mission is never simply humanitarian aid. It is never just a seminar on bird flu. Practically everyone in our country helps the poor and needy at times, gives to earthquake appeals and so on. The donors may be agnostics, unbelievers, Communists, Muslims or whatever. They do what we do but we do it as Christians. That is, we do 'our works' for Christ's sake and in his name as part of our carrying out the Great Commission – a mission that is holistic ministry and involves Christian witness directly or indirectly.

Anyone can do good works and help the poor and give

money for the drilling of a water well but *only the Gospel* can meet people's deepest needs and give the poor life-giving water to drink. For us Christian mission and Christian world service always belong together.

So before you donate money to an overseas cause, please ask yourself, *Do I simply want to help and do good OR do I also wish to share the love of Christ and further God's kingdom through my gift? Do I wish to minister to body, mind and spirit of the poor and needy OR do I wish to exclude the spiritual dimension?*

If you just want to 'do good', then give through the Red Cross or Oxfam etc but if you want to give holistically as a Christian, then please give through Christian world relief organisations. If furthermore, through your gift, you wish to strengthen the voice of Lutheran witness, mission and world service in Asia and Africa, then please give through Lutheran-based organisations that carry out the Lord's holistic ministry and mission in our world.

*My ambition is to help to win back some of the hundreds of thousands of Australian Lutheran humanitarian aid dollars given to secular relief organisations in order to maximise our Christian 'dollar power' for the benefit of the recipients of our gifts.* For Christ's sake.

Of course, on a local level, community appeals also need to be supported. And it is surely not wrong to donate to Austcare or Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) but it is much wiser to make all your giving as much as possible part of your Christian ministry and outreach.

Please don't misunderstand me: In no way am I saying that in our relief work we should give preferential treatment to Christians and in effect discriminate against Buddhists and Muslims or whatever. Not at all. No, for the most part, we are committed to help and heal according to need irrespective of creed, race and colour. Notwithstanding this, there are times when we have a special obligation to those from our own 'family of faith'. *So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.* (Galatians 6, 10)

## 3. Examples from Asia: Quenching the thirst of body and soul

Many poor people do not simply suffer from material poverty but also from a spiritual one, from a sense of defeat if not hopelessness. No wonder that only a few weeks ago in a remote province of Cambodia the leader of a poor village with no exposure to Christianity asked World Vision staff to please come into their village not only to help with education and health care but also to do Bible study on a weekly basis. 'You can use my house for this', said this man who didn't know the Gospel. He and other villagers had watched the 'spirit of Christianity' in action

(continued p.11)

The Bishop speaks:

## We insist on looking like aliens

*On his recent visit Rev Mangisi Simorangkir, bishop of the 350,000-member Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia (GKPI), shared his thoughts with Linda Macqueen in an interview for 'The Lutheran' (6/3/06). Here are some of his challenging, thought-provoking comments:*

'We have to get rid of the western influences that are associated with Christianity. Indonesians don't like the West, and if Christianity is seen to be a western religion, it will not be accepted. Indonesian Christianity must be rooted in its own culture. But it is hard to convince people of this, even many of our pastors. They think that a 'real' church is a gothic church (which looks so out of place in tropical Sumatra), and to be a 'real' pastor you have to wear a black gown and dog collar. Why don't we build Batak churches and wear traditional Batak gowns? No, we insist on looking like aliens. It is silly'



*Bishop Simorangkir's pastors at 2005 Synod – in the Indonesian cultural setting 'looking like aliens'*

Then he mentions that his church has 1144 congregations but only 207 pastors, 180 of them based in parishes. But, he says, that *our laypeople are very strong. Every Sunday about 1000 lay preachers lead the worship. We have had to get away from the idea that you have to be perfectly and professionally trained in order to preach and lead worship ... You might think that it is unfortunate for us not to have enough pastors. But it is a good thing. It is good for laypeople to have the responsibility of leading a congregation ...*

He points out that in Indonesia pastors *get a lot more passionate about preaching than they do in Australia. They have a lot of energy in the pulpit; they get worked up and punch their fists in the air. Pastors here in Australia tend to be monotonous and too logical; they just entertain your brain and don't excite your emotions...* He also noted that *Indonesians love their Bibles. In Australia people don't seem to care much about reading the Bible...*

*(quoted with permission)*

## Letters

**ASIA FOCUS in demand overseas:** *I already received The ASIA Focus, and I made copies to the people in the church, and they are very glad to get it. If we can get the next ASIA Focus continuously, we will really appreciate it. Just send to me, and I will make copies for the people in the church. Thank you so much.*

Era Hutagalung, Medan, Indonesia

**Sharing and friendship:** *It feels good when someone misses you. It feels better when someone loves you. But, best of all, it is happiness when I have the chance to have a friend who prays for me and other Christian brothers and sisters and who shares everything, like an Australian friend like you.*

Dewi Simatupang, Medan, Indonesia

**On receiving a scholarship through ASIA FOCUS:** *Thanks for everything. Since I know you, I believe that God has sent you to help me. This is the biggest (gift in) 'history' and the nicest gift that I have ever received in my life. And now, my happiness here has been completed, even on my birthday. Praise the Lord for all things he has done. I promised that I'll do my best to make my family, you, and especially my God proud of myself.*

Lely of Medan on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday 10/4/2006

*We can't make everyone an ASIA FOCUS project but have found someone from the Uniting Church in Gympie to provide her with a university education. Note her excitement!*

