

Setting a Vision for SEKOLAH PAPUA HARAPAN (Papua School of Hope)

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Why would a Christian teacher teach overseas? Where is the greatest possibility to make an impact sharing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ with students who have never heard of it or only have a limited understanding? Often, families in other countries enroll their children in Christian schools. They choose these schools because they generally offer the best education in the area, and the curriculum is delivered in English. God has unlocked the doors to a unique opportunity for Christian teachers and administrators in newly-founded Christian schools. The location is Papua, Indonesia, the eastern-most province of Indonesia in the western half of the island of New Guinea, formerly called Irian Jaya.

In the 1990s Dr. Darrell and Sue Van Luchene were asked to serve as educational missionaries in Indonesia. Dennis Denow followed them, and then my wife, Alice, and I were asked to join them. We were asked to serve the educational foundation Sekolah Pelita Harapan (School of Light and Hope) in Lippo Karawaci, Indonesia, near Jakarta, the national capital. Darrel, Sue, Alice, and I were asked to help evaluate and make suggestions to help set a vision for education in Papua. Our task was accomplished in the spring of 2002. We discovered a gigantic mission opportunity for Christians to witness through a Christian school system.

Papua, the most remote and resource-rich island in Indonesia, has remained largely undeveloped due to lack of infrastructure and extremely rigorous terrain. Villages are reached by footpaths. The only other way to access remote interior villages is by airplanes that land on dirt and grass airstrips carved out of the side of limestone mountain peaks. The population is between 2.5 to 3 million people, who speak a mixture of 275 languages. Villagers living in the mountainous interior region have very little, if any, opportunity to pursue education. Families in many interior villages are desperate to find opportunities for their children to have access to education. The existing government schools are poorly administered. Teachers do not show up on many days. While the outside world rushes in at an alarming pace, many interior people groups are marginalized and unequipped to step into leadership positions to guide their own village, people group, province, or nation.

In 2014 another opportunity came for us. Alice and I were invited to return to

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View Missio Apostolica 23, no. 2 (2015) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

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Papua for six months to mentor teachers and administrators of both of the Papuan Schools of Christian Hope. Whenever and wherever possible we would also be given the opportunity to lift the arms of Wally Wiley.

Do you remember “*Where’s Waldo?*” These books were created by English illustrator Martin Handford and originally called, “*Where’s Wally?*” They consist of a series of detailed illustrations depicting dozens or more people involved in a variety of activities at a given location. Readers are challenged to locate a character named Wally (Waldo in the U.S.) hidden in the illustration.

We found a real-live Wally at the end of the world. His name is Wally Wiley. He lives in Papua, Indonesia.

Repeatedly, people ask, “Where’s Wally?” He is the “go-to man” for many people of all backgrounds to get advice and help in the Province of Papua and beyond. The government of Papua has asked him to be a consultant in ways too numerous to mention. “Where’s Wally?” “What would Wally say?” “What would Wally do?” When a problem arises, people say, “Let’s call Wally.” To Wally, interruptions are okay. Wally is the man who originally invited the four of us to Papua.

Wally moved to Papua in 1977 to work with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). He was not a pilot, but a carpenter. After many years of experience within this Christian mission organization, Wally became one of its leaders in Papua and eventually for all of Indonesia. He can be compared to James Hudson Taylor, a mid-1800s missionary to China whose huge vision for spreading Christianity in China became a reality. Wally fits this comparison for the Province of Papua.

Over the years Wally came to realize that Papua, Indonesia, was in desperate need of quality education and health clinics. He decided to do something about it. He formed a vision in 2003 with the help of others for Papua Harapan School System (Papua Schools of Hope). The two school systems have similar names (Sekolah Pelita Harapan and Sekolah Papua Harapan) but are administered under separate governing bodies. They do advise and assist one another.

Today Wally’s vision is becoming a reality. One K to 8 school is now fully functioning in Sentani along the coastline near the capital city of Jarapura. It presently has an enrollment of 150 students. A new K to 12 campus to serve 750 students is in the planning stages in Sentani, along with a new health clinic, providing a great opportunity for God’s kingdom!

A second school in the mountain village of Mamit operates a K to 3 school that also includes a health clinic. The future vision extends throughout the interior highlands of Papua to include at least 25–40 schools and clinics to be built in the next ten years. These schools will offer more than the basic 3 Rs. Character development is an essential part of the curriculum, as well as a focus on attitudes,

skills, and lifelong habits. These are built from a biblically based Christian worldview. Sekolah Papua Harapan (SPH) exists to empower the people of Papua, particularly those in the most remote contexts, to become leaders in their own communities, country, and across the globe.

Children from interior mountain highlands who are recognized to exhibit exceptional intelligence and ability are invited to come to the SPH located in Sentani. Their tuition costs are covered by donations from Christians across the globe. This school hopes to have at least one-third of its total school population to be from the highlands. The English language is being emphasized so that students can eventually attend universities outside Indonesia as a pathway to become national and world Christian leaders.

