

Jesuit priest uses painting to evangelize In retirement



Dutch-born Jesuit Father Lambertus Sugiri van den Heuvel was 84 years old when he was invited to join a painting course last February at St. Theresa Parish in Central Jakarta. "They gave me canvases, paintbrushes and paints. I was so excited," he told ucanews.com. He was among six people to participate in the course, led by a painter from Bali.

Father Sugiri said he has always wanted to be a painter, but his priestly duties limited him to only one vocation at a time. "I kept my hobby of painting in my heart for years, but I couldn't pursue it as I was actively serving as a pastor," he said.

"The painting course brought my hobby to the surface," said Father Sugiri, now technically retired. He still serves as the parish's assistant priest and moderates the parish's women's and charismatic renewal groups. When he started painting, he used oils but quickly shifted focus to acrylics. "It takes less time, and the paintings are more beautiful," he said.



Ignatian spirituality

Father Sugiri said passion for painting is deeply influenced by Ignatian spirituality, finding inspiration in the work of Jeronimo Nadal, a 16th-century Jesuit priest who used an illustrated Bible to communicate the Gospels to those he served.

After arriving in Indonesia in 1952, Father Sugiri sought a copy of Nadal's book, eventually asking for help from the Jesuit province in the Netherlands to find the book at the Vatican Archives.

"The book was there, and I got a copy of it. It contains 150 black-and-white paintings. I realized that he evangelized through paintings. I was so interested," he said.

But since the book was 500 years old, "I decided to just adopt his idea," he said.

New evangelization

People today are more visually oriented, Father Sugiri said, and in order to capture their attention one must use visual means.

"Therefore, I have a motivation to continue growing the evangelization through paintings. This is my spirit," he said.

In less than a year, Father Sugiri has produced 50 paintings, mostly on biblical themes.

He produces at least one painting a week, spending most of his free time painting, he said.

"It's not about being perfect. I have a message in each painting. It's about the mystery of our faith in Jesus. Jesus was rich, and there are many things we can reflect on," he said.

Six months after he began painting, the parish held an exhibition that displayed some 80 paintings by Father Sugiri and other members of the painting group.

From Jan. 13-20, all of his paintings were exhibited for eight days in the Shekinah building in Central Jakarta.

A visitor, Yustizia from St. Mary Immaculate Parish in West Jakarta was impressed with a painting titled, "Remember Me."

"This painting is about the Last Supper before Jesus died on the cross. It calls on us to always remember all sacrifices that Jesus did for us," she told ucanews.com.

Yustizia, 55, said Father Sugiri's paintings are alive.

"I really appreciate his efforts. From his experiences, I believe that he has a lot of ideas that he can share," she said.

Indeed, Father Sugiri has plans to produce 150 paintings. But he doesn't plan to sell them.

"Now I have 50 paintings. I still have lots of homework. As long as I feel strong enough and my hands don't shake, I will continue painting until I die," he said.

Katharina R. Lestari, - UCA News Jakarta