**West Papua – Australian-Indonesian friendship must stand:** *I do feel hurt by what has happened in West Papua. In my perspective, the Papuan people do not ask for help without reason. But I know that our government didn't distribute the Papua's wealth fairly to all the people there. You know, the situation in my country will not alter our sense of brotherhood with the Australian people. Even though right now, there are so many irresponsible stirrers who spread provocations to declare war on Australia. Esp. the FPI or FONT PEMBELA ISLAM (fundamentalist groups). But we always pray that SBY, our President, will not be provoked by them. I am still trying to find out the facts... I don't want my mother land to be destroyed by the provocateurs like in Africa. As a university student, I have a responsibility to seek a solution to this problem hand in hand with you. I don't want there to be a grudge between Indonesians and Australians. My Australian brothers and sisters, let's complete this mission and find the solution to help make a better world, especially with regards to West Papua.*

Dewi Simatupang, Medan, Indonesia

**ASIA FOCUS No.11 March 2006 feedback:** *I am in awe of what you do. This is just another amazing edition. You have great talent and use it for your Lord in a way that blows me away.*

LCA Pastor

## Isolated and alone – yet joyfully proclaiming the Gospel

*UPDATE on the ministry of Rev Sihol Hutagaol, Central Sumatra (see A. F. March 2006).*

Rev. Sihol truly works on the frontiers of Christian mission at Air Molek (see map) in Riau, Central Sumatra, where only a minute minority of the population is Christian. What used to be dense jungle country not long ago has now been converted into palm oil plantations as far as the eye can see.

'I like it here', writes Sihol even though he faces many problems and lives on the smell of an oil rag. He is married with children. All Indonesian pastors are poor getting paid usually Rp. 1 million – Rp. 1.5 million (\$150 - \$220) p/m on average but Sihol only receives Rp. 590 000 p/m for his work in his far flung parish, many miles from anywhere. That's all his people can afford to give him. There is no minimum wage and no centralized system.

Above all he needs a motorbike, for the sake of God's work in his parish, and ASIA FOCUS is getting close to being able to supply him with one. Some earmarked donations have already been received for this cause.

### Map of Sumatra



I so admire his spirit. 'I really thank you (ASIA FOCUS) for your concern and your encouragement for me to spread the Gospel here in Riau province. On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2006 I was able to baptise a whole family (parents and two sons). I am really, really happy to have done this. God has strengthened me to spread the Gospel. I told you that I have two focal points in my ministry: outreach and development of spirituality (growth in Christ, Bible Study).'

And in April Sihol sent this SMS; *Next month I will baptise three people who are SAKAI (local indigenous tribe who speak their own language). Please pray for me.*

When receiving this message, I could sense his excitement and thankfulness. He is such a winsome, engaging young pastor who also happens to speak good English. An exception. I hope to visit him in August.

When one day I expressed my concern about his material wellbeing and the shortage of everything, Sihol replied; *I am sure that God will help me. He has guided me to study at the seminary to be a pastor (even though he had no money). I simply do God's work. He will never forget me.*

## Confident of Church Growth

*UPDATE on the ministry of Rev Naek Gultom, on the frontiers of Southern Sumatra.*

Due to the kindness of a couple of parties, last year ASIA Focus was able to supply Pastor Naek Gultom, of Muara Bungo, Jambi, Southern Sumatra, with a new motorbike. It really empowers his ministry. He is still excited about it and the work he does and writes, 'Let me tell you about my church. I am happy because six new families have joined my church. The church is growing slowly but I believe that God will bring continued growth to my church. Please pray for me.'

Time and again from him and everyone this *Please pray for me.* Pastor Naek also works in an isolated inland region, an unfriendly Muslim environment, where Christians are a very small minority.

Don't forget that most Batak (Lutheran) Christians live in villages and towns with large Christian populations. In North Sumatra with its 6 million Christians hundreds of villages and many towns are predominantly Protestant-Lutheran. That's where most Australian visitors are going and that's where life is considerably easier (but *not* easy) for followers of Christ. It's a totally different story for the rest of Sumatra and much of Indonesia.

## Progress Report on Youth Library Centre

*UPDATE on Rumah Baca (The Reading House) in Medan.*

Rumah Baca making good headway, thanks to a self-motivated energetic leadership group of committed young adults. It was started to give support, encouragement and opportunity for self-education to the large number of unemployed Christian young people of Medan. Recently church folks have added another 200 magazine volumes and 20 books to the collection but more are needed *to equip young people in knowledge and ministry*, in the words of Sahala Sitio, the chairperson. Books can only be read in the rooms, not taken home. A donor also pays for

the subscription of KOMPAS, a leading independent Indonesian newspaper.

Committee members visit churches and youth groups, issue invitations and organize monthly discussion groups on topics such as youth and church, youth issues and problems, globalisation. Well known former Bishop, the Rev Dr SAE Nababan LLD, was one of the speakers.

