

## Pastor Builds 12,000 Seat "Holy Stadium" in Muslim Stronghold

Written by

Thursday, 31 March 2005 08:00 PM EST

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### **In Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic country, pastor Petrus Agung has built a church the size of a stadium**

It's not exactly common to see a church the size of a stadium in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation. But Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI), translated Gospel of the Kingdom Church, isn't afraid to take risks.

Despite a traditional law that forbids any group from building a facility larger than the city's grand mosque, the congregation, located in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java, is building a 12,000-seat arena dubbed the "Holy Stadium," which was to open this spring.

Though the largest mosque in Semarang seats 3,000, JKI--which has grown from 25 people to 6,000 since 1991 and now operates an FM radio station, the city's only nonsmoking café, a medical ministry and a drug-treatment center--received a permit for construction of its stadium in record time.

Pastor Petrus Agung, who leads the ministry with his wife, Tina, chalks it all up to the favor of God. Saved at the age of 17, Agung said he was called to pastor in 1990 when God spoke to him three times. "The first time I thought it was the devil," he told Charisma. "When the voice said, 'Start a church in the city,' I laughed. I said: 'Devil, you are a liar. I am an evangelist. I have no calling to be a pastor. It will be a disaster.'"

But the voice persisted. "Before I rebuked that voice the third time, the Lord said, 'It's Me.' I cried and said, 'Forgive me, Lord.' And He said, 'Start a church.'"

Agung obeyed, launching JKI in February 1991 with his wife, a handful of musicians and some friends. In seven years, Agung said, the church grew to 400 members, which he said is small by Indonesian standards. "There are millions of people around us, so that's very slow," he told Charisma.

The church's growth rate began to change after Agung began speaking in public- and private-school assemblies. At one school, he said, the principal brought all the students into the auditorium and told the pastor he could speak freely with the students for two hours.

At first the youth were not responsive. "I was so frustrated," he said. "But the Lord said: 'Don't worry. Keep talking.' After 15 minutes, He said stop. ... So I stopped, and I thought it was my worst preaching, but I said: 'If you want to receive Jesus ... if you want to change your life, come. I will pray for you.'

"They ran, and I began to pray for them. They began to weep and cry. ... It was always like that ... and not only in the Christian schools."

The church grew to 700 within two months, then Kong Hee, pastor of 16,000-member City Harvest Church in Singapore, came to preach a revival meeting and challenged Agung to believe that God would grow the ministry to 2,000 people by the end of 2000.

"I said in my heart, 'I don't know,'" Agung said. "But I tried to be polite with him, so ... I said,

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'2,000 is fine.'

Then at the revival meeting that night, Kong Hee surprised his friend even more. "He said something powerful: 'Let's say 2,000 before 2000. So by the end of 1999 you are going to reach 2,000,'" Agung recalled. "I was so afraid when he declared that."

But before Christmas 1999, JKI had more than 2,000 members, with hundreds getting saved that year. Agung says since then the church has held a baptism service almost every month.

Though the congregation, whose average age is 21, earns less than \$300 a month, they have sacrificially given jewelry, bikes, homes and land to build the new facility. Agung and his wife gave their car, money and all her heirloom jewelry, including her wedding rings, to the project. But the couple is convinced they can't out-give God.

Today, the ministry is debt-free, and the Holy Stadium is more than 80 percent paid for even though construction is not complete. In the wake of the tsunami that devastated parts of South Asia, the church has become a center for distributing relief and supplies.

Agung said obedience to God is at the heart of the church's growth. "We have to hear what He says and just obey it," he said. "Do it, whatever He says."

**Larry Keefauver in Semarang, Indonesia**