

## Amidst prayers for unity and justice, Christians learn of persecution in Indonesia

Indonesian expatriates say the support and prayers of the Edmonton Christian community helps ease their minds amid reports of church bombings and closures, desecration of tombs, and arrests in their homeland.



Rey Situmorang

“We have the law but sometimes remote areas are not easy to control or monitor,” said Rey Situmorang, a member of the Indonesian Christian Fellowship in Edmonton.

“The authorities let the radical people do whatever they want: close the church, bomb the church – people died because of them.”

“Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue,” is the theme for the 111th annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is celebrated in Canada from Jan. 18-25. In Edmonton, the week was marked with an ecumenical service Jan. 20 at [St. John Bosco Church](#).

Archbishop Richard Smith was joined by Bishop David Motiuk of the [Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Edmonton](#), and priests and faithful from the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton, and Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada at the event.

The Week of Prayer theme is chosen by Christians in a different country each

year and serves as an invitation to pray for the unity of all Christians around the world. This year's theme was chosen by Christians in Indonesia.

"We're not happy with the persecution for sure but there are a lot of good people in Indonesia," Situmorang said. "It's getting better but if it happens to your church, your congregation, you feel sad, when you hear your sister or brother could not go to a church because you don't have the permit."

Indonesia has more than 261 million people. An estimated 90 per cent are Muslim, with Christians, Hindus, and other religions accounting for the remaining 10 per cent.



**Erwin Simanjuntak**

Nevertheless, Erwin Simanjuntak said Indonesians of all faiths lived in harmony before the last 10 to 15 years, as Christianity gained more of a following in the world's largest island country.

"It's tough, but even with those persecutions, Christianity is growing in Indonesia," said Simanjuntak. "You won't find empty churches in Indonesia. Every church has three to four services and they are always full."

In Edmonton, more than 800 people claim Indonesian heritage. The Indonesian Christian fellowship has about 100 members from different Christian denominations, including Alliance, Catholic, Baptist and Lutheran Christians.

Indonesia Bagi Kemuliaanmu (Indonesian Fellowship Singers) provided music ministry at the Christian unity service. Situmorang, who played guitar and keyboard at the event, said the Indonesian choir welcomed the opportunity to promote love and unity amid the pain and political unrest in his home country.

"We were honoured. We were happy to be part of it and we were able to show a little bit of how the Indonesian community comes together and worships," he said. "I think it's the first time Indonesia is the focus, and people realize there are Christians in Indonesia and we can contribute to society."

The choir's contribution featured Indonesian dance and the smooth piano-like sound of the traditional Javanese Gamelan percussion instrument.

"There are more than 170 ethnic groups in Indonesia, but the Javanese instrument is considered a national instrument," said Simanjuntak. "Listening to it, it feels like home for sure."

Many of the more than 100 who attended the service were moved by an original hymn composed for this year, "Peace and Unity for all Nations."

Composer Sheyla Benjamin wrote the song in response to the persecution of Christians in Indonesia.

"We have so many challenges in this world: conflict, animosity, political unrest, pain and suffering," said Benjamin. "How do we deal with that? With prayer. God is love and we need to be more loving, more peaceful."

Maria Kruszewski called the religious persecution in Indonesia "heartbreaking."

"As people of faith we need to support each other and to support anybody who has any kind of faith," said Kruszewski, who led the ecumenical Taizé prayer ministry at the service.

"Of course because we are Christians we feel it in a more intense way because these are our Christian brothers and sisters. But anybody who's persecuted – whether they be Muslim or Palestinian, or whatever they are – persecution is just a terrible thing."



**Maria Kruszewski**

Kruszewski, a member of [Assumption Catholic Parish](#), was presented with the Rev. Marilyn McClung Memorial Award at the service, for her ongoing contributions to Christian unity, including leading singing at Edmonton's annual Outdoor Way of the Cross event.

The Outdoor Way of the Cross is an ecumenical event modelled after the popular Christian devotional that marks Jesus' last hours before his crucifixion.

"We don't do enough ecumenism in our world. and I think it's always wonderful when we do get together and celebrate together," Kruszewski said.

St. John Bosco Parish was chosen as the venue for the service because of its "beautiful ethnic and cultural diversity," said Julien Hammond, coordinator of the Archdiocese of Edmonton's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.

"It embraces an ecumenical spirit and it embodies the biblical theme chosen for this year's World Day of Prayer for Christian Unity: Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue," said Hammond.

That theme was highlighted by Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith in his homily.

"As we pray together, we are reminded that our calling as members of the body of Christ is to pursue and embody justice," Smith said. "Living in and from Christ, therefore, we too must unite ourselves to all who suffer, at home and abroad, and by our acts of mercy give witness to the power of the Cross to overcome evil."