

Indonesian Tribe Celebrates 50 Years of Christianity

Fifty years ago, the Sawi people of Papua, Indonesia, were violent headhunters and cannibals, hostile to neighboring tribes and isolated from the outside world. Today, 85 percent of the tribe identifies itself as Christian, according to Pioneers-USA.

The Papua people have had no historic contact with Muslim evangelists like the rest of Indonesia. But Christian evangelists have developed a stronghold there.

In 1962, Don and Carol Richardson, missionaries with Regions Beyond Missionary Union (now World Team), traveled to the island of New Guinea with their son Steve (now president of Pioneers-USA) in hopes of sharing the **gospel** with the Sawi.

“Fifty years ago we encountered 200 naked Sawi headhunter-cannibals brandishing spears and streaked with war paint,” Don recalls. “They danced around us to the beat of their drums, chanting in a language all their own.”

While living among the Sawi, Don and Carol (who passed away in 2004), learned the Sawi language, translated the **New Testament**, planted a church and discipled Sawi leaders to care for the growing flock of believers.

June 28, 50 years after the Richardsons’ arrival among the Sawi, Don and his three sons, Steve, Shannon and Paul, returned to Indonesia for an anniversary celebration hosted by the Sawi church and those of four neighboring tribes, which have since been evangelized.

“Three generations of the same people who greeted us in 1962

welcomed us again, singing jubilant songs, this time in both the national language and in their own tribal tongue,” Don notes, describing the celebration. “This was a culminating experience of my life thus far.”

Steve was an infant when he arrived among the Sawi in a dugout canoe, cradled in his mother’s arms. He spent the first 13 years of his life in the tribe and watched the **gospel** take root and grow, a story that is recounted in the best-selling book, *Peace Child*, by Don Richardson.

“I was amazed and encouraged by the depth of the Sawi peoples’ gratitude, 50 years later, for the coming of the **gospel** and its impact on their lives,” Steve noted. “One after another, men and women—often with tears in their eyes—expressed profound appreciation for our family and the message we brought.”