



MINUTE FOR MISSION

March 1, 2004

Singing a Song of Peace and Wholeness

Ambon is a beautiful island in the Maluku region of Indonesia, approx 600km north of the coast of Australia. It was one of the original spice islands fought over and settled by the Dutch and English. Burnout and abandoned buildings and military checkpoints are reminders that this place is not an idyllic paradise but a place of conflict and a fragile peace.

Faith is an essential part of living in Ambon. The "Closing the Gap" workshop, sponsored by the Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP) program of the Uniting Church in Australia, brought together women from Muslim and Christian communities. Fifty women courageously stepped beyond the security of their own areas and communities, not only to meet one another across the religious divisions, with all the fears of a community in conflict, but to eat and sleep and work together for a week.

Communal living in a large abandoned house, with mattresses on the floor, cushions to sit on, a willingness to participate and learn, together with the abounding enthusiasm and great skills in community building of Joy Balazo (from the Uniting Church in Australia), made it a memorable week. Music, singing, games, role plays, and fun helped us all to relax with one another and to learn. Prayer and reflection undergirded all that we did. Out of this time of sharing the personal pain of the results of civil unrest and violence came a commitment to a dream of living in harmony again and working to make this a reality.



At the end of the week, the women had become friends and committed themselves to one another across the community and religious divides. They had also committed themselves to various joint projects that would enhance the lives of their communities and build bridges between them. They want to run more workshops, not only for other women, but for the men of their communities. The next step is to train them to run the workshops themselves. Standing in solidarity with these women is about encouraging, equipping, enabling and empowering them. Participants in YAP programs speak of a shift of heart and mind from seeing others as enemies, to being friends and partners in peace building. It is about singing a new song, a song of peace and wholeness.

If you would like more information on this project please contact Joy Balazo on balazo@nat.uca.org.au or see www.uim.uca.org.au.

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Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: www.pcusa.org/witness. New minutes for mission are posted every two weeks.

For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-228-7228, ext. 5689, or Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org.