Most families in the interior are subsistence farmers living in grass-roof homes. Sending their children to the coast for schooling is a dramatic change for the family, requiring significant sacrifices. Although parents cannot afford tuition, they are asked to commit to visit the coast and invest in the life of the school. In addition, they contribute a small donation toward the transportation costs of their children to visit their village home during school breaks. The most significant sacrifice, however, is the separation that comes with sending their children away to school. Papua Harapan is committed to work with families and help them stay connected and to provide excellent care to students as they are away from their loved ones. Parenting classes are held in the villages and counseling is offered to assist with transitions.

The trip from the village to the coastal campus of SPH brings many new experiences for these children: riding in cars for the first time, living with electricity, tasting ice cubes, learning the concept of restaurants, seeing paved roads and two-story buildings, owning multiple changes of clothes, sleeping on mattresses, tasting a diversity of food options (instead of the staple sweet potatoes and sweet potato greens), and learning to swim.

When these children transition to life at SPH, they join other children who come from similar remote village contexts, as well as “day-school children” who live with their families in the coastal town of Sentani and commute to school each day.

Today, more than at any other time in history, it is critical to have a quality Christian education system in Papua! The reason is simple: Papuans are living in a time of great change. It has never been more essential for children to build a biblical worldview. Challenges are great for all of us, but especially these young people. They are moving at jet speed from primitive to modern influences, both good and bad.

Native Papuans call themselves Christian because of the strong influence of Christian missionaries in the area during the last one hundred years. However, their general knowledge, understanding, and practice needs support and encouragement.

The government of Indonesia has been transmigrating many educated Muslims to Papua. Wally Wiley estimates about one-half of the population is now Muslim. The Christian government is concerned that soon not enough Christian leaders will be available to meet the challenges Papua is about to face in next ten–twenty-five–fifty years. It is urgent that Christians cultivate strong leadership skills.

While in Papua, I was given the privilege to visit the mountain village of Mamit. My purpose was to encourage the young teachers, students, and parents by preaching and leading a prayer seminar. While I was there, the Lord surprised everyone—parents, teachers, and students—by providing an unannounced visit of the governor of Papua, Lucas Enembe. Since he had been educated in Australia, I was able to converse directly in English with him. We were together for a day and a half. In our conversations, his basic message was “Help.” Papua needs people to help implement Christian education. Christians have an open door to send Christian educators to assist Wally Wiley to implement the vision of the Sekolah Papua Harapan system!

Sekolah Papua Harapan schools are authentic Christian schools, in which the curriculum is taught with a Christian worldview and the Gospel is freely shared with every student every day. Alice and I have taught around the world in a variety of countries, but at the schools of Hope in Papua we observed something new and special. Every morning each student was given a good morning welcome handshake and a verbal “God bless you!” by teachers as they arrived to the school campus. As a group the class would greet their teachers with a “God bless you!” Class sessions ended with students blessing the teacher. “Thank you, Mr. Bob. God bless you.”

These genuine Christian greetings set the tone and create a blessed atmosphere of peace and security for the entire school day. What a wonderful testimony for God’s kingdom!

Without an intentional approach, Christian education can be just a frosting or an expensive education that is barely distinguishable from its secular counterparts. A key understanding is how to provide a saving Christ-centered worldview throughout the curriculum at every grade level. Otherwise, the finest Christian young people are being taken captive with humanistic ideas during the very time when they have the greatest potential, highest energy, and most creativity to have an impact on the world.

Students often neither understand the relationships between the hundreds of Bible facts they have memorized, nor can they incorporate them into a clearly defined Christian worldview and actions. Bible stories remain unrelated and of little value to “real-life” issues. Sadly, some Christian school graduates cannot articulate or apply the biblical Christian worldview in their daily lives. Many waver in their faith when confronted with the carefully articulated arguments of other beliefs. “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according

to Christ” (Col. 2:8).¹ Students may accept only the criteria reflecting the secular lifestyle. Good Christian education must do better.

Sekolah Papua Harapan system has a holistic approach that prepares every course to be biblically and discipleship based. Through this discipleship-based education, Sekolah Papua Harapan exists to equip Papuan children to be national and international leaders with GODLY CHARACTER, CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDES, SUPERIOR ACADEMIC SKILLS, and PRODUCTIVE LIFELONG HABITS (CASH).

Where is the battleground? The Mind

Ideas rule the world. Correct the ideas instead of the behavior. Our world is morally defective, ethically distorted, and spiritually devastated. Therefore we must teach our students how to THINK. Thinking is hard work. Few people think about foundational beliefs. Wisdom and truth are revelation and thought based.

In ancient Israel, the tribe of Issachar was noted with distinction because its “men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron 12:32).

People who are able to understand and articulate their beliefs inevitably become leaders. People who fail to understand the ideas of their times inevitably become followers, and not very good ones.

Temptations, pressures, and difficult circumstances arise during every school year. Despite these distractions, there will hopefully be continuous spiritual growth. This growth often seems shallow or based only on emotion. A number of young people love God with their hearts, but their minds are given over to hollow and deceptive philosophies. An educational system should not be inactive or silent. Christian education must act and speak up! Every class session has the opportunity to build an understanding of what is the truth.

Can Christian education make an impact in this world?

