

FIFOHAZANA MOVEMENT

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The Growth of the Church and the Fifohazana Movement



Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, regarding material wealth, but it has one of the most effective programs of evangelism within the Christian Faith that empowers one of the faster-growing Lutheran Churches in the world.



The movement is called the “Fifohazana Movement.”

Origin of the Fifohazana Movement

fi•fohanana |noun|

Formed from verb *mifoha*, means to get up, to awaken, to revive.

It also means to get up, rise and to be awakened from sleeping. To revive means to bring back to health, strength or consciousness. Taking into account the Christian and spiritual issues, the Church prefers to make use of the word **revival** to translate the word *fifohanana*.

In the early 1890s there was a severe political crisis in Madagascar that brought with it hardship, starvation and severe poverty to the people.

Weakened by hunger and poverty, the people were vulnerable to certain diseases such as high fever, leprosy and malaria, which increased during this period.

It was a difficult time for the people on the island — even Christian believers became disappointed in the Christian Faith. Many Christians fell into dormant faith. They attended worship services, but did not have a close relationship with God.

The Raising up of a Leader: Rainisoalambo



Rainisoalambo and his wife on right with Bible on the table

Frequently, at such times, God calls special people to be His messengers — most often indigenous persons to bring comfort to the people in their suffering. A man by the name of **Rainisoalambo** was such a man for the times.

During this time of crisis, Rainisoalambo fell sick and felt abandoned by his friends. He felt like he was going to die. It was during this time of struggle and illness that Rainisoalambo in a dream received the call from God on October 15, 1894. His call was to preach and to teach the Word of God, to bring people to believe in Jesus Christ and seek to develop a deep spiritual transformation to the people in his midst.

As a result, in 1884 Rainisoalambo was baptized. The London Missionary Society (LMS) saw in him an intelligent, persuasive leader and trained him to become a church leader in his community. However, things did not work out for him as he had hoped and he quit working in the church. He also came down with a case of leprosy, his family was suffering, his business vanished and his family was starving.

Then Jesus appeared to him in a dream and told Rainisoalambo to put away his *sampy* (the small idols and charms he used for his traditional divining and healing). When he awoke, he found that he was healed. He quickly got rid of his charms and began a new life of fervent prayer, witnessing to his neighbors about what had happened, and reading the Gospels with new eyes, through the culture of the Malagasy people.

A group of believers soon gathered around him, and within a year they had formally organized themselves into what we would now call a **base community of believers**. Their simple rules called them to lives of economic sharing and self-sufficiency, cleanliness and orderliness as individuals. Also, they

were to manage wisely their homes and property, learn to read the Bible, hold daily communal prayers, and to study and send out apostles and evangelists to establish other such households and communities. Out of Rainisoalambo’s misery arose a Christian leader who helped the people of Madagascar to read the Bible, believe in Jesus Christ and apply the truths in their cultural context.

in·dig·e·nous |adjective|
Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native. “The indigenous peoples of Siberia.”
in·dig·e·nize |verb|
bring (something) under the control, dominance, or influence of the people native to an area. “English has been indigenized in different parts of the world.”

The story of Rainisoalambo is the most fascinating story of **indiginizing Christianity**. In this story about Rainisoalambo and the Fifohanaza Movement, there is a lesson for us in the United States to think about. How do we reach out in our current culture to share the Gospel with people who are demoralized, depressed, angry or turning away from the message of the Gospel? We need to pray that we too, like Rainisoalambo and the Fifohazana Movement **may indigenize** the Gospel and evangelize those who have turned away or never heeded the welcome love, forgiveness and hope of the Christian Faith!

This is the story of what is now called the **FIFOHAZANA Movement** or awakening that is the power of the growth of the Malagsy Lutheran Church.

The TOBY Center

What is a Toby?

A Toby is a camp, a place set apart for wholeness, healing and resuming a normal life. A Toby camp includes housing for the members as well as for the sick and poor, a church building used for worship and teaching, a school for the children, gardens and livestock for providing food, and a kitchen and dining hall.

Rainisoalambo founded a place in which people may become trained to carry out a ministry to the people who come to live in the Toby, and also to reach out to others in the community with the love of God as recorded in John’s Gospel.

*“A new command I give you:
Love one another as I have loved
you, so you must love one
another. By this everyone will
know that you are my disciples, if
you love one another.”*

— John 13:34-35



Some Toby buildings near Antsirabe were damaged by a rare Earthquake in 2020 - Friends of Madagascar Mission helped rebuild the buildings



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Clothing Worn by the Movement Members

Rainisoalambo encouraged the people living in the Toby to wear white clothing. White signifies purity and cleanliness. The clothing reminds the people in the Toby that God’s people must witness in life to that purity.



Shepherds praying with prisoners attending a worship service



Shepherds distributing Bibles at a prison

The seven commitments of the followers of Rainisoalambo (and still maintained today)

1. Learn to read in order to read the Bible.
2. Learn to count and calculate (to read numbers) in order to look for verses in the Bible.
3. Present a good image of Christians by women combing their hair and men cutting theirs correctly.
4. Clean the house regularly so it may be worthy of being a house of prayer.
5. Grow vegetables and rice and plant fruit trees in order to produce food. There must always be enough food at home.
6. Start any task or activity with prayer in order to receive God's blessings.
7. Wrap deceased followers in a clean sheet/cloth when there is a death among Christians. The dead should be buried where he/she died. (The Malagasy custom was to bury their dead where they were born, following the ancient pagan burial customs.)

Guiding Principles of a Toby in Madagascar Today

- It emphasizes the preaching of the Gospel, evangelism, hospitality and care for the poor and sick, as well community development.
- The members of the Toby live in the camp or in their homes in the cities and villages and are active in the local churches where they serve in numerous capacities.
- The pastors are leaders of the movement, and most pastors in the Malagasy Lutheran Church are members of a Toby camp and the Fifohazana Movement.
- The Toby members do not depend upon foreign assistance or governance.
- The work of the Toby submits its activities under the leadership of the church leadership.
- A person who wants to become a Shepherd must be involved in a two-year training program, and then be consecrated before becoming fully engaged in the ministry as a Shepherd.



Shepherds participate in the laying on of hands during a service of confession and forgiveness

The Impact of the FIFOHAZANA Movement on the Growth of the Church Today

The main goal of the Fifohazana Movement is to bring people to believe in Jesus Christ by totally giving their lives to Him. The ministry invites people to be reconciled with God through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

"We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

— 2 Corinthians 5:20



Evangelism Committee - Shepherds traveling to a neighboring community to share the Gospel

The people in Madagascar are in need of prayer and the Word of God to strengthen their faith and to heal them from their sicknesses. Since they worship idol gods, they also need to be delivered from the evil spirits. It is in such situations that the casting out of demons is central to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. And for those who are backsliding Christians, the Shepherds visit them in their homes and pray for them.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church is now nearing 4 million Christians in a country of 24 million people. The church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar grows because the Shepherds from the Fifohazana Movement reach out to the people with love and care!

You can help!

For more information about FOMM's work in Madagascar, go to:

www.madagascarmission.org