Rumah Baca needs continued development and support. Its full potential has not been reached yet. A lot of fund raising is being carried out by a band of dedicated volunteers. They don't rely on handouts or subsidies but we need to keep helping and encouraging this important initiative for the all-round wellbeing of Medan Christian youth. Sahala is thankful; *We thank ASIA Focus through Rev. August Fricke and also the LCA for the continued support of the young people of Medan.*

## New Influx of Nias People

*UPDATE on Church Worker Mr Seng Bun and the Nias people of Kerinci, Riau, Central Sumatra*

Malaysian owned Riau Pulp & Paper Company is everything to everyone in the Kerinci district. It is a state in a state, the builder of a whole new city, monopoly employer feeding, among others, a total of 28 000 Nias people including the 6000 new arrivals that came after the devastating Nias earthquake last year. Our correspondent Gan Seng Bun describes these people as the poorest of the poor. Gan is a near-executive level company man but in his free time is a tireless church worker and advocate of the Nias people. The 2005 December Edition of ASIA Focus ran a story about the securing of a large piece of land for a church for these fellow Lutheran Christians, something that to him was a real miracle. ASIA Focus helped to make this purchase possible.

Here is Gan's latest update:

- the building of the church (to which ASIA Focus also contributed) begins in July 2006
- his visiting of the poor and sharing the Gospel with them continues as before
- The company at last has bought land on which the Nias people can bury their dead – a major breakthrough

**Comment:** Exposure in 2005 to the lives of the impoverished Nias people in Kerinci, 'the poorest of the poor', has taught me that we humans can be survivors no matter what, that to have pride as persons is important and that people are beautiful, literally beautiful, even in poverty.

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**Sign at a Lutheran Church in Singapore:** *Our Lord's last words our first priority.*

*(The Great Commission – Mat 28: 18-20 and Acts 1: 8).*

## Worsening Situation for Christians

### New Pornography Law

In December last year our government submitted a draft on a new pornography and porno-action law. It's very controversial in our society. Women activists and people with concerns have already made protests after long discussions. We can say that the whole draft is discriminating against women and accuses women of being agents of increasing immorality in Indonesia. It makes sex appear like 'the worst thing'. Besides that, the draft does not recognize our pluralism in society. We have different cultures, religions and races. We think our government is trying to make us adopt one of the cultures in this world, so that all women must be wearing clothes which hide our whole body. Every day many different sections of society try to demonstrate against this proposed new law.

### New Work Place Relations Law

The revision of the law of employment has caused labour protests and demonstrations in every town. The revision protects only the rights of the investor and sacrifices our labour rights. If our government doesn't respond by May/June there will be huge demonstrations, like in France.

*(Please note that even present labour laws and practices in Indonesia are exploitative, unlike ours)*

### West Papua and Human Rights

The protests from our country against the Australian government which gave political asylum to 42 West Papuans and the call to cut diplomatic ties to Australia makes me understand how our government and a portion of the Indonesian people think. I can understand the reason why Australia gave asylum to them. If our government cannot protect their human rights, not even their lives, it's better for them to live in Australia. I hope they can live in peace there. Human Rights are still not respected in my country. I try to appreciate the rights of all people, not only mine.

*Please pray for my lovely country, you Australian people, so the life will be better in my own country.*

*Hotlin Sitorus, Medan*

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**Giraffe International:** This month in Darwin 13 participants from South East Asia are being equipped to adapt the well known *Giraffe Youth Leadership Course* into their own culture/language. This will also be an amazing experience for Australians to experience Christian community in a global or at least Asian context. Info: LCA - SA district office (08) 8267 5211.

# The Tsunami Aftermath

## Aceh

### Balance sheet 17 months after the event

Total number of tsunami dead in all affected countries together: 230 000. In Indonesia alone: 170 000 dead; 500 000 still homeless; Jan 2006 still 65 000 in tents plus 70 000 in temporary barracks; half of what had been aimed for. \$17.7 billion given by 'the world' including 1 billion from Australia to Indonesia alone. After one year, 17 000 dwellings had been built, some or many of them shoddy and having to be repaired or rebuilt. Some Australian advisers contracted by AusAid, the government body through which our government disperses foreign aid, were paid up to \$350 000 each for 6 months' work, according to press reports. No matter how much we give through public appeals, the truth generally is that most of the affected people will receive little help. Many will receive nothing while some, of course, will benefit significantly. It is hoped that we are faring a lot better by giving through church channels. Working for the LWF – Department of World Service, our own Ken Semmler last year did his best in Aceh to increase the level of transparency with regard to the incoming tsunami donations. It is no secret that corruption has also crept into some of our partner churches and congregations but we have to be very careful in what we are saying and need to fully understand the situation first. But we cannot necessarily be silent either.

### Devastating report on misuse of tsunami funds

THE AUSTRALIAN newspaper came out with a well researched, devastating report on post-tsunami corruption in Aceh on 24 April 2006. Here are some of the lines; *The warning signs were obvious to anyone paying attention. Cashed-up, Indonesian government officials were suddenly able to afford flashy new cars. Sadly, the spending spree has been financed from cash looted from the billion-dollar fund to rebuild the shattered lives of tens of thousands of tsunami victims. It seems endemic corruption has drained tens of millions of dollars from the international relief fund at a time when tens of thousands are still living in tents. In Australia, aid organisations are counting their losses after the Indonesian National Audit agency reported \$50 million missing from the country's post-tsunami reconstruction fund. Of the 1219 government posts established to distribute aid at least 715 have failed to even provide financial reports of their activities.*

Agencies mentioned and hit hard are Oxfam and Save the Children's Fund. It has been discovered that in many cases dwellings built – apart from the very low number of houses completed at all – have been sub-standard and have to be torn down again or at least partially rebuilt. However, Australian aid officials were said to have been at pains to stress that some Australian money was better accounted for than that of some other countries. It really is a disaster for large portions of the aids industry. It is hard to believe that highly experienced and respected

relief organisations can be milked like this. In the findings there was no reference to World Vision or our own Lutheran World Service and absolutely no conclusions should be drawn.

