

STORIES OF FAITH

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VITAL CONGREGATIONS

Sharing space, growing in faith

A growing, new worship community—ELCA Batak—is sharing space with First Lutheran Church in Redlands, Calif., and leaders say both groups are enriched by the experience.

"It's working," said Kamser Siahaan, president of Batak's council. "We have a good relationship."

The partnership began last fall, and members even celebrated Christmas together.

Siahaan's faith community, with about 60 people, is awaiting a new pastor from ELCA companions in Indonesia, where the Batak have their roots. They have been worshiping together in Southern California for more than 10 years, originally part of a larger Batak group, said Tom Goellrich, director for evangelical mission in the ELCA Pacifica Synod.

Goellrich helped match the Batak community with First and provides support. **Mission Support from the synod and churchwide organization sustain his work.**

"They're a very enthusiastic, very energetic group who have a great faith and a great love for Jesus," he said.

While they await a pastor, the Batak community calls on outside help to preach on Sundays, sometimes from other pastors who speak the Indonesian language. Having an Indonesian pastor helps older people in the congregation who can't understand English as well as younger members, Siahaan said.

Kim Krogstad, pastor of First, also helps. She recently presided over the wedding of Siahaan's daughter.

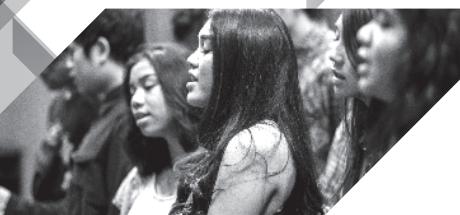


As with any new relationship, there was some "stepping on each other's toes," mainly involving scheduling, Goellrich said. The congregations worked it out.

First has worship services on Sunday mornings and the Batak congregation worships in the afternoons, with singing, dancing and a meal afterward.

"We have a lot of growing because members of the congregation live around here," Siahaan said. "We're hoping to have more than 100 people."

Krogstad said she hopes the youth groups in the congregations can share activities. A new group of people with a different background is bringing life and joy to their congregation, she said, and the experience "has really been a delight."



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