



## Indonesia partnership deepens

**St John's in the City, Wellington is living proof that a congregation can intentionally nurture a direct relationship with an Asian Christian church with four million members.**

In August last year, St John's in the City formalised its partnership with the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Church of Indonesia, the country's largest Protestant church, during a visit from one of HKBP's key pastoral leaders.

Rev Debora Sinaga met with representatives from Presbytery Central and Assembly Office to exchange gifts and share experiences of Christ's Church. She then signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for hosting exchange visits between St John's in the City and the HKBP. The MOU outlines the motivating influences and practical obligations of each host, such as expenses and accommodation.

Debora's visit was timed to support the arrival in the Capital of one of its church's newly ordained ministers, Rev Ridho Kardo Parhusip, who was the first to experience a three-month cross-cultural stay in Wellington.

"We extended the invitation after receiving such gracious hospitality in Sumatra during our first brief visit the previous year," says minister St John's Rev Allister Lane. "The intention was for someone in their formational stage of ministry to dive into a new context they could reflect on afterwards."

Although St John's in the City has around 25 Indonesians in its church community, Ridho stayed in eight different English-speaking homes during his three months, to give him a language immersion experience. He also completed modules developed by Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership on the history of Christianity in New Zealand, and pastoral care and mission.



Rev Rev Ridho Kardo Parhusip (right) was blown away by West Wind wind farm at Makara, Wellington.

"When we talked with Indonesian church leaders in 2017 about how best to foster the relationship their key request was teaching English," says Allister. "They explained that for a minister in Indonesia, being able to speak English in a range of contexts enhances their leadership potential. We took some time to reconcile that request with our initial doubts about the lessons from colonial history."

Ridho led worship in Bahasa Indonesia for St John's in the City native speakers, which was "a welcome experience" says Allister.

"The Indonesians in our community are proud of their country and its culture and want to share it. We also have a proactive Indonesian Ambassador in Wellington who has met with inner city clergy to discuss among other things how religion operates in Indonesia."

For Ridho, observing and taking part in a wide range of worship, study group and outreach activities generated new and at times thought-provoking ideas, explains Allister.

"Ridho noticed LGBTQI issues being raised in different ways here. Less controversially perhaps, he picked up on our weekly offering for the local food bank and thought that could work back home."

Ridho has returned to Sumatra to work for the HKBP's national church, specifically with children at risk and in orphanages.

"We continue to take an interest in his ministry," affirms Allister.

Since then and under the banner of St John's in the City, a 10-member group headed to the island of Sulawesi in December 2018. The participants were an equal mix of Indonesian and Kiwi-born, and this second short cross-cultural exchange was again led by St John's Church elder Ino Pasullean.

The location was chosen because a congregation member has a connection there. During the 10 days in Sulawesi's largest city Makassar and in scenic Toraja, the group visited an orphanage, a theological college, schools and churches. They participated in worship and were interviewed for an hour on Christian radio.

"These trips are an opportunity for members of our congregation to get to know each other better as well as an enriching cross-cultural exchange," says Allister. "I also feel that Indonesia in general doesn't get the attention it deserves, given that it's the world's fourth most populous nation and is on track to becoming the next economic Asian Tiger. At St John's we're fortunate that the Indonesian members of our congregation are helping us to navigate a relationship with the largest Protestant church in what is predominantly a Muslim country. There's a high level of grace being shown to us and it's a fascinating journey."

Jade Reidy Spanz