

Jakarta, Indonesia  
Fri, 4 February, 2011

Dear Volcano Appeal Supporters.

Herewith, an account of our trip to Jogya, Solo, Boyolali and its surrounding area.

Elizabeth and I arrived in Jogya January 19th, 2011 late afternoon. From the airport we took a train directly to Solo, and upon arriving we went to see Father Alexios at the Holy Trinity Parish, where we were fortunate to be able to attend Vespers.

With the kindness of Father Deacon Macarios who lent us his car, and accompanied by Father Alexios, the following morning we went to visit St. Mathew Parish in the village of Pasekan, Tlatar in the region of Boyolaly, about 35 kilometers from Solo. There we met Father Marcus, the Parish Priest, Father Anthony, Father Barnabas, Subdeacon Jacob, Matushka Heleny and Matushka Claudia.

Witnessed by everyone present, Elizabeth presented the funds received from Friends of Indonesia - Australia for the relief of victims of the eruption of Mt. Merapi in October 2010 to Father Alexios, who in turn handed it over to Father Marcus and Father Barnabas.



After some discussion as to the effect of the eruption and what the Orthodox Community and their priests have already done and will endeavour to do in the near future to alleviate the suffering of the people devastated by the eruption. It

was decided that the most and pressing matter to be resolved is the availability of fresh water in the area of Boyolali. Since the eruption there is no fresh water at all, and it is only available by purchasing the fresh water from Solo and transporting it in tanks to Tlatar, Boyolali. The next urgent needs are baby food, milk, warm clothing, and blankets. As for food, the government through the Red Cross and other agencies has provided enough.

After receiving the funds, Father Marcus immediately placed an order for 10 (ten) tanks of fresh water (each tank containing about 500 litres of fresh water). The cost is Rp. 250.000 per tank (about A\$30 a tank including transport). As the fresh water arrived it was pumped from the tank into a big water reservoir located within the premises of the Parish. This big water reservoir (the main reservoir) is fitted with 9 (nine) valves secured with long pipes which serve to distribute the water to smaller reservoirs in the area. This enabled inhabitants of the area to enjoy fresh water without having to travel too far from their homes.



It has been decided that Father Marcus will purchase 120 tanks for the next four months.

The baby food, milk and blankets (since they are cheaper in Jakarta) will be purchased in Jakarta.

St. Mathew Parish occupy an area of about 320 square meters. According to Father Alexios and Father Marcus, the land and

building has been fully paid for. For legal and administrative purposes, the land and building is registered under Father Daniel (GOI). However, on February 6, 2009, a notarial deed was drawn up which gave complete ownership and control of the land and building to the Orthodox Community of St. Mathew Parish. Furthermore, with the good relationship developed by Father Marcus with the local government and population of the area, the existence of the Orthodox Community of St. Mathew is well accepted in the region.

In the coming months, the local government has made plans for the relocation of about 200 families who had lost their homes during the eruption of Mt. Merapi. They have decided to relocate these families to an area very close to the St. Mathew Parish. At present Father Marcus, Father Barnabas, and Father Anthony are busy assisting in the process of relocation. Please, we ask for your prayers for the success of this mission.

More than half of the overall building area of St. Mathew Parish is used for the Church. Because of the lack of funds, the building is left as it was when the Orthodox Community first took it over. (see enclosed pictures). Although the building is completely run down, during the eruption of Mt. Merapi in October and November the Parish was used to shelter over 200 refugees. Although many refugees have now moved to other places, there are still up to date about 50 to 70 refugees daily coming and going in the Parish. The facilities are shown below.



Guided by Father Barnabas, at about 14:00 we continued our trip to the village of Simo, about 15 kilometers from St. Mathew, to visit St. Basil the Great Parish. We were greeted by

Mr. Untung and his family, who is the owner of the property where the St. Basil the Great Parish is located. Mr. Untung has allotted part of his residence for the Orthodox Community. According to Mr. Untung he intends to sell his property, and from the proceeds to build St. Basil the Great Parish in a 500 sq.m. plot of land not very far from the present location. This plot of land was donated by another member of the Orthodox congregation.

The Orthodox Community and the Church is well established in the area of Simo. It is well accepted by the local government and population. It is reported that in due time, the Parish will receive the necessary permits.