It is my perception that schools like SPH desire the Christian impact on students to be more than a mile wide and an inch deep. SPH strives to add depth to the witness that is presented, not a hit-or-miss or happy-clappy approach. Genuine revitalization implies a conscious decision to live in a more Christ-like forgiveness-driven relationship. SPH wants every student to come to the “House of Salvation” and through the work of the Holy Spirit embrace a serious personal relationship with Jesus. It’s not niceness that Christian schools are after, it is love motivated by Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. Love also is known by its right action, not only through the avoidance of evil. In the Christian classroom, the student has the opportunity to learn the truth and experience the truth.

Truth—So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31–32).

Before an audience in Jakarta in 2005 Ravi Zacharias said this:

The most powerful weapon in the world is not military, political position, personality, beauty, or talent. The most powerful weapon is The Truth. Jesus Christ claimed to be the truth. Is his exclusive claim defensible? He is unique, but he is uniquely true.²

What is truth? Every student deserves to have this question answered from a Christian worldview and know why Christians believe it. The truth is: He died! He rose! The disciples saw Him before and after!

SPH promotes a Christian worldview that teaches the truth and provides insight into God’s intentions and God’s plan for a full and meaningful life that brings glory to Him. Some students will reject the invitation, but at least the young person should understand what a Christian believes and the reason for this belief.

Three major challenges face all Christian schools:

1. To reach as many students as possible with the Christian worldview.
2. To reach them as deeply as possible.
3. To help students grow in their personal maturity and faith in Jesus Christ.

Consider this positive Christian teaching approach example from Sekolah Papua Harapan physical education classes: At the end of every class session, time is taken to ask the class three questions: How was your character today? (Positive or Negative) How was your attitude today? (Positive or Negative) What skill did you learn today? This happens every class period for eight-plus years. I’m sure this repetition can have an impact for a lifetime. Christian character and attitude can become prominent in importance for each student. It is not just head knowledge. It is applied knowledge. SPH wants to make a significant impact on students’ ability to formulate a clearly defined biblical Christian worldview and live accordingly. At SPH this happens, during physical education classes and other classes throughout the day.

What are the needs of SPH and students in Christian schools around the world?

To believe that Life is Meaningful and has a Purpose

Students believe it is very important that life is meaningful and has a purpose. Yet, many students don’t have a purpose and want help in finding the meaning in life for themselves. Effective Christian education can assist in helping the majority of students find that personal meaning in a relevant, fulfilling, and God-honoring way.

To have a Sense of Community and Deeper Relationship

Many factors conspire to cause separateness in our society. At a personal level, there is higher mobility, divorce and breakup of families within any student body. The world is becoming increasingly impersonal with growth of mega-cities, like Jakarta. One of the emotional consequences to this separateness is loneliness. A large percentage of students go through long periods of loneliness. Many students lack the skill of building lifetime relationships. Teachers need to deal with this severe loneliness by encouraging participation in large-group activities as well as small groups rooted in dialogue, special interest circles, prayer, and Bible studies.

To be Appreciated and Respected

These are certainly basic and fundamental needs. It is estimated that one-third to one-half of students lack a sense of self-worth or self-esteem. This is a direct consequence of not being loved or appreciated. It has been found in both sexes. Low self-esteem can bring with it a host of social problems, such as alcohol and drug abuse and eventually suicide tendencies. Significantly, students who have a close relationship with God feel much better about themselves. They find their identity in being an adopted child of God.

To be Listened to or Heard

Specifically, this means that every school needs intentionally to provide more opportunities to listen to students, both in one-on-one discussions, and as well as in class or group sessions. Students have many questions to ask but do not speak up. They need to be taught how to phrase smart questions.

To Have Help in Practical Ways to Develop a Mature Faith

Teachers tend to make too many assumptions about the depth of students' knowledge and faith concerning their religious beliefs. For example, Christians pray and believe in the power of prayer but do not give prayer the attention it deserves. Many students are hard pressed to defend their faith, because they are uncertain about what they believe, let alone why they believe it. Teachers need to work toward closing the gap between beliefs and practice. There is a need to turn professed faith into lived-out faith. This is part of character building.

In positive terms, teachers hope students will profit from their classroom experiences. They hope students will experience freedom from fear or anxiety that will develop true poise to confront and cope with changes in today's world.

Conclusion

While visiting Mimit, I was asked to preach. My words were translated into Indonesian. At the end of the service, an older gentleman stood up and asked me a question: “Would you please come back next month?” My heart broke when I had to tell him I was returning to my home in the United States. This was the second time I had heard a plea for help in two days. I was reminded of Matthew 9:38 “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is well known throughout the world for excellent Christian teachers and education. It would be a great blessing to provide concrete HOPE to Sekolah Papua Harapan system with LCMS-trained teachers and administrators, along with doctors and nurses for school clinics. My wife and I can testify that mentoring young teachers is well worth the time, money, and effort.

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Endnotes

¹ All Bible quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, English Standard Version © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

² Ravi Zacharias, “The TRUTH is Invaluable” Speech given in Jakarta, Indonesia, August 5, 2005.