

WORLD MISSION

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

HIGHLIGHTS

Summer/Fall 2009

Mentoring future leaders in Indonesia

African church leader

Congregational mission involvement

Outreach in Central Asia and Vietnam

SSi.(Teol)
STT
IKT





PROMINENT ALUM Rebecca Young with Margaret Dharma Angkuw, the first female graduate of Jakarta Seminary, who was ordained in 1955.

Equipping for service

Rebecca Young helps
future ministers
integrate Christian and
Indonesian identities

By Pat Cole

Rebecca Young's students come from far-flung islands across the sprawling Indonesian archipelago. When they enter her class, the PC(USA) mission worker invites them to turn their theological thinking toward home.

Young, a theology and missiology professor at Jakarta Theological Seminary, encourages them to see Jesus Christ from an Indonesian rather than a Western perspective.

"What they've learned about Jesus Christ has tended to be from a missionary viewpoint," she says. "I'm hoping they'll see Christ not from Western eyes, but as one of them."

Jesus, she points out, was born in Asia. "Let him come home and be Asian."

Missionaries understandably communicate the gospel with their own cultural biases, Young says. "We're all human."

She challenges students to see how Christ was at work in Indonesia even before the first missionaries arrived. She invites them to share stories from their cultures, hoping students can see God's hand in history.

"The Holy Spirit was working in Indonesia even before people here knew about Jesus, preparing their hearts to receive Jesus," she says. "It is amazing to see how many cultures and traditions had a Jesus-like figure that was preparing them to receive Christ."

Young says that an appreciation of heritage helps students integrate their identity as Christians and Indonesians in their daily life. "It makes (faith) more real for them," she explains. "It is transformative in your personal and social life to know that Jesus is relevant Monday through Saturday and not just on Sunday."



INDONESIAN PERSPECTIVE Missiology students Arman, Sergio and Toar with their professor. She urges students to see Jesus through the lens of their experience as Indonesian Christians.

Young's appointment to serve in Indonesia in 2007 was something of a spiritual homecoming. She had heard the call to vocational ministry while serving there as a nutritionist with Church World Service from 1989 to 1993 in Jayapura, Irian Jaya, Indonesia. She was active in a local congregation and eventually was asked to preach. It was not part of her job description nor was it a role she aspired to fill. To her surprise, she eventually found that she was comfortable behind the pulpit. The Indonesians have also affirmed her giftedness for proclamation. "The people of Indonesia told me that I was more suited to be a pastor than a nutritionist," she says.

For Young the trek toward ordination and mission service was following a family tradition. Her parents were both Presbyterian pastors and several of her forebears served overseas as Presbyterian missionaries.

To prepare for her new career, Young enrolled at Columbia Theological Seminary, where she received the Master of Divinity degree. With the encouragement of her professors, she pursued doctoral studies at Fordham University in New York City. She completed a Ph.D. in systematic theology with the intention of teaching at a seminary.

While still looking for a permanent position, the tsunami of 2004 struck Indonesia. Young, who was fluent in Indonesian and had public health expertise, called Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) and offered her help. Soon she was off to Indonesia to assist with relief efforts.

In Indonesia she met the president of

Jakarta Seminary, who told her the school had an opening for a systematic theology professor. That conversation set in motion events that led to her appointment as a PC(USA) mission worker in 2007.

"I am the perfect case study that trust in God puts it all together," she observes. "After years of feeling I couldn't connect the dots of my own experience, I saw that God was instead connecting them for me into this beautiful picture."

These days Young encourages young people who are seeking direction for their own lives and ministries. Most travel long distances to the capital city of Jakarta for seminary studies, spending two and three days on buses and boats. Indonesia's 17,000 islands (5,000 inhabited) span an expanse that's equal to the distance between San Francisco and Bermuda.

Jakarta Seminary, founded in 1934, is Indonesia's oldest theological school. It is supported by Indonesia's National Council of Churches, and about 250 students from approximately 30 denominations are enrolled.

In the classroom Young is a mission worker who inspires her students for mission service. Veryandri Tungga, a student from a poor and predominately Christian island near East Timor, decided last year to pursue mission service in his church after taking Young's missiology class. He chose her to supervise his senior thesis.

In the preface to his thesis Tungga wrote: "There are no perfect words to express the joy I feel, except to say 'Thank you.' Even so, I hope that in saying this, it is felt as more than just ordinary words, because the help that Rev. Young has given me is extremely meaningful, not just

in the process of writing this thesis, but in the future course of my life."

Young's students will serve in a country that is home to the world's largest Muslim population. More than 85 percent of Indonesia's population is Muslim and less than 10 percent is Christian. Her goal is to help students be faithful and respectful witnesses to their faith.

One way Young models this is through her work with PDA, which continues to collaborate with partner organizations to help with tsunami recovery. Young spends 25 percent of her time working with PDA-related projects. One project involved replanting mangroves destroyed during the tsunami, an effort that involved a Muslim student group. Both the environment and fisher folk benefit from mangroves because they help prevent erosion and provide essential habitat for crabs.

In two years of service, says Joas Adiprasetya, acting seminary dean, Young has convinced students and colleagues of her commitment to students and her passion for contextual education.

Students "love Becca for her friendly personality, but also for her exceptional ability to present complicated theological issues in understandable and fun ways," he says. "Becca also delves so deep into theological and cultural struggles that sometimes she looks more Indonesian than most of us. We are very grateful to the PC(USA) for sending Becca to help us here."

Read more about Rebecca's ministry at www.pcusa.org/missionconnections.

Emily Odom contributed to this article.