### Tsunami agony still, 'Where is my husband?'

Muslim woman Mrs Munir lost her husband, some children, 18 members of her wider family in all, her house, her land, her garden, her everything. Now everything is in the sea, the very earth on which her mortal life was built. It's all washed away. It's a moonscape now. In fact, it may be ocean now. For the coastline itself is redrawn. Where once villages proudly stood, now blue waves roll ashore.

Today, 17 months later, her pain is still like yesterday's despair. Writes her granddaughter Evi, 'My grandma – now with relatives in Medan – always gets sick and always gets insane in the hospital, and sometimes she cries hysterically asking, *Where is my husband, where is my family, where are my children?* All this makes me confused. What can I do?'

Families who have lost everything, like this woman, should eventually be resettled and receive a new home in a new area (some after three years?) but those who have lost 'only' most of their earthly goods and were left with a roof over their heads and a bit of land under their feet have largely been unable to get any real long term help at all for the rebuilding of their houses and everything else. There seems to be a clear injustice here as the funds should be there and donations by governments and the public at the time were unparalleled in history. Compare Cyclone Larry and Innisfail. Victims in Australia, by comparison, get royal treatment.

### Nias Island – pain unabated even now

Beautiful Nias Island is a surfer's paradise but one of the poorest and most backward places in Indonesia. That was even before disasters hit. After the tsunami struck parts of this Christian island end of December 2004, the 2005 Easter Monday earthquake (magnitude 8.7) devastated it in total. 850 people died. Today some 10 000 survivors on Nias alone are living in tents still. Island and islanders are reeling still.

While a significant amount of relief funding has been received – also by the churches (in particular from German donors) – one group has missed out. They are the members of the fairly small Lutheran Church in Teluk Dalam, a small town in the south of the island. The reason? They are Batak people, not local Nias people, belonging to the GKPI whose Bishop is Rev Mangisi Simorangkir.

They no longer live in tents but their church is heavily damaged and rebuilding costs are large. There is still a food shortage, plain and simple. The destroyed infrastructure and remoteness of the place results in everything being very expensive. There is still a need for most things – like books for the children at the local school, stationary and instruments, etc. Things are not good. 'The economy

is dead and there is just no money around,' writes Bishop Simorangkir.

ASIA FOCUS has just now sent \$2300 (Rp. 15 million) for GKPI Nias relief. Another \$2300 has also been released to cover the costs for the Bird Flu and Dengue Fever Workshop (see article on page 2) - an equally great need even if this sounds strange.

**Note:** Nias Island was shaken up again on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006 by another frightening earthquake (7.1 on the Richter Scale). The whole earth crust there seems unstable.

## INDONESIA - a country in decline, poverty keeps rising

*Anti-people economic policies are implemented with greater savageness than ever. Since the 1997 Asian economic crisis and the collapse of the so-called Indonesian miracle, the neo-liberal economic recipes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and western governments – including Australia – have been implemented by the local elites, with full western backing. This has resulted in a constant downward pressure on the living standards of the 200 million poor Indonesians. Unemployment and underemployment have grown. Public transport and other costs have increased. Labour productivity has been driven down. More factories close than open. Even agricultural products have been undermined, as policies protecting local agriculture are dismantled.*

Max Lane, University of Sydney - 'Inside Indonesia', April 2006

## INDONESIA - Christian-Muslim Relationships in Aceh

Aceh is the most Islamic province of all of Indonesia. Sharia Law with all its restrictions has been introduced but not so much by the will of the people but Islamic power politics from the outside. So for restaurants to offer pork meals is *strictly* forbidden, of course. Yet one day after church last year in broad day light some of us – the pastor and church worker Linda inclusive – enjoyed a lovely pork meal in a Chinese restaurant in the middle of Banda Aceh right next to a Muslim café. And no one is allowed to sell beer in Aceh, of course. No problem either. Give Linda an hour at most and she has found for you plenty of beer good and cheap. You must have friends! These are examples of the hypocrisy that legalism and prohibitionism fosters. On a more serious note, Linda is a great community worker and relationship builder between the tiny Christian minority and Acehnese Muslim society. She gives this positive assessment:

*I believe the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Aceh is getting better. This week I have had a meeting with our Muslim friends from North Aceh in Medan. They told me that their leader no longer gives negative reports about Christian people or Christian NGOs in their area and that SIRA (Central Information Reference Group Aceh) – one of our Islamic partners – had come to their village and said that they were helped by Christian people while conflict raged in Aceh but they did not proselytise. And when the tsunami came, again, the first aid came from Christian people/NGOs to help Aceh people. We should say thanks to them and not spread bad news about Christians, SIRA told them. According to our history, Aceh is very open and our*

*(Batak) forefather had proved this a long time ago. Let's together rebuild Aceh and keep peace.*

Linda Sianturi, Banda Aceh



*Strange contradictions in Muslim-Christian relationships: here warm and friendly Muslim young people asking to pose with Betty Fricke while in other areas hate reigns and rocks are thrown at manses and churches (see also p. 8)*

