Indonesians in the New York Metro Area

During the beginning stages of a new church start in Woodside, Queens, Pastor Lasut brought in an unusual speaker to lure Indonesians to a worship service. The guest speaker, named Victor,* was fl own in from Indonesia for the occasion. He had been a Bible student in Jakarta in 1999 when a horde of Islamic radicals swept into his Bible school, beating him, and then attacked and killed him. He was so bad internally that nothing could be done to save him and he would die within a few days. At that point, Victor claimed that his spirit left his body and that Jesus spoke to him, indicating that it was not time to die yet. When his spirit returned to his body, a cracking sound was heard inside of Victor’s neck and he was completely healed.

When Did They Come to New York?

With widespread inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts plaguing Indonesia in the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century, a corresponding uneasiness over the country’s economic stability brought a fresh wave of Indonesians into Metro New York. Before this time, the Indonesian population in Metro New York was largely hidden. The exodus from Indonesia included both Christians and Muslims, almost all of whom attribute dissatisfaction with their country’s outbreak of violence as a reason for leaving.

Where Do They Live?

With two Indonesian restaurants side-by-side on Whitney Avenue in Elmhurst, Queens, this street qualifies as an Indonesian enclave more than any other in Metro New York, even though Indonesians are spread throughout Elmhurst, Corona, Woodside, and Forest Hills in Queens. Many successful Indonesians move out of the city to buy homes in New Jersey and Long Island.

What Do They Believe?

Although Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, most Indonesians in Metro New York are Christian. Sometimes this Christian identity comes from having an ethnic Christian heritage, such as that found among the Minahasa and Batak, but sometimes it is as a result of recent conversion, as evidenced among many ethnic Chinese as well as Muslims who have become disenchanted with their religion due to Muslim-perpetrated violence in their home country.

What Are Their Lives Like?

With much of the population undocumented, Indonesians are mainly relegated to service paying occupations. Most Indonesians socialize with one another along ethnic and religious lines in their places of worship.

How Can I Pray?

* Indonesian Muslims in Metro New York are very open to dialogue about faith due to the atrocities back home. Pray that Christians will forgive Muslims and lovingly share about Christ.


3. This Indonesian Consul General estimates 8,000 to 15,000 Indonesians live in Metro New York.

4. Ibid. Wikananto.