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## 5 Solas in Indonesia

By Timothy and Rosalind Burden

At MERF’s International Council (IC) meeting in **Jakarta, Indonesia**, we learned more about MERF’s ministries of *evangelism and church extension, biblical training and diaconal aid* in Indonesia, the 4th largest population of the world. This includes gospel radio and online media work in 6 major Indonesian languages.

My wife, Rosalind and I were privileged to stay on to give biblical training at a school in **Kupang, Timor island** and a church in **Salatiga, central Java**. Prepared to teach the 5 Solas or Alones of the Reformation, I found participants very keen for Q & A sessions. So, there was opportunity to share in many ways: *Scripture Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone and Glory to God Alone*. We were wonderfully cared for by the local MERF team, Tommy & Elisa and Pastor Yonson and by brothers and sisters at each venue.

### Christian Schools

Although Indonesia’s majority is considered Muslim, clearly, in many areas, there is freedom for Christians to worship and practice their



Timothy and Rosalind Burden



Taking photos with Athalia school students

faith, such as establishing Christian schools and universities. These bear gospel witness to the communities around.

**In Jakarta**, a local school hosted MERF IC participants. Rosalind reports: “It was a delight to visit the Athalia free school! This is attached to the fee-paying Christian school, where the entrance foyer declares Proverbs 2:6 *“The Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth comes wisdom and understanding.”*

A tremendously warm and hospitable welcome was given to all of us by the staff and trustees. Founders presented the vision and school ethos. The free school was established to provide education to children of poor families. Careful consideration is given to finding quality teachers to display Christian love to these local children, many of whom are from Muslim families. The school first opened despite

initial suspicion, and even serious opposition, but now it is much appreciated by the community.

Parents come along to parenting classes, where more of Christ’s love is shared. We toured the school and met many of the children. They were excited to talk with Christians from around the world. The students loved having their photos taken with us and telling us of their studies. It has been an unforgettable experience. We pray that they may have seen something of Christ dwelling in us and that the Christian witness and education will result in many coming to know our Saviour.”

**At Kupang**, we met students of the SMTK Reformation and the LSE Trinity school. The school’s vision is “To help students become disciplined, skilled, of good character, innovative and creative, based on Bible guidelines and school rules.”

It was amazing to hear the whole gathering chant “*Soli Deo Gloria*” as their school greeting.

After giving a brief message about Paul’s conversion, I spoke about the Reformation and *Sola Scriptura*. As it was clear the students desperately wanted to ask questions, the session turned into a Q&A session. “How do we know the Bible is not just a collection of myths?” “Are planets mentioned in the Bible?”

“*Is it true that salvation is only in Jesus?*” When I said that that was a very good question, the whole student body applauded the questioner. We then explored the fact that salvation is not just forgiveness and that faith is not just assent. The students were encouraged to open their own Bibles to verify the answers, and it was good to see this. Some local pastors joined us and they were asked to contribute to the answers. *We pray that many*



The students in Kupang paid full attention

of these students will become pillars of the church in years to come.

### Salatiga Church gathering

Salatiga is proud of its reputation as the most religiously tolerant city in Indonesia. That may be why, on the Sunday morning, before the third service of the day, church youth were freely singing loudly in the church carpark for all to hear, and why a police patrol called in, not to stop them but as a regular security patrol protecting churches. The need for such patrols indicates that not everyone shares a tolerant approach.

On the Saturday we joined believers from many of the surrounding churches. I started biblical training using the material translated in advance, but it soon became apparent that this was not what the gathering expected. So, we switched to what they had expected - the opportunity

to ask questions. Rosalind helped facilitate translation through Anastashya, Yeti and Cephas. We are especially thankful for Anastashya, who had some theological training and had translated the materials prepared in advance. Her wedding was to have been the previous weekend. So, she should have been on her honeymoon, but her fiancé had died before the wedding. Her graciousness, composure and willingness to serve will be an abiding memory for us.

The assembly divided into three groups to discuss what questions they would ask. Some of the questions:

- How can we bear witness to Jesus in hostile communities?
- How can we encourage younger people to become deacons?
- How do we stop charismatics from taking our young people?
- How do we stop people being just nominally Christian?

- What do we do when churches give incentives to people to leave one church to join another?
- How can we stop our young people from drifting away?

These and other questions showed the struggles that these long-established churches are facing. They reveal how much courage, faith, grace and vital authentic Christianity is needed, and how important the *Five Solas* of the reformation are. *Sola Scriptura* is especially needed, and to

be always reforming by its light and not stagnating in tradition. *Pray for those who struggle with these issues.*

Praise God for the wide gospel witness in 6 Indonesian languages of the Indonesian MERF team and pray for many from the Muslim majority to come to faith in this 4th largest nation of the world. *Pray also for the Lord's provision of MERF resident Bible teachers to serve in each of Jakarta, Indonesia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Lokichoggio, Kenya.*

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Gathering at Salatiga church