## INDONESIA - Terrorism, Tourism and Mission Trips

*'The chances of a mission trip to Indonesia are minimal,' wrote a friend on the basis of travel advice given on sites like [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au). I hear of people not going there because of this. This has the potential to put on hold all in-depth, meaningful relationships between us here in Australia and our family of faith in Indonesia, especially Sumatra. Affected are the Lutheran schools and congregations there, delegations from here, aid efforts and sister congregation relationships. If fear comes to rule the day, this would be a tragedy. In these days of trouble and stress over there, I think they need us more than ever. The travel advice hasn't changed much for years. Based on that advice, I should never go there as in fact I annually do. I have never felt in danger. I have never felt unwelcome, not even by the Muslim population I gladly mix with.*

ASIA FOCUS Editor

### Indonesia struck by new earthquake:

On Saturday morning, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2006, the tried and tested nation of Indonesia was rocked and shaken by another calamitous earthquake. It occurred near Yogyakarta, Java, killing 6200 people, badly injuring over 20 000 and leaving 600 000 homeless. It is frightening how quickly this latest catastrophe has dropped out of sight and seems already forgotten by most Australians. While some 95% of the people of the region are Muslims, a Lutheran Church and manse have been destroyed with many fellow Christians' wounded and their homes in ruins. "We ask for your help," wrote our friend Bishop M Simorangkir whose church, the GKPI, has opened an emergency shelter for the victims. Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS) accepts tax-deductible donations which will be channelled through LWF- and WCC- related ACT (Action by Churches Together) which operates like the Red Cross, according to the Bishop. **Direct church-to-church help** may be difficult for ALWS. Please consult with the LCA's Mission Board or donate directly through ASIA FOCUS – with your donation marked specifically for *Java Earthquake* relief.

Frightening aspects of

## 'The Muslim Mind'

Fuelled by the war in Iraq and the US Middle East policies in general, the anti-Western and especially anti-American feelings in all Muslim countries are extremely strong. The Iraq war and the so-called war on terror is a disaster for Christianity and, as has been said, has set back Christian mission in Muslim societies by a century.

Even in moderate Indonesia a substantial proportion of the population, like in all Muslim countries, admires Osama bin Laden and justifies and defends Muslim terrorism. A respectable survey has revealed that 25% of all Indonesians support and sympathise with the Bali terrorists while the Balinese themselves, largely Hindus, are in total disagreement with that, of course.

The power of hate and the politics of hate are frightening. It was frightening to see the fanatical Muslim President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, on a recent state visit to Indonesia, stir up the masses there with anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric and to see them all loving it including particularly Jakarta university students. This man wants to wipe Israel off the map and sees America as Satan personified. He could set the world aflame with his religious hate.

There really is a clash of culture and civilization. Christians largely see their religion as a personal matter. We are Australians. Ours is a democratic and secular country. A long time ago we may have seen ourselves as living in a Christian country but not these days.

For a Christian, 'the world' is an external force, a force he may fight or resist. For a Muslim, the world should be ruled by Allah's law. The Muslim is obligated to do all he can to make his country a Muslim society, a Muslim state, if it is not already one. Islam is his mission, his calling, his everything. It gives him his identity as a person. It is his life. Asked for his nationality, a Muslim may say, *I am a Muslim*. For his faith is his world.

So it is really no wonder that in Indonesia the Church is more and more becoming a suffering church as the ISLAMISATION of the country continues, pressures on non-Muslims increase and discrimination of Christians in public life intensify to the point of persecution in some regions. We know of the many churches recently burnt down etc. Yet in some areas of Indonesia harmony and respect prevails between Islam and Christianity, particularly in Eastern Java.

Generally organized Islam seeks power. It pitches Islam versus the West, the 'Christian' states. The problem is that there are no Christian states – something the Muslim mind finds hard to grasp.

Muslims have long memories and have not forgotten the Crusades in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when 'Christian' states fought Muslim states. The behaviour of

conquering Christendom in those days, as we know, was absolutely shameful and the quicker we learn that there never were any truly Christian states in this world the better.

While personally peaceful, kind and loving, Muslims to this day share in some of this old-time combat mentality. For they still feel exploited, oppressed, besieged by the West and want to regain a place of pride and leadership in the world.

Muslims will see every Australian, whether a nominal Anglican, an agnostic Sydneysider or an active Christian, as a representative of the decadent 'Christian' West. We all are being identified with Western Middle Eastern politics and US military adventurism.

The tragedy is that these policies isolate and help to ostracise Christians in Muslim countries. This is the huge problem we are facing. This is the problem of nearly all Christians living in Muslim societies.

All we can do is pray to God to have mercy and to pray specifically for our fellow Christians in Muslim countries. As the Lord's people we can know that, in spite of everything, *the Kingdom ours remaineth*.

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### INDONESIA – First Lutheran Academy

Rev Mangisi Simorangkir, bishop of the GKPI Church, and Rev Bonar Lumbantobing, lecturer at the theological seminary of the HKBP Church in Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra, alongside of others, are in the process of establishing a new Christian institute for Indonesia. It is the *Akademi Lutheran Indonesia*, the Indonesian Lutheran Academy. It expresses a determination by Indonesians (without overseas help!) to promote Lutheran theology in Indonesia.

