

Evangelism in Madagascar

By Daniel Tolojanahary

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Introduction

Editor's note from David P. Lerseth, FOMM Executive Director:

The Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) has many qualified evangelists, pastors, teachers and laypersons to lead the mission and ministry of their church. They have numerous Bible schools to train evangelists and catechists, many regional seminaries to train pastors for ordination, and one seminary that offers a Master of Divinity degree.

Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM) has invited Pastor Daniel to write an article about evangelism in the Malagasy Lutheran Church. This church knows how to do evangelism. This does not mean that one cannot simply transfer their evangelism program to the USA. Evangelism in Madagascar is focused upon the cultural norms of their country. But we may learn from the intentionality and Biblical bases of their program, to develop our own American evangelism programs.



Pastor Dan and his wife Bernadette

Madagascar Evangelism Program

Malagasy population are about 30 millions. There are 18 tribes with different cultures, dialects and religions. But the majority of Malagasy population are Christians: 58.1% of the population is Christian, with 2.1% being Muslim, and 39.2% practicing traditional religion. Lutherans are about 5 million and this number grows day by day. (According to Pew Research Center data for 2021, 85.3 percent of the population are Christian, 3 percent are Muslim, 4.5 percent adhere to traditional beliefs, and 6.9 percent have no affiliation. It is common to alternate between religious identities or to mix traditions, and many individuals hold a combination of Indigenous and Christian or Muslim beliefs.)

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith...

— Romans 1:16

One of Malagasy Lutheran Church's visions is "to spread the Gospel in Madagascar and in other Nations." This vision is being reached in three ways through active Church institutions: the Evangelism Department, Bible Schools, and the Revival Movement.



1. Through the Evangelism Department

This department coordinates the work of evangelism in each of the 26 Synods. In general, the Evangelism Department mobilizes, motivates and helps individual Christians and Christians who are from each branch of the church to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The different branches of the church include Sunday School, Scouts, Youth, Blue Cross, Men's fellowship, Women's fellowship, etc.

All of the branches of the church share the Gospel. How do they do this? They go outside of the church in their own town or in nearby villages and invite people to come to church. The motto of the Malagasy Lutheran Church is "One Christian wins one non-believer every year."

Church members walking to a neighboring town for an evangelism event



The Evangelism Department encourages churches to share the Gospel in a contextualized way. They encourage congregations to be sure that the people have a translation of the Bible in their own dialect, show Christian movies such as the *Jesus Film*, sing and teach songs to the local tribes in order to reach the unreached tribes with the Gospel.

Editor's Note: *The synods "target" certain villages for sharing the Gospel. They provide transportation for members of a congregation to go to a village on a weekend and share the Gospel as detailed above. The results are amazing! Sometimes there may be 50, 75, or 100 men, women and children who come to Faith in Jesus Christ and are baptized.*



Evangelism team going to a neighboring town, having an oxen team to transport some of the people



Some of the 50 persons baptized on an evangelism weekend



Pastor Manoela with a village witchdoctor who became a Christian at an evangelism weekend

2. Through the Bible School

The Bible School works under the coordination of the Evangelism Department. The Bible School trains Christians to become Catechists and Evangelists. Both Catechists and Evangelists receive the same education (a two-year course), but the Catechists work in a local congregation preaching and teaching the Lutheran doctrines through the Lutheran Catechism. The Evangelists live in a village with very few or no Christians to reach people who still live in darkness.



Students at the Mananovy Bible School

Editor's Note: *Friends of Madagascar Mission supports 77 evangelists in four synods of the Malagasy Lutheran Church. I encourage you to consider supporting one of these evangelists, so more villages may be reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To learn how to support an evangelist, go to: <https://madagascarmission.org/evangelists-evangelism/>*

These 3 photos depict several of the Evangelists with their bicycles, their primary mode of transportation.



3. Through the Revival Movement



A gathering of shepherds

Parades with Christians are a common event, informing a community of their presence.



The Revival Movement is a very important part of the Malagasy Lutheran Church. It is the strongest force that makes the Malagasy Lutheran Church increase in membership. Their role is seen in the Sunday morning liturgy by praying, preaching and driving out demons. The Revival Movement trains Christians to become Shepherds. They are trained by Pastors for two years. They receive almost the same teachings as the Bible School students. But apart from preaching and praying for people, Shepherds are Exorcists. Exorcism is one of the subjects they learn.



Shepherds praying with people

Editor's note: *Please do not misunderstand what this means. It is not like the impression we in the USA have or like "Hollywood" portrays exorcisms. Having experienced many times the exorcism in worship, I would compare it to an expanded "Order of Confession and Forgiveness". It is a very dynamic call to confess our sin, ask God for forgiveness and then receiving in a personal way the laying on of hands and it being declared that one is forgiven.)*

The Shepherds are bold to evangelize. Many of them extend their witness of the Gospel outside of the church, preaching the Gospel to people. Their work of witnessing to the Christian faith plays an important role, as most Malagasy people are possessed by evil spirits. Many of these people come to church to be delivered from the bondage of sin, evil and the devil.



A pastor laying on of hands during an exorcism, declaring forgiveness!

Summary

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, **the Evangelism Department, the Bible School and the Revival Movement** are the three moving forces of the Malagasy Lutheran Church in Evangelism.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church is one of the fastest growing churches in the Lutheran World Federation. Every month many people are baptized and new churches are formed.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church has a membership of 4 million people. Today, there are even Malagasy Lutheran Churches in Europe called “the Regional Synod in Europe.”

For more information, visit the FOMM website at:
<https://madagascarmission.org/>



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Links:

FLM: <https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/malagasy-lutheran-church-flm>

FOMM: <https://madagascarmission.org/>

Jesus Film: <https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch/jesus.html/english.html>

Support: <https://madagascarmission.org/evangelists-evangelism/>

Bible School: <https://madagascarmission.org/bible-schools/>