During the eruption of Mt. Merapi, Father Barnabas signed up as a volunteer in the evacuation of the people devastated by the eruption. He coordinated a rescue team to the village at the foot of Mt. Merapi, and in the midst of the evacuation there

was suddenly a very loud rumble and hot lava that was moving rapidly toward them. The vehicle used for



the evacuation could not be saved, and several volunteers trapped in the vehicle were burned to death. It was only by the Grace of God that Father Barnabas survived.

Like St. Mathew Parish, St. Basil the Great during October and November was also used as a refugee camp. Although the Parish itself is maybe about one third of St. Mathew, Father Barnabas succeeded in his mission to help the people devastated by the eruption of Mt. Merapi.

After being hosted for lunch by Mr. Untung and his family, we continued our trip to the village of Ngamplak, Kakuwingu, in the province of Semarang, to visit St. Jacob Parish. The land and building of the Parish, measuring 100 sq.m., was donated by the family of Subdeacon Jacob. The Parish Priest is Father Anthony.



We were all in tears to see the condition of the Parish. But because of the faith and strong commitment of Father Anthony and Subdeacon Jacob, the Parish has

become one of the important place of gathering in the area. It was reported to us that out of over 30 churches in the Province of Semarang, only two churches have been officially recognised and have received financial aid from the local government. They are the Orthodox Parish and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Although the aid is only in the form of a good gesture of the local government, it is an indication that the local government has recognised the existence of the Orthodox Community and Parish in the area. This is, of course, very important because it will pave the way for many new possibilities.

In his effort to help the children that have been affected by the eruption of Mt. Merapi, Father Anthony has developed an orphanage for children who have lost their families and homes. It is hoped that the orphanage will provide a home, food, and primary education to the children. This endeavour is today financed by small contribution from the community. We have asked Father Anthony to prepare a simple study on this project, with concrete details and clear objectives so that it will be possible to do something for the development of the orphanage. Th Parish and Fr. Anthony request your prayers for this endeavour.

The following day at 05:00 Elizabeth and I went to visit some of the areas devastated by the eruption of the volcano. It was necessary that we started our trip very early in the morning to avoid the police baricade which forbid the people to enter the area.



The area we visited is the village of Cangkringan, about 7 kms from Mt. Merapi. We were amazed at what we saw and experienced.

Although it has been over three months since the eruption, the ground that we were standing on was still

very hot with smoke and gas coming out of the ground almost blinding us and making it difficult to breath.

The ground where we stood was once small villages which have been completely obliterated and buried by dust, sand, huge stones, and other volcanic materials. There was nothing left. We saw people just sitting at the edge of mountains of black earth, staring at Mt. Merapi in front of them. We tried to talk to some of them, but they just stared and said nothing.

While we were standing and watching the devastated area, an old woman approached us. Our first and immediate reaction was to offer her some money. She refused our offer. She told us that she did not need anything. She said, "I am very exhausted. I am so exhausted that I don't even have the strength to pray. Please pray for me". She had lost six members of her family when her village was swept away by the hot lava of Mt. Merapi. Elizabeth prayed for her, and all the time we were praying we noticed that she never took her eyes off from the Cross that Elizabeth was wearing.



In conclusion, we would like to say that our visit to the three Parishes in Boyolali, Central Java, has made us feel and see the very strong presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in those places and all along our trip. The faith and commitment of the Orthodox Community and our priests in each Parish has shown and taught us a great deal about what faith is (hope, humility, love) and what it means to serve our Lord wholeheartedly, and show our love to other people.

There are no words to express our feelings in watching our brothers and sisters, side by side with our priests, struggling hard to make ends meet, and yet at the same time keeping the faith and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. This very short trip to Solo, Boyolali, and its surroundings, was for Elizabeth and I a spiritual trip -- an unforgettable trip.

Pray for us, for the guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we can do more in the very near future for our brothers and sisters, and our Priests in the area of Boyolali, Central Java.

Finally, we would like to extend our deepest appreciation to Fr. Deacon Agapit, who generously provided us with two round trip tickets to Jogya.

Elizabeth and Mikhael, Members of the Financial Assistance Committee of Friends of Indonesia – Australia, Jakarta, Indonesia.

**Father Christopher reports that \$4990.55 has been raised from the Volcano Appeal as at 5/2/2011 and \$3312.55 has been sent with a further \$1678 to be forwarded with the monthly priest's disbursements.**