
An Indonesian Response: “From the East to the West and from Everywhere to Everywhere”

Andi O. Santoso

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14–15, NIV)

Introduction

Twelve years ago, I was struggling to discern whether I should continue my ministry as a local pastor serving with Pengutusan Injil dan Pelayanan Kasih (PIPKA, the Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia [GKMI] Board of Missions and Charities in Indonesia) or leave the congregation to engage in more mission-focused ministry. At that time, our family was also facing health challenges, as my second daughter was born with hearing impairment. Parallel to this personal struggle, I was involved in several ministries aimed at reaching unreached people groups in Indonesia, as well as in a humanitarian organization focused on community development, disaster preparedness, and the discipleship of young people through a short-term program. This was one of the darkest moments in our lives as a family, when we could not see what the future held. My passion has always centered on discipleship and holistic mission.

While I was wrestling with the possibility of leaving the pastorate in the local church, a significant encounter shaped my decision. I met a friend who was leading the Indonesian People’s Network, the largest network of organizations and churches committed to reaching unreached people groups. When I shared

Andi O. Santoso is the Regional Director for Asia and the Middle East, Mennonite Mission Network, and the chair of the Deacons Commission, Mennonite World Conference (2022–present). He was a former member of the Mission Commission of Mennonite World Conference (2015–2022).

my struggle about whether I should leave the church to join mission work, he asked me, “Are you sure you want to leave the church, when all the resources for mission—people, money, and others—are in the church?” His question deeply challenged me. This pivotal conversation prompted me to take a two-month sabbatical leave. During that time, one of the phrases that came to my mind was, “from the East to the West.” I kept hearing the question in Romans 10:14–15, “How can people hear if no one preaches?” and the wonderful claim, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

A Journey of Missional Leadership in Indonesia and the Global Church

I ultimately chose to remain in the congregation, and through that decision, God led me to a new understanding of the church and mission within a broader framework. I was later nominated and elected as General Secretary of the GKMI Synod. Through this role, I began to engage in more diverse contexts. I traveled to many churches and listened to people’s stories and challenges as they followed Jesus and participated in his mission while also navigating different contexts and limitations.

I was invited to serve on the Mission Commission of the Mennonite World Conference from 2015 to 2021. Since then, I have become convinced that church and mission cannot be separated. At that time, our family had to move from East Java to Central Java, from the east to the west. One of my earlier involvements as PIPKA’s representative was participating in the Global Mission Fellowship meeting in Basel, Switzerland, in 2012, where I first encountered the Mission Commission of the Mennonite World Conference. Later, I attended the MERK (European Mennonite Regional Conference) in May 2012 in Sumiswald, Switzerland. This was a journey of crossing barriers—across cultures, at regional, national, and international levels.

During my ministry in the synod, I began to learn more about the history of GKMI, which was founded by a Chinese Indonesian believer named Tee Siem Tat. On December 6, 1920, twenty-five new believers were baptized by a Russian Mennonite missionary, Nicolai Thiessen, while Johann Hübert dedicated the children. This event later became known as the Kudus Movement. The movement gradually expanded to many other regions in Indonesia and eventually developed into what is now the GKMI Synod. On December 6, 2020, GKMI celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Today, GKMI has more than 16,000 members and continues to expand through numerous churches and mission branches across Indonesia.¹ GKMI

1 Lawrence M. Yoder, *The Muria Story: A History of Mennonite Mission in Java* (Pandora Press, 2006), 43–45.

is notable for embodying the principles of self-support, self-government, and self-extension. Unlike earlier missionary-led initiatives, GKMI represents a significant shift toward indigenous leadership and contextualized Christian expression, rooted in local initiative rather than foreign control.²

This journey has made me aware of differing understandings and practices of mission. Some view mission primarily in terms of evangelism, church planting, and the sending of missionaries abroad, while others understand mission more broadly as bearing witness through ministries of reconciliation and *diakonia*. In this essay, I reflect on my own lived experience as someone formed within GKMI and actively involved in PIPKA, and who now serves with Mennonite Mission Network (the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA) in the United States while continuing to engage Asian and Middle Eastern contexts, as well as through my voluntary work with the Deacons Commission of the Mennonite World Conference.

My journey extends to multiple locations of mission practice—from local Indonesian initiatives shaped by indigenous leadership to a Global North institutional setting that remains deeply connected to worldwide mission partnerships. This positioning allows me to live with both local and transnational perspectives, offering a unique point of view for examining how mission is practiced, negotiated, and reimaged across contexts.

In dialogue with Wilbert R. Shenk's analysis in "Anabaptist Missiology: Leadership Trends," I want to explore how my experience reflects the broader transition he identifies from colonial mission structures to more decentralized, participatory, and globally interconnected forms of mission. By bringing together personal narrative and missiological reflection, I will attempt to deepen understanding of how contemporary mission is shaped by the interaction among local agencies, global networks, and evolving partnerships.

The "Multilateral Partnership Model": The Formation of the Missionary Training Center in Jakarta, Indonesia, and a New Way of Doing Mission Together

Shenk's discussion of PIPKA in his article highlights a decisive shift in missiological thinking from externally controlled mission structures to locally grounded partnership. As he observes, "in PIPKA, mission is no longer directed by foreign agencies; rather, local churches define the goals, while external partners participate as equals in supporting that vision."³ This insight captures the essence of a profound transformation: Mission is no longer conceived as something carried

2 I. P. Asheervadam et al., *Churches Engage Asian Traditions*, Global Mennonite History Series: Asia (Good Books, 2011), 18.

