

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me”

MATTHEW 25:40

The Least of These

Much has changed in Indonesia over the last 25 years, and many people’s lives have improved. But the shift from a traditional to a “modern” way of life is a constant source of social conflict. The hidden constant in this conflict is the role of personal relationships and social status: you are who you know, and who knows you. If you don’t know anybody, you are nobody.

That realization has been haunting me lately, in the form of a dead baby.

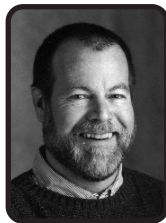
Her name was Rita Norlina Selan. Her mother died when Rita was a few weeks old. Her father is a farm laborer who had no money. Unable to buy milk, he fed her rice water and sugared tea. Rita starved to death.

This sort of thing happens in the hills of Timor all too often. But in Rita’s case, it happened less than a mile from our house. The milk she needed was sitting on a shelf in our pantry. The car that could have taken her to the hospital (or her mother before her) was parked in our garage. So why didn’t she get the help she needed? Because her father didn’t know us, and we didn’t know him. When asked why he didn’t come to us for help, he said he was malu (translate that as a combination of shy, ashamed, and afraid). He knew who we were and where we lived, but he did not feel socially important enough to make requests of the “Big White People.”

Rita reminds me that social analyses of the causes of poverty and training on nutrition and public health, while important, are secondary. What is of primary importance is building the kind of community where no one is nobody.

That’s the kind of community that Jesus worked to create, and it’s the kind of community we have yet to become.

John Campbell-Nelson is a missionary serving with the Evangelical Christian Church of Timor.



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You make the difference . . .



The prayers and help you provide through your local congregations make possible the work and witness of GLOBAL MINISTRIES, which is supported by Disciples Mission Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) of the United Church of Christ.

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