### MALAYSIA – SABAH Lutherans in Mission to China

Retired lecturer of the Lutheran Seminary in Sabah, Malaysia, Ken Phin and her husband Liong Fah travel regularly to southern China to teach and preach and find the needs there overwhelming. This is what Ken Phin wrote earlier this year:

*I have just come back from intensive teaching at Ho Yuen Training Centre, Guandong, China. Prior to the training courses in Ho Yuen, my husband, Liong Fah and I went to the southern part of China working among the Hakka speaking people. During our stay in China, we were encouraged by the people we met. We conducted training courses in three areas. Besides teaching, I focused on personal counselling while Liong Fah gave advice on their church building projects.*

*We found that wherever we went the demands from the church and the people were beyond what we could cope with.*

## Cambodia

### A Land of Challenge – Plans for a University

Cambodia is a heart stopper in many ways: the poverty, the genocidal history, the tragedy, the friendly, charming people, the endemic corruption, the Mekong, the Angkor temples, the street kids, the heart warming orphanages.

Cambodia has also attracted huge amounts of aid funding from countless people, many governments and a large number of world relief organisations. They are all there – every international relief agency of any consequence. They spend millions and millions. Comparatively small Lutheran World Service alone spends \$US3million p.a. in Cambodia. In fact, one of every two dollars circulating in the country was originally a donation from overseas. Yet, in all that, Cambodia's trials and tribulations continue.

Mention the word *Cambodia* and people are moved to generosity. Mention Indonesia and the story may be very different. The word Indonesia, from the point of view of many Australians, unfortunately brings with it the underlying connotations of extremism, radical Islam, terrorism, discomfort and fear.

Many of us too share in a great love for the people of Cambodia. Our 2005 MISSION TRIP was popular and highly successful. Enthusiasm for the 2006 MISSION TRIP leaving Adelaide around July 7 2006 runs just as high. Our Cambodia connections seem to strengthen from year to year. In fact, an absolutely exciting project is presently being researched: the possibility of sooner or later establishing a major Adult Education Facility in the Cambodian Province of Preah Vihear tentatively named PLAS PRAI UNIVERSITY. Plas Prai means *transformation*.

### Plas Prai University

This Adult Education Facility may indeed be able to be called a university by Cambodian standards and may potentially be established for around \$US100,000 but we don't know for certain. Four faculties are envisaged: Bible School, English Faculty, Agricultural and Commercial (Business) Faculty. The idea is to contract foreign lecturers for periods of time on a voluntary basis.

Teaching and modelling ethical standards and integrity in a corrupt country with corrupt institutions are crucial when you consider that in many of the country's 'best' educational facilities degrees are for sale.

What's the motivation and foundation for this project? Very simply, Christ with his Gospel of grace, within the Lutheran context and tradition. Or this answer could be given: truly evangelical witness in word and deed. As Lutherans, one of our strength lies in the area of education. We believe we should build on our strengths.

The necessary extensive process of investigation and

consultation has only just started in serious and explorations are on the way now. We believe that the possibilities are enormous and that the need is there. We already know a lot about the region, the Province of Preah Vihear has good connections to the local population. We are sure that the *fields are ripe for harvest*. We may be presented with one of these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and await God's call.

The upcoming Mission Trip to Preah Vihear under the leadership of Pastor Roger Whittall and his wife Lois of Adelaide/Light Pass will be a crucial step in the investigative process. New Guinea Lutheran Mission veteran Reinhard Tietze with his theological and agricultural qualifications will be an important part of the trip and the process. He indicated that he would be able to secure substantial donations for this project, should it proceed.

We need to be humble and careful, and open to all possibilities. Our LCA Mission Director and others have advised to carefully think through issues of sustainability of the project and to consider carefully all long term implications. Obviously we don't disagree. No one should assume, as of June 2006, that Plas Prai University will become reality. *If you, dear reader, have a particular interest in this project and can offer some expertise or advise, please do get in touch.*

We are very excited about the possibilities. ASIA Focus will keep reporting on progress and lend all the support it can. This is a big undertaking that has to stand on its own feet and develop its own momentum, structure and organisation if and when the green light is given. It would be wonderful if one day ASIA Focus could claim, *'We conceived and nurtured you. We are your mother.'*



*Cambodian children crossing the mighty Mekong River - they deserve love, life and a future. Education is the key.*

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**Ordered to get married:** *Sir, I have one hope for the Lord at the present time. My parents ordered me to get married in 2006 but I haven't found my partner yet. Please pray for me.*

Indonesian Christian bachelor, aged 29, Sumatra

# The Philippines

## Excitement over new office equipment

*We are excited*, wrote Jeruel Basalong when news filtered through to him and his bishop that ASIA Focus was able to make money available for the purchase of a computer and a photocopier.

The whole 12 000 member Northern Luzon Autonomous District (NLAD) of the Lutheran Church of the Philippines did not own one computer or one photocopier. Can you believe that Rev Marvin Paas, its bishop, has to visit internet cafés around town to be able to answer official mail from church leaders around the world! Learn all about the Philippine Church in ASIA Focus No 11 March 2006.

Dear reader, please realize that most likely you would not be Lutheran today had it not been for the communication revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that allowed Luther's message to spread like a wildfire and conquer countries and continents. Johann Gutenberg's invention of the printing press changed the world and served the Word. His innovation most likely saved the Reformer from helplessness, obscurity and untimely death.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century church must never forget this, not even the struggling, impoverished church in the Philippines. This church lacks the printed word – the materials required for worship, Sunday School, Christian education – and is in danger of entombment in some kind of modern-day Stone Age.

