

Thanks for Loving Me: Pastor Rospita Siahaan's Story

By Ompung Jerry Schmalenberger, Affiliated Faculty

After retiring from the presidency of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley California, I began serving as an ELCA Global Mission Volunteer for the next 17 years.



Rospita & Donny

In 1997 I was teaching in the Huri Kristan Batak Protestant (HKBP) seminary on the Island of Sumatra, Indonesia. It was the second day of classes when Principal Robinson Rajagukguk mentioned how sad he was that their best first year student had not returned this year. Because her policeman father died when she was eight and there was no compensation, Rospita Siahaan could not return for her second year in the five year program.

So I borrowed a dirt bike from the daughters of an instructor and made my way across the village, dodging the many deep pot holes, to her humble home where she lived with her widowed mother and an older sister. After explaining who I was, I told Rospita that if she would get on the seat behind me we could return to the school campus and she could attend her class...and I would pay for the rest of her seminary expenses. She jumped on and circled my waist with a very strong embrace. We raced through the village hitting all the pot holes I had missed coming in! And so it was that I gained a Batak Boru (daughter) and a very precious long time friend who will begin her Th.D. program this fall of 2012.

Rospita, a Toba Batak, graduated first in her class of about 75 students. I visited her on her internship among the palm oil plantations and brought her to LTS for my J-term class. In '03 I took part in her Jakarta ordination and in '04 I performed her wedding at Pematang Siantar to Donny Podang now also an ordained Batak "Pandita" of the Pak Pak tribe teaching at the Pandita school at Sipaholon.

My Boru was assigned as a junior Pastor to a large congregation in Sidikalang where I stayed with her and Donny who was serving in an administrative office of the Prasis (district superintendent). During this time she earned her Master's degree with a German faculty adviser who exclaimed it was the best thesis he had ever read. She was later transferred to the national headquarters of HKBP where she worked in the Koinea department office.

Donny and Rospita now have two beautiful daughters. On the 28th of July she flew to Hong Kong, along with my Cucu (granddaughter) Deaconess Maida Siagian, to begin work on a Th.D. My wife and I will provide her scholarship as we have done for seven Bataks before her. And, she will continue to sign her e-mails "*Bapak (father), thanks for loving me.*"



Maida with Ompung