

FAQ SHEET

Becca Young ~ Missionary to Indonesia

INDONESIA: Indonesia is an archipelago of 13,000 islands in Southeast Asia and has the world's largest population of Muslims (about 190 million), but also one of the world's biggest Christian populations, at around 25 million (it has the largest Christian population in Asia).

JAKARTA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY: The Seminary was founded in 1934 as an ecumenical institution to serve the needs of Protestant Indonesians training to be pastors. It has graduated over 1000 students, both men and women, many of whom now have leadership roles in Indonesian churches. Many of the Indonesian Christians are Reformed: 32 members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches are Indonesian churches, all of whom send students to the Jakarta Seminary.



REV. DR. REBECCA B YOUNG (the official version)

B.S. Psychology, College of William & Mary, VA
M.P.H. Nutrition, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
M.Div, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur GA
M.Phil, Fordham University, Bronx, NY
Ph.D., Contemporary Systematic Theology, Fordham University, Bronx, NY

After getting a master's degree in Public Health Nutrition and working a year as a nutritionist in a public health department in east Tennessee, Becca served 3-1/2 years as a missionary to Indonesia (Public Health Nutritionist in New Guinea) for Church World Service before going to seminary. During seminary, she spent a year doing outreach to the homeless in Baltimore, Maryland while serving as an intern pastor at an inner city PC(USA) congregation. While working on her doctorate, she taught courses for three years at Fordham University in NYC and at Piedmont College in north Georgia, including courses on World Religions and on Ethics. Her dissertation topic was Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Since getting her doctorate, she has been serving as Liaison for Tsunami Recovery for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

Becca has been appointed to be the Professor of Systematic Theology at Jakarta Theological Seminary in Jakarta, Indonesia. She will be teaching in the Indonesian language, which she speaks fluently, to students from throughout Indonesia. She has been appointed for a three year term, beginning in the fall of 2007.

BECCA'S PERSONAL FAITH STORY:

Like my older brother and sister, I was born in St. Joseph's Hospital in Asheville while my father was serving the Reems Creek and Beech parishes. So I spent my earliest days in the manse behind the Reems Creek church. When I return to visit there, people come up and tell me that they remember caring for me as an infant. Some members attended my ordination at Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church in 1998.

After graduating from college in Virginia, I was looking for work, and my father (a UPCUSA minister) met Barrett Gilmer (a PCUS minister and director of Holston Presbytery Camp) at a gathering of pastors who were discussing the pending reunion of the northern and southern churches. Barrett mentioned that he needed a cook for the camp that summer, so my father called me and said, "Go help this poor man out." Which I did and ended up working there for 4 summers and training my replacement, Patty, who is still there. I lived one full year at the camp, cooking for church retreats in the fall & spring and for skiers in the winter. While there, I became a member of Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church, singing in the choir and sometimes teaching Sunday School. I loved the shaped-note hymnal and old time hymns, the beauty of the natural setting, and the genuine fellowship among the church members. I learned what a real "homecoming" was, and dinner on the grounds was always the highlight of any church social event. I think back on those days often as sort of golden days in my life.

My decision to get a master's degree in public health nutrition came out of a desire to do my part to relieve world hunger. I knew from the time I started the degree that I would use it to go overseas to work in a developing country to help hungry people. I chose UNC-Chapel Hill because it is one of the top Schools of Public Health in the country. After graduation, when it came time to apply for mission positions as a nutritionist, the PC(USA) was in the midst of reuniting and moving to Louisville (it was 1986), so they were not sending out missionaries that year, although they

were the first group to whom I applied. Since my own denomination wasn't hiring, I ended up getting an assignment in Indonesia through Church World Service.