It is particularly the progressive Filipino youth with vision and know-how that can bring hope, dynamism and new life into congregational life, worship and outreach, also through the printed word. *Most youth ideas are new to the Diocese (district) because its officers are a generation away from the youth (away from the way the world works today)*, writes Jeruel, *the youth's work is joining the choir and blowing out the candles*.

So for a long time, because of poverty but also lack of vision and education, the whole district (NLAD) with all its congregations had embarrassingly little in terms of written materials. The reason was always, *no money, no budget, therefore impossible*. So Jeruel started to produce on his own account a private church newsletter called THE VOICE. He borrowed an old computer and was offered a small shabby room for an office and then finished up paying dearly for photocopying at commercial outlets. Then he tried to sell the finished product, excellent as it was ...

Well, all of a sudden everyone wakes up and before long his newsletter is declared the Philippines' counterpart of our LUTHERAN, or something close to that. Before Jeruel there was nothing, and there still is nothing in the other two districts of his 28000-member church. However, the word is spreading. The Lutheran World Federation is soon flying him to a conference in Vienna, Austria. But no one so far had ever offered him the very basics!

The ASIA FOCUS donated computer and photocopier will be used to print service sheets, hymn sheets, song booklets, cards, flyers, baptismal certificates, Sunday School and other educational materials for congregations great and small. To recoup some operating costs, printing services will be offered to the public.

Rev James Palangyos, a senior pastor (not a youth!), is in charge of remote villages in the Cordilleras, a large mountain region. He writes that we need to *produce reading and teaching materials for the villages in the people's own language so that our witness for Christ and our teaching of the Word of God becomes more effective*. That sums it up. Unable to afford to produce sufficient materials of anything, it was impossible for him to do justice to his work.

He like other pastors and evangelists can breathe more easily now due to the generosity not so much of ASIA Focus but of two people – mother and daughter who are great ASIA Focus supporters. Bishop Paas and Jeruel had been told that ASIA Focus was unable to make general funds available for this project but if a small miracle were to happen and someone was willing to make a large donation, well, then the funds would be there.

The 'small miracle' did happen. Mum (and Dad) on the Sunshine Coast happened to have some extra cash available and their daughter in my own church found \$2300 between them with ASIA Focus having to add a very small amount only. To God be the glory!

## Thailand – the struggles of an evangelist

*Sudajit Sornpan works alone as an evangelist, without much support from anyone, in the Thai city of Banpran doing God's work and building up the Lutheran congregation there. This is her story:*

**Coping with no money:** I work in Banpran Church (East Thailand) as an evangelist. I receive monthly only 4000 bath (\$130). Sometimes I have to use this money for church work because the church has no money and the subsidy of the ELCT (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand) to my church is getting less every year. It will cut it down to nearly nothing and the offering is not enough to pay for electricity and so on because the church members are poor. That's why the ELCT finds it hard to get people to work for it because there is no money and no budget.

When I came to Banpran Church I had to spend my money to buy the curtain for the church and things like that. I work hard here because I want the church to grow. Every month I have to spend my monthly salary on church work. Last month we had a church youth camp (in Northern Thailand) and I had to borrow money from people to be able to do my duty and go there... I don't know what's going to happen in the future but I believe that God will show a way. Please don't worry about me, just pray for me.

**2006 Easter Festivities:** In our church (here in Thailand) we had a prayer meeting on Good Friday until midnight and on Easter Sunday morning we had worship early in the morning. And in the afternoon we had Thai New Year called Songkran. We splashed water on each other's bodies. We invited the people in the village to come to join with us so they can hear the Good News and come to know how God's power and the meaning of Easter.

**Growing the congregation – and bananas:** Our church here hopes to baptise 20 new people during 2006. By March, eight people were baptised already. Altogether, our small and new congregation has baptised 30 people. I have to work hard here because church members don't really know how to serve the Lord but they are learning now how to do this. They have so many things to learn. I also have much more to learn because our church has no money to do other ministries here. Now we have planted banana trees and we think we will introduce fish farming and will make ponds to help the people.

## Burma

### Persecution continuing

A surprising, mysterious request has been received in the mail from an unknown Christian in Yangon (Rangoon), Burma (Myanmar), to be put on the mailing list of ASIA FOCUS. His name has to be withheld. We have not been in contact with anyone in Burma with its oppressive regime. Its military junta has right now launched ANOTHER OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE KAREN PEOPLE in the east of the country killing many and causing another wave of refugees spilling over into Thailand. Not that the world cares. Most Karens are Christians.

Stuart Betlem from **Integrity Travel**, Brisbane, supports ASIA FOCUS. He would love to assist you in all your travel plans including mission trips, holidays and business travel.

Please contact consultant Stuart Betlem:  
Ph: (07) 3375 7201  
Fax: (07) 3375 6721  
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Integrity Travel is a licensed travel agency. Make your travel plans assist those with less in Asia.

*(continued from p. 2)*

through the Cambodian World Vision staff. He had decided that he and the whole village needed to learn about Christianity and so catch the Christian spirit. He wanted his people to be like 'them', the World Vision staff. This staff personified Jesus not only in what they did but also in the persons they were. You see, who we are as persons matters more than what we do.

