

Understanding another side of the world

By Nance O'Neil, RSCJ

As the Society celebrates its twentieth anniversary in Jakarta, it is perhaps more significant to mark the increase in our understanding of other cultures. And their acceptance of ours.

From the outset, the Sacred Heart presence in Indonesia was intended to help educate and support the people there. Another goal was having the chance to live in Muslim neighborhoods in order to promote relationships among Catholics and Muslims. More Muslims live in Indonesia than in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia combined... so we have been blessed.

The Society of the Sacred Heart ministry in Indonesia began when the central team decided to honor the canonization of Saint Philippine by starting a community in a new "country of the future." Indonesia was selected. And Helen McLaughlin, the superior general, said to me: "Why don't you go?" And I replied: "Where's Indonesia?"

Four RSCJ were originally intended to go; the Archbishop, Leo Soekoto, had invited us, and he suggested that we not come "as missionaries." But I was the only one who managed to get there and, like Philippine in the United States, I lived with the Ursulines for a time. It is noteworthy how the Ursulines have acted as catalytic agents in furthering and

supporting the Society's mission! Anyhow, Barbara Dawson, RSCJ, arrived two years later and by then we were firmly established as teachers at the Catholic university, Atma Jaya – which means "living spirit."

Since we were sponsored by the university, I had expected to teach. First, it was Business English, and now I teach at an inter-congregational seminary as well as at a mostly Muslim university.

We have a truly international community in Jakarta, and people are put in touch with us by way of other parts of the world. In addition to teaching, we work with an NGO that empowers the urban poor to defend their rights, runs a radio station where poor people learn to become news presenters, and serves displaced communities with education.

This winter, a seminar on Saint Madeleine Sophie drew over 100 people; two Catholics and two Muslims presented papers on her spirituality, on the inner and the outer life of the spirit. Some of the comments by Muslims were especially appreciative.

Muhammad Bagir, a professor of mysticism at the Islamic College for Advanced Studies, said: "The Sufis are not far from Sophie, or, we can say that Saint Sophie isn't very different from the Sufis in explaining that the human heart has to be pure to enter 'The Holy One.' Purity and holiness of heart mean letting go of everything except the Divine. I see the life of Sophie as Contemplative and Active. She knew there are two types of soul. The first type...goes out energetically to work and returns to the source of interior life and prayer. The second...seeks for quiet, silence...from an inner life they go forth to love and share the secret they have met in their silence. Sophie was the second sort."



Indonesia is an archipelago in Southeast Asia consisting of more than 17,500 islands (6,000 are inhabited) and straddling the equator. Land area: 736,000 sq. mi., about three times the size of Texas; Population (July 2009 est.): 240.3 million.

RSCJ in Indonesia

Brigid Keogh was an early pioneer, and many other RSCJ from the U.S. Province have spent time in Indonesia. In addition to Sister O'Neil, those who have worked full-time include: Barbara Dawson, Sis Flynn, Bonnie Kearney, Nancy Murphy, and Sally Rude.

Top: Members of the RSCJ community in Jakarta.

Center: Choi Sung Kyung, RSCJ, in traditional Korean dress.

Bottom: Jovita Triwiludjeng (Lulut), RSCJ, sharing the traditional yellow rice cone.



Lulut's Story

A clear indication of the growth in cultural understanding is the profession of our first Indonesian RSCJ. The Society went to Jakarta to help make God's love visible there, and it is with a sense of deep gratitude that we welcome our first sister from that country. **Jovita Triwiludjeng** – called **Lulut** – was professed February 1, 2009, in Rome. There are two more novices now.

Lulut spent a few months at St. Martin de Porres School (see page 12), at Oakwood, in San Francisco at the Schools of the Sacred Heart, and in St. Louis and St. Charles to study Philippine. She also worked with Mary McGann, RSCJ, in Berkeley, the Little Sisters of the Poor in New York, and Sprout Creek Farm in Poughkeepsie – and she visited Teresian House. The nuns there still remember her with joy.

The thanksgiving celebration in Jakarta for Lulut's profession was a howling success! She shared her own experiences of the pierced Heart at two Masses and again for our over 250 guests Sunday morning before lunch. Strength, poise, simplicity and depth – that's how I describe it.

Fortunately, the caterers put up a tent – it is the rainy season. But on the way to church, a full rainbow shone, the sun came out, and the rains didn't come until mid-afternoon when more than half the guests had gone.

The "program" was delightful. The kids' mothers adapted a hymn and changed the words specifically for Lulut; the Muslim mothers had said to the Catholics, you choose a song you all know and we'll learn it. Choi Sung Kyung, RSCJ, here for her pre-probation international experience, did a breathtakingly beautiful Korean dance in traditional dress. Then Lulut cut the traditional yellow rice cone – splitting the top half between her mother and me. And everyone ate – lots, and delicious – and still at the end, there was plenty left over to share with neighborhood families.

You can imagine what the preparations involved. I heard the practices of the kids and their mothers every morning. Sis Flynn, RSCJ, and Digna Dacanay, RSCJ, came to join us, and there were lots of folks wanting to see them. We were all amazed – and she was, too – at how much Indonesian Sis remembered after ten years' absence.

We thought Digna's language would be a help with the three "live-ins" who had arrived from Timor just before Lulut and I got home from Rome. They washed and set up the 200 chairs we had borrowed from the parish. Ten minutes were extracted from the two-hour video of the profession, but we could not get it to show on the computer! At the last minute, our neighbor electrician, Pak Adhi, found a computer nerd friend who came and installed what was needed. This at about 4:00 when Lulut needed to show it at Mass at 5:30! He had seen the caterers installing lights and fans in the tent and came, unasked, to oversee since "they won't understand our system." Good neighbor!

May we all be good neighbors to each other's needs as we continue to live and work with people whose culture may be different but whose heart energy is the same – around the world. ❖

The RSCJ presence in Indonesia officially began with the arrival of Nance O'Neil, RSCJ, in Jakarta, on the island of Java, in February of 1989. Sister O'Neil had just ended a six-year tenure as the first provincial of the newly formed U.S. province. Immediately after her arrival, Sister O'Neil lived with Ursuline sisters, another striking parallel to the experience of Philippine who lived for six weeks in an Ursuline convent in New Orleans after her arrival from France.