

JOY BALAZO AND YOUNG AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE



The Uniting International Mission of the Uniting Church in Australia has established a program to help young people take responsibility for peace-making in their communities. Led by **Joy Balazo**, the program is striving to build a culture of peace in communities affected by conflict and violence in the Asia Pacific region. It does so by holding workshops to help give people the skills and abilities to resolve conflicts through peaceful means.

In line with the second of the four key themes of the *Decade to Overcome Violence*, Joy believes that abuse of power is a major source of conflict in today's world. She says:

'Working for peace means working with everybody because conflict affects everybody in the community regardless of faith, ethnicity or gender. It is very important to recognise our differences, respect the faith and culture of others and be open to many possibilities.'

Only as we *'build communities of peace for all'* (as the Christian Conference of Asia DOV theme puts it), will successfully overcome the violence that afflicts so much of Asia and the Pacific. **'Peace: a Mission not an Option'** is how Joy and the Young Ambassadors program puts it.

Joy draws on years of experience of working for human rights alongside highly troubled communities. As a result, the **Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP)** aims to train, motivate and energise people to build peace particularly in the areas of Papua New Guinea, Burma, Indonesia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Australia. Since 2002 it has grown very successfully, with nearly 1000 young participants in YAP workshops, and over 500 actively promoting peace in their countries across their divisions.

Jubel's story from Ambon

'I live in Waal Village. We lived so peacefully in our village, along with Muslim people, before the conflict. The majority of people in our village were Christian, however we still had several Muslim neighbours. When my beloved village was attacked by Muslims, we had to flee, and leave our belongings. They burnt our clove harvest. We had to walk in the cold night, climbing the mountain, over bushes and crossing rivers. When we got to the camp, we continued to suffer and life was hard. I hated the people who did this to us. They have no hearts. Praise the Lord that he brought us back to our village after three years in an IDP camp.'

SEEDS OF PEACE

‘A few months after we had returned to our village, I became a church elder and my pastor informed us that we were going to participate in a workshop. I was so surprised to see Muslim people in the meeting, I asked my friend, “Why do they put us together with these people? I won’t participate if the workshop is going to be with them.” My heart was as hard as stone. My friend told me I wasn’t supposed to act that way, especially because I was a church elder. I kept silent.

‘When I went home I told my husband about this. I told him that I would not participate in the workshop. But to my surprise he told me that I shouldn’t act in that way, that everything that happens is in God’s great plan, so there is nothing to hate and nothing to feel sorry for.

‘The first day of the workshop, I still refused to talk to the Muslim participants. But I remembered my husband’s words and I lifted up a prayer in my heart, for the Holy Spirit to guide me and to help me get over my feelings. I thank God and the Holy Spirit for the revival they blessed us with. The process in the workshop changed me. I am now able to see things from their point of view and not just focus on my story. I now realise that they also suffered.



‘After the workshop myself and my colleague participated in our annual church meeting and we have talked about our action plan with the church and they have given their support. All of our workshop participants, Muslim and Christian also had a picnic together to strengthen our relationship. All of us want to help those still in the IDP camps to come back to their villages so we can live happily again.’

The key to YAP is empowering people at the grassroots level to deal with community conflict resolution. In Joy’s words:

‘We are continuing the mission God has given us despite race, religion or ethnicity. Our humanity brings us together. We are all children of God, of course, we have different names for God... It is an active commitment. Not armchair peacekeeping. It is dirtying your hand to do peace work. We don’t want that diluted by any personal agenda.’

‘They now believe they can make a difference. People have their self confidence back. They know they can do something, they don’t have to wait for the hierarchy to act.’

Sources and more information:

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www.journey.ucaqld.com.au/news/young_ambassado.html