When I went overseas for the first time, I kept up with Arbor Dale, sending them reports of my work in Indonesia. O'dell Smith was the pastor at the time, and he was very supportive and encouraging of my choice. At the point I decided to go to into seminary, it seemed natural to have them be the supporting church for my candidacy, and Bob Ramsey, who was maintenance person at the camp and an elder at Arbor Dale, was my sponsor. Then when I was ordained, I chose Arbor Dale to be the place where it took place. My mother had been ordained to the PCUSA in 1991, so she read scripture, my father preached, and a Columbia Seminary professor gave me my charge.

During the time I was taking courses for my doctorate, I was happy that the Presbytery of Western North Carolina allowed me to keep my membership here, even though I was far away in New York City. I became active in a church there while I was studying (Rutgers Memorial). Whenever I had a chance, I came back to visit this Presbytery. When it came time to write the dissertation, I realized I could move back down here. I chose to live in North Georgia. This move also allowed me to remain in PWNC where I have continued to attend meetings as my travels allow.

When the tsunami happened, I had just finished my dissertation, was unemployed, spoke the Indonesian language, was a minister and had a background in public health, so I called the PC(USA) and offered my services. Someone referred me to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and when I described my background, they said, "How soon can you leave?" I was on a plane within about three weeks, and have served in that capacity ever since. I am liaison to three different groups of PDA constituents: first and foremost, I relate to the churches in Indonesia who are doing relief work in the tsunami area. I provide them with support, funding, guidance and pastoral care, and try to help them understand what donor churches in the West require from them in return for giving them the funds to do their work. Second, I relate to other church donor agencies in the US and Europe who are also providing tsunami relief funds, so that we coordinate our work with the Indonesians. Third, I do speaking to PC(USA) churches and presbyteries throughout the USA, helping them to understand the work of PDA using the tsunami as a case study. In each of these areas I feel that I have learned a great deal about how much we as Christians in Asia, Europe and the USA have in common in spite of our great cultural and geographical divides. I understand better and can work more comfortably with people from all parts of the great Body of Christ that holds us together.

An example of that understanding comes from my experience bringing eight Indonesians to the Gulf Coast to do relief work for Katrina survivors. The group was a combination of relief workers and tsunami survivors. The group members came as representatives of the three church-based agencies with whom PDA works in Indonesia. They had all expressed their concern for the US after Katrina, and wanted to give back some of what they had received from us after the tsunami. Therefore they willingly traveled halfway around the world, in spite of all they had gone through themselves, and come here to help us. It provided them with a great sense of dignity and of the fellowship of all of God's people throughout the world. We all need each other, and have gifts to share with one another.

My desire to go to Indonesia as a theology professor comes from my desire, first of all, to serve God and God's people using the gifts I have been given: my ability and willingness to live in a different culture, learn their language and learn from them about what it means to be a servant of Christ. It also comes about because I love to teach and get a great deal of satisfaction in researching subjects, writing about them and sharing what I have learned with others. I am told that I can take something very complicated and break it down into ways that are more easily understood. I also love to tell stories, which always makes things easier for people to grasp and want to pay attention.

But it also comes out of my desire to be a point of contact between U.S. Christians and Indonesian Christians who live in a predominantly Muslim society. In the U.S., we have many misconceptions about Islam that my experience living and working in Indonesia have taught me are baseless and unfair. I feel that I am in a unique position to help US Christians understand Indonesian Christians as well as Indonesian Muslims (who in their diversity do not easily fall under any of our stereotypes of Islam). I also feel that I can contribute to Indonesian understanding of US Christianity and of our diversity and complexity, as well. Because so much of the violence in the world is between Christians and Muslims, I hope to bring greater understanding between people of the two religions as part of my working towards the coming of God's Kingdom of peace and justice.

"When I left Indonesia after more than three years of mission work in the health field, I felt called to return to the US to get a theological education with the goal of becoming a seminary professor. I wanted to help pastors in training to understand the international aspects of Christianity and our worldwide mission under God. That was 14 years ago. To see that dream finally come to fruition after all this time is truly a sign of the miraculous leading of the Holy Spirit in my life."