

**Notes from Rev. Pipi Dhali, GKI-LA
For Presbytery of San Gabriel, September 18, 2021**

1. What do the letters "GKI" stand for? Can you tell us a little about your church?

"G" stands for GEREJA, which means Church; "K" stands for KRISTEN, which means Christian; and "I" stands for INDONESIA. So, GKI means Indonesian Christian Church. GKI is one of the largest Presbyterian Church Organizations in Indonesia. We named our church GKI because most of our church members came from GKI churches in Indonesia, and I myself was a GKI pastor as well. By using GKI in our name, people who came from Indonesia would easily know that we are a Presbyterian or Reformed church.

Our church members are mostly immigrants from Indonesia; we come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds that make up the diverse society in Indonesia, and we are proud of the diversity within our congregation.

2. What is the history of the Reformed/Presbyterian church in Indonesia?

Presbyterian is one of the most common denominations in Indonesia; there are many Presbyterian Churches there, and each of them has a specific historical background. Focusing on GKI, the church organization started during 1930-1950 as mainly a group of Chinese Indonesian churches in Java. On their journey as a church, there were two milestones that I am really proud of.

Firstly, despite initially being a church of mainly Chinese Indonesians, the church has always made it a commitment to be open to and embrace the multi ethnic community in Java; we made intentional efforts to minister to and serve other ethnic groups, and eventually, our body of church became more and more diverse over time. We strongly stood by the commitment to not be an ethnically exclusive church. The modern GKI is now reaping the benefits of the organization's historical efforts for multi-ethnic ministry, as GKI now is one of the most diverse church organizations in Indonesia. We are even extending our reach and ministry to other parts of the country outside of Java.

Secondly, GKI became the pioneer among the ecumenical churches in Indonesia in uniting the founding three synods across all parts of Java (East Java, Central Java, and West Java). In August 1988, those three synods became just one synod, GKI; the goal was to ensure that our fellowships unite in efforts and missions to serve the people of Java and beyond.

3. What is it like being Presbyterian in Indonesia--how is it different from here, are you in the minority, what is it like for Indonesia to be such a diverse nation, including by religion?

Indonesia is a country of thousands of Islands. It has a multi-cultural society with many historical backgrounds including by beliefs and religions.

Overall, Christians in Indonesia are in the minority among a mostly Muslim population. In fact, Indonesia is the largest Muslim population in the world. That said, GKI is known by the general public as a Christian community that can sincerely live together in harmony with others of varying backgrounds and faiths. We take great care in designing our ministry, so that it does not come off aggressive or forceful, and we choose to focus on ministry activities that prioritize mutual harmony and spreading the love of Christ to all our neighbors. We found it important as a church to also preserve the harmony in a society that we share with others. We regularly have inter-religious dialogue forum, we are engaged in community services along with many organizations from other religious backgrounds, pastors have a good and friendly relationship with other spiritual/religious leaders, and many churches provide service, such as health clinics and soup kitchens, for the surrounding community regardless of the audience's religious backgrounds. I confidently say that most people in Indonesia enjoy collaborating with the Presbyterian churches (including GKI) because of our friendly and respectful approach to the community.

4. What was it like growing up in your home community/island: gifts, values, challenges?

My home community is in the east part of Java Island. I loved growing up there because I can feel the openness of most of the people there to making friends with others without biases. The people in that area are a lot more casual, honest, and straightforward. They could come across rough at times, but they are also very genuine and strong in their sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, for example, the area I grew up in faced the least amount of riots and violence based on ethnic/religious discriminations, as our community was tolerant and protective of each other.

This environment really shaped me as a leader in the church as well. The spirit of fellowship among the people brought me numerous gifts of values, perspectives, and sensitivity to do the ministry with a sense of togetherness. It helped me and other leaders to focus on building a church organization that embraces holding hands together with other churches as a synod (syn-hodos = to walk together) and also others with different religious backgrounds as fellow human beings who also strive for a life of love and peace.

The challenge churches in Indonesia often faced is the intervention of political agenda. We lived in a country where political agenda and instability often try to scapegoat the public based on religious differences. Therefore, as a church, we must learn how to both preserve our identity as Christians and build a healthy relationship with other elements of the society so that outsiders cannot easily drive a wedge between us.

5. What do you want your San Gabriel Presbytery family to know about you personally?

I am passionate about teaching and preaching (drawing and painting also). My journey with GKI has given me valuable experiences in leading a larger church organization; I had served as a chairman in both Klasis (Presbytery) and Synod during my tenure with GKI. One of the challenges that I face here now as a pastor is the fact that the Indonesian congregation here likes being an 'independent church' - which to me is not healthy. Since I came here to serve, I have been praying and giving my congregation encouragement to get affiliated with or join a larger Presbyterian church in order to get mentorship, guidance, and a broader perspective and responsibility of ministry. It would help the congregation grow in the knowledge that we are a part of something bigger than our local community, and that as Christians, we should strive to continuously grow closer to the Lord and amplify his love as much as possible. It would also allow us to build more meaningful fellowships with Christians from other walks of life, which would enrich our own insights. We also believe that we too have values to add to a larger Presbytery based on our unique experiences and walks of faith.

I am witnessing how good God is in helping me and my church in this journey, especially through many friends from the family of San Gabriel Presbytery whose kind hearts and helping hands are so appreciated.

6. If you want: it seems like there are more women pastors in Indonesia than in many other churches -do you know why?

Firstly, the Presbyterian churches in Indonesia inherited the values of gender equality from the western Protestant missionaries. Since I was a child, I have never seen a problem for women to be a pastor in our churches. When I studied at the Seminary, there was a largely balanced composition between male and female students. As a community, our teachings have always communicated that each one of us has a role to play in the church, regardless of gender, and that being a woman should never stop one from aspiring to be a leader or even a pastor at a church. Many of our elders have historically been women as well.

Secondly, Indonesians have a strong perception of women as "Ibu" (meaning mother) who nurtures and teaches their children with unending love. Mothers, and women, are therefore held in high regards within the Indonesian society. In fact, many tribes/ethnic groups in Indonesia operated on a matriarchal basis rather than a patriarchy. In this way, the society has always been used to figures of women leaders, and they see a lot of correlation between the nurturing and guiding nature of a mother with the role of a pastor.