3 Wilbert R. Shenk, "Leadership of Mennonite Missions, 1945–1985," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 8 (2000): 52–53.

out *for* others, but as something discerned and lived out *with* others. In the PIPKA model, authority is not centralized in sending agencies but relocated within the local church, thereby affirming its theological and contextual agency.

This shift represents more than an organizational adjustment; it signals a fundamental reorientation of power and identity in mission. The traditional “classical” mission model, shaped by colonial assumptions, positioned Western agencies as the primary agents of initiative and control. By contrast, PIPKA embodies a vision of mission as mutual participation within the body of Christ, where no single group claims superiority. The role of external partners is reframed not as superior or even savior, but as co-laborers who accompany and support locally initiated vision.

Such a model challenges deeply embedded habits of leadership that associate responsibility with control, and instead invites a posture of trust, humility, and relinquishment.

Shenk presents the formal agreement between PIPKA and the Mennonite Brethren Board of Mission (BOMAS) in the formation of the Missionary Training Center in Jakarta. The agreement appears in full within Shenk’s essay (pp. 85–95 of this volume), and can be summarized as follows:

1. We are members of the same family.
2. As partners, we are not simply shareholders, but family members.
3. Diversity and differences do not mean disunity.
4. Our goal in partnership is to strengthen local churches to grow and multiply.
5. All program decisions are to be made on the field to achieve PIPKA’s goals.

Shenk also noted that the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions likewise joined with PIPKA through sending two missionary couples to work in church development in Kalimantan. This was another example of what collaboration in a mutual way looks like.⁴

Through this Missionary Training Center, PIPKA began to recruit and send many Indonesian church planters and evangelists to Sumatra, Kalimantan, Bali, Sulawesi, and several other regions in Indonesia. During my university studies in Jakarta (1995–1999), I recall that my pastor at GKMI Anugerah Jakarta, Rev. Yesaya Abdi, encouraged me to visit PIPKA’s churches in Lampung during my semester break. Following his suggestion, I traveled to Lampung and stayed with the late Rev. Ishak Ngongo and his family. Rev. Ngongo was among the early church planters sent by PIPKA, along with Rev. Sulihanto and others. During my visit in 1997, I had the opportunity to meet several of these PIPKA church planters and learn firsthand about their ministry.

4 Ibid.

This experience became a foundational moment in my missional formation, shaping my understanding of PIPKA's work and my participation in God's mission in a practical way. Rev. Ngongo invited me to preach in one of the churches he had planted, an opportunity that stretched me beyond my training as a student of computerized accounting and taught me to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry.⁵

Dale Warkentin, one of the missionaries from BOMAS who was involved in this Missionary Training Center formation, has described a Spirit-led revival among Indonesian Mennonites characterized by indigenous leadership, contextual spirituality, lay participation, and rapid mission expansion through PIPKA.⁶ I believe one of the biggest lessons I learned from that trip was how God can use ordinary people like Rev. Ishak Ngongo and many others, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to share the good news among people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, transforming lives. The mutual partnership between PIPKA and BOMAS in forming the Missionary Training Center was answering the prayer of the founders, Herman Tan, Andreas Setiawan, and Theophilus Muryadi, to take the gospel outside of the Muria mountain in Central Java; that is, outside of "Jerusalem." Herman Tann, in "The Story of PIPKA," wrote,

PIPKA was meant to be an extension and channel of the Muria Synod to spread the Gospel and plant churches not only in Indonesia but also in the world. PIPKA broke down the traditional and colonial church policy of geographical and ethnic boundaries. The Muria (Mennonite) Church found its global tasks to evangelize all nations and opened the door for global relationships and partnerships with its fellow Anabaptist/Mennonite believers and institutions.⁷

For contemporary mission leaders, the significance of this model lies not only in its structural implications but also in its theological depth. Partnership, in this sense, is not merely a pragmatic strategy for effectiveness; it is an expression of ecclesial unity and shared discipleship. The PIPKA model calls leaders to reimagine mission as a relational and reciprocal process, rooted in the recognition that God's work is already present within local contexts. In doing so, it offers a more faithful and sustainable paradigm for global mission, one that honors the dignity, voice, and leadership of local communities while redefining the vocation of those who come alongside them.

5 See Andi O. Santoso, "From Ordinary to History Maker," *Mennonite World Conference*, March 8, 2019, <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/stories/ordinary-history-maker/>.

6 Dale Warkentin, "Reports of Renewal: Revival Among the Mennonites of Indonesia," *Direction* 8, no. 4 (1979): 18–19.

7 Herman Tann, "The Story of PIPKA: I Will Build My Church," paper presented at the Mennonite World Conference, Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 24–29, 1990, 5.

Conclusion

The story of PIPKA's founders and early church planters reveals a distinctive pattern of missional leadership that is both locally rooted and globally connected. This leadership is not defined primarily by position or institutional power, but by a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit, a commitment to relational partnership, and the courage to cross cultural, geographical, and structural boundaries.

Such Spirit-led leadership is embedded in the DNA of PIPKA and expressed in its daily practices: preaching the good news, facilitating communal discernment, building relationships across barriers, engaging diverse cultures, carrying administrative responsibilities with integrity, and creating bridges between communities. It is a form of leadership marked by humility, mutuality, and openness to learning from others, qualities that have enabled PIPKA not only to grow locally but also to engage meaningfully with the global church, including partners in the Global North.

My own journey, from East Java to Central Java, and from Indonesia to the wider global church, reflects this broader movement "from the East to the West and from everywhere to everywhere." It demonstrates that mission today is no longer unidirectional, but multilateral, shaped by reciprocal relationships and shared participation in God's work. This is the vision of missional leadership today: a Spirit-led, globally interconnected, and locally embodied participation in God's mission, where all are invited to the table, and all are transformed.