

STT-HKBP

Pematangsiantar, North Sumtra, Indonesia

Sunday, 20 September 2015

Dear Friends in Christ,

The words of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, “for everything, there is a season” seems quite appropriate as this past month at STT has been a time of beginnings and endings. I arrived back in Pematangsiantar on 14 August. I arrived, but my luggage did not make it onto the plane in Kuala Lumpur – a hazard of close international connections – but the suitcases arrived two days later. I arrived just at the beginning of a new semester and a new academic year.

I returned in time for the annual Independence Day celebration. Independence Day activities at STT-HKBP always begin with a worship service which includes a student drama depicting the struggle for freedom and God’s providence in helping to win the freedom for the people. Following the worship service there is a time of family fun which includes faculty and staff participation in all kinds of games. And, of course, there is food shared together!



Students had their own time for fun and games in the afternoon. They had volleyball tournaments; football (soccer) matches; as well as other kinds of races and activities. The traditional game for Independence Day is the climbing of the greased pole by teams of five or six students. Traditionally this has been a male activity, but I am told that these days, there are teams of women who participate as well. At the top of the pole is the Indonesian flag as well as other prizes for the taking.



On 1 September, the “Rumah (House) Sophia”, a new center for “women and gender studies” here at STT had its inaugural seminar on “Gender and the Family”. There were over 100 participants, mostly women, who came together to think about gender and family in their own lives as well as the lives of those with whom they work. The participants were pastors, deaconesses, and Bibelvrouw (Bible women) from the HKBP churches in North Sumatra. There were four presenters who gave input from their particular areas of competence. I was asked to be a presenter from the pastoral care perspective on gender roles and family life. There was opportunity for intense discussion following the lunch break. There were many good suggestions as to what future topics might be explored by the Rumah Sophia. Another beginning!! Please pray for the work of this center as they address issues of gender, equality within family life, community, and society. It is a much needed conversation, but one that will take patience and sensitivity to both religious and cultural contexts.

The second Friday of the month is always graduation day. This year, we graduated 80 students from the BTH program and 14 students from the MA program. This is both an ending and a beginning. It is an ending for the formal academic study for our students, but it is a beginning of a two year vicarage for them before they will be ordained as pastors of the church. Thus the entire theological process from beginning student to ordination as pastor is a seven year journey. Please pray for those beginning their vicarage years for experiences that will stretch them and move them from students to pastors. Daniel Sinaga, on my right-hand, is part of the HKBP. He is also a member of the LWF, “Young Reformers” program which has been meeting in preparation for the 500 year anniversary in 2017. Pimpinan Sijabat, on my left, is a member of the HKI (Lutheran Church Indonesia). He and Daniel were the first two



students I met when I came to STT two years ago. Their English is quite good and they were very helpful in being interpreters for me. They are best friends and graduated numbers 1 & 2 in their class.



This last year from September 2014 to September 2015 was designated by the HKBP as the “Year of the Woman”. Last weekend, I went with my colleague, Anna Pangaribuan, to the island of Samosir as she was to be the preacher for the festival service of District 7 of the HKBP there. Anna’s first parish experience was on Samosir. There 23 parishes in District and 7 of them are served by a woman pastor. This picture is of the women pastors and the deaconesses of the area. The woman in the center in the red top is the Samosir representative to the national legislature. She is Anna’s sister-in-law. Anna is standing next to her on right hand side.

It was an interesting day. The service was three hours long – Anna preached for 45 minutes! But there were some creative elements to the service. I have been in meetings where the conversation about liturgy is “how can we make it uniform across the HKBP?” But in this service, we had a Batak liturgical dance during the confession and absolution. Eight teen-age girls came down the center aisle draped in a black ulos – this kind that is given at the time of death to a widow or widower to signify their change of status. During the actual confession, the knelt in contrition, but at the absolution, they threw off their ulos and “danced”. Batak dancing is very contained, which is to say that the dancer stays usually in one spot with rhythmic movement of hands, feet and body up and down in that one spot. Following the service there was a 4 hour party which included an auction of food and a giving of money for dancing and singing. All this was to raise the funds to pay for the party! No Batak party is ever complete without the eating of Saksang – a traditional pork dish in which a young pig is boiled in its own blood with a variety of spices. At the end of any party is the giving of portions of the boiled pig to honor those who have either come a long distance or given much to the efforts of the party. That was, indeed, a very fine ending!

The seminary itself is in the process of endings and beginnings. At the end of October, the 8 year tenure of Dr. Darwin Lumbantobing as principal of the seminary will come to an end. We will, of course, celebrate his service to the seminary and to the church with a festival party. But the faculty will also vote at the end of October on two names to forward to the bishop. The appointment of the principal, the academic dean and the dean of students is a bishop’s appointment. The present academic dean, Dr. Victor Tinambunan and my colleague, Dr. Anna Pangaribuan, are two of the people who have hopes of becoming the next principal. Please pray for God’s grace and presence in this process and for the seminary during this month. With this change of leadership there will also be a shifting of staff positions, so there is much stress on campus as transitions always bring about change and uncertainty.

I pray that your own endings of the summer activities and the beginnings of the new fall activities will be blessed and a blessing to all who come. As always, I am grateful for your partnership in this ministry of sharing the Gospel wherever we do find ourselves.

In Christ,

*Rosanne*