Or meet Mr Min (see article ASIA FOCUS June 2005, No.7), a man from the Lua tribe of northern Thailand, who belonged to a family of communist insurgents that had fought the Thai Royal Army up to 25 years ago. He told me that his sister had shot and killed herself because she felt so tortured by an evil spirit who never left her. And he was going to do the same thing because his life was a living hell. He too was demon possessed and tormented. He had spent all his savings to break free. He had even gone to visit a famous traditional demon exorcist over the border in Laos in order to be set free from the daily torture but all to no avail. In his despair he turned to Christ who set him free and give him a new life. That was in 2000. To him, the material support he received later on through the mission ministry of the Thai Lutheran Church in his region was nothing by comparison to the *all surpassing worth of knowing Jesus*. (Phil 3, 8).

We really need to teach our own church members that feeding the body, mind and spirit of people goes hand in hand. A few weeks ago a young woman from my church said to me, *Pastor, I would like to make a special gift to ASIA FOCUS. I really would like to give money for the drilling of a well in a Cambodian village*. Then two weeks later we had a mission service where speakers with first hand mission experience spoke and talked about the hunger for God's Word in Asia. After the service the same lady said to me as we shook hands, *Pastor, after hearing what the speakers said, I no longer need my money to go towards a well. It can go to anything now that supports the Gospel, water well or not*.

*Excerpt from a paper presented by Pastor August Fricke at the Buderim Mission Festival, 29 April 2006*

## Holistic Mission Ministry

This principal must stand:

Christian world service is Christian world mission and Christian world mission is Christian world service – a calling of both word and deed. This is the Great Commission. This is proclaiming the Gospel. To help this principle become incarnate in our work in the different cultural settings and political systems on earth is the challenge of both Christian world mission and Christian world service. We must reject the modern idea that Christian witness can be by works only, without words. Try to tell the Early Church that!

Essentially, in a different context, C.S. Lewis says something quite similar when he says this about happiness:

God has designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy without bothering about religion. God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

## Current ASIA FOCUS projects in brief

### Thailand

- Sponsorship of evangelist Mr Tosapol Lapimol.
- We now are also sponsoring a second evangelist, Mr Wichan. *(see next edition)*
- Sponsorship of two students in Sii Khiu.

### Cambodia

- Sponsorship of two evangelists Niem Hok and Lok Samouen.
- We are looking forward to further action in Preah Vihear, our ongoing field of special action. *(see p.9)*

### Indonesia

- "Rumah Baca" (Reading House) for Christian Youth. *(see p.4)*
- Relief to the struggling poor in Medan – social fund.
- Supporting the Nias people in Riau Province with their church plant. *(see p.5)*
- Sponsorship of blind student Ida Rosari's theological education at STT Abdi Sabda.
- Sponsorship of Luther Matheus Saogo, Mentawai Islands, for studies in Java. The LCA also sponsors two Mentawai students.
- Other sponsorships.
- Earthquake Relief on Nias Island - first help received after 14 months. *(see p.6-7)*
- Financing a Bird Flu workshop. *(see p.6-7)*
- Helping a frontier parish in the wilds of Central Sumatra to develop a Christian Mission & Ministry Centre.
- Other needs as they arise, not forgetting the victims of the devastating earthquake on Java end May 2006. *(see p.7)*

### Philippines

- Subsidy for church publishing. Helping to meet the most basic publishing needs of a district of the Lutheran Church with 58 congregations.
- Supply of the church district's first computer and photocopier. *(see article p.10)*

*Projects are chosen with care after a great deal of research and consultation.*

## A Big Thank You to All Donors!

ASIA FOCUS does not appeal for money in the way the LCA and our congregations do and must. We have no interest in diverting any such funds but hope to help revive the mission spirit in our church. In this way, we hope that greater resources for mission become available for our church as well for additional endeavours such as ASIA FOCUS.

Obviously ASIA FOCUS projects depend on the continual flow of donations and we believe that the Spirit will guide and provide. We intentionally make commitments in Asia for a year at a time only.

ASIA FOCUS wants to say *thank you so much* to all donors. We thank you for your engagement in the marvellous and exciting venture of faith.

Dear friends, 95% of readers clearly see ASIA FOCUS purely as a free service which it is. Relatively few donations are being received. However, the real miracle is that some fellow Lutherans – and non-Lutherans! – are able and willing to make very large donations, often 'out of the blue'. The other day a non-Lutheran pensioner couple attending a Lutheran church donated \$2000.

There are some two to three dozen people that provide the thousands of dollars that ASIA FOCUS is able to spend in Christ's name. At the same time, small donations are heart warming as well because they express interest and appreciation.

### Subscriptions

The popular and free ASIA FOCUS newsletter will sooner or later be sent only to those who at some stage have indicated their desire to be on the mailing list. Please order your free printed copy now if you have not done so. Those currently on the ASIA FOCUS email list will continue to receive the electronic version (PDF). If not interested in receiving ASIA FOCUS please let us know.

ASIA FOCUS is a free publication distributed in printed and electronic format. Unless otherwise indicated, Pr August Fricke ([fricke@netspace.net.au](mailto:fricke@netspace.net.au)) is the author of all items.

*You are also invited to order multiple copies of this newsletter. ASIA FOCUS may be reproduced freely. Individual materials may be reproduced but please make appropriate acknowledgements.*

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**Next Issue...**

*ASIA FOCUS No.13 due in August will contain the latest on the Lutheran church in Burma, Vietnam and Kyrgyzstan!*



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