



Gospel Progress in Indonesia

Top to bottom: MERF's Makassar staff singing at the training centre opening; Neighborhood children's outreach at the Makassar centre.

will see strong churches established through their work.

Toraja

During the colonial period, pioneer missionaries from the Netherlands were blessed with major success among the Toraja people in Sulawesi. The Toraja inhabit the mountainous regions north of Bugis land. The vast majority of the Toraja people and their sister tribe, the Mamasa, converted to Christianity in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Most professed Christ in the 19th century. They quickly organized into churches patterned after Dutch practices of that day.

Sadly, many did not become well-grounded in the Word of God, but have continued old Dutch church forms. Also, many Toraja Christians are still deeply involved in the traditional tribal culture of elaborate, animistic funeral ceremonies.



The nation of Indonesia has a population of over 238 million living on more than 14,000 islands. Located just north of Australia and south of Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, it is by far the most populous country in its region and also the largest Muslim nation in the world.

After World War II, following three and a half centuries of Dutch colonial rule, these diverse island cultures united as a single republic. Today MERF ministries reach five large people groups on two major Indonesian islands: Sulawesi and Java.

Reaching Sulawesi

In south Sulawesi, MERF is involved in gospel radio broadcasting, evangelism, biblical training, and diaconal aid among Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja peoples.

Bugis

Bugis is the largest language group in that area and are considered among the most difficult Muslim people to reach in Indonesia. Their communities have the highest concentration of mosques in the country. There was active persecution of Christians, and some converts lost their lives in the memorable past. By God's grace, now there is a more tolerant spirit among Bugis, especially in cities.

Almost all recent converts are young people who have come to faith through the faithful, long-term witness of friends in one-to-one evangelism. The strategy of the Bugis gospel radio broadcast focuses on initiating contact with young people who have no strong commitment to the religion of their parents. *Pray that many Bugis hearts will be softened by these gospel messages.*

Makassar

There are many more Christians among the Makassar people on the island of Sulawesi. Makassarese villagers are also far more open to participating in small group Bible studies. In addition to gospel broadcasts, MERF supports two Makassarese evangelists who work in the eastern hills of south Sulawesi. *Pray that they*





nies. Since most Toraja embrace the basic Gospel message, MERF's Toraja broadcasts focus on more in-depth Bible teaching.

Expanding Biblical Training

The city of Makassar is the major port and the most vibrant business centre of Sulawesi. In 2008 MERF established a small ministry centre close to its busy airport. It has been useful for radio ministry, local children's outreach, and coordinating other MERF projects, such as short biblical training conferences held every few months in Makassar, the Soppeng MERF centre (established a few years earlier), and in other Bugis and Toraja areas.

To extend the biblical training ministry, this year



MERF constructed buildings in Makassar to host trainees. Sacrificial volunteer help from local Christian trade and business men pushed the project forward to completion. On August 12 the opening was joyfully celebrated. The new facilities will enable groups of thirty to forty church planters, lay leaders, Sunday school teachers, and youth workers from Sulawesi and surrounding islands to stay for four to six week biblical training

Clockwise: Preparation for the opening of the new Makassar training facilities; One of the new Makassar training dormitories; Pastor Armin, Makassar ministry leader, speaking at the opening ceremony; Sundanese pepper farmers near the future site of Java training centre.

programmes. *Pray for the many decisions to be made in preparation for training to begin at the new facility.*

Reaching Java

For many years, Australian brethren have urged MERF to become involved in indigenous missions on the most populated, main Indonesian island of Java. In 2009 MERF began gospel radio broadcasts in the two main ethnic languages—Javanese and Sundanese—which are aired over a growing network of local FM stations.

Javanese

The Javanese are 41 percent of Indonesia's population, most living in central and eastern Java island. Hindu, Buddhist, and traditional animistic ideas have shaped Javanese culture, but most Javanese today are moderate Muslims. There are some Javanese Christians.

Sundanese

The second largest language group, Sundanese, dominates the west of Java island. They have a friendly, polite, and cheerful culture. Sundanese people are more overtly Muslim in their

dress and ways than their Javanese neighbors, and Christians are scarcer.

In mid-2010 because of encouraging responses to the gospel, MERF's vision extended to training of Indonesian church planters in remote Sundanese vil- lages.

This led to purchasing a strategically located prop- erty. A group of Java-based Indonesian Christian busi- ness people have commit- ted to take on the construc- tion of a training centre for evangelists, which can also be used as a confer- ence centre for pastors and elders. Plans have been drafted for two dormitories and a large meeting hall for teaching sessions. *Praise God for this exciting oppor- tunity.*



"So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun..."
—Isaiah 59:19