

Celebrating 159 Years!

By David Lerseth

Celebrating Mission, November 2025

Beginnings: Celebrating 159 Years of Global Mission in Madagascar!

Global Mission work in Madagascar began in 1868 by the Norwegian Mission Society, and in 1888 the Norwegian American Lutheran Church joined in the mission work. Why did these churches send missionaries to Madagascar?



Early missionary home



Early missionary Pastor Hogstad and wife Oline



Early Malagasy Christians

GO! BAPTIZE!

The Biblical Mandate for Mission, called the Great Commission, is a joyous one – it compelled them to go. And they brought the Gospel to what has now grown to be a church of over 4 million members and growing!

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

— Matthew 28:19-20

“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

— James 2:15-17

GO! CARE!

PHYSICAL NEEDS!

Those early missionaries knew that besides sharing the Gospel, they were to care for the physical needs of the people.



And so the missionaries’ work developed the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM), and also developed a great number of ministries to care for the needs of the people. These included: training centers to teach good farming practices; feeding programs; schools for the deaf and blind; a medical system called SALFA (with 10 hospitals, many clinics and dispensaries); and places to care for the poor and mentally ill.

A classroom at the Lutheran Visually Impaired/blind school

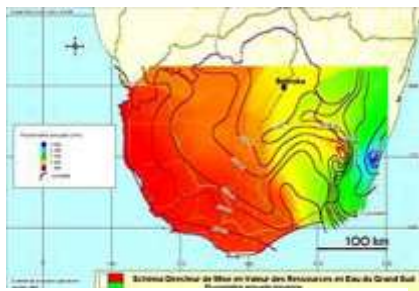


Today: Celebrating Digging Wells and Water Distribution Systems

Recently, Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM) has responded to the call of the Malagasy Lutheran Church to provide water wells for the people – particularly in southwest Madagascar, an area where FOMM has the majority of their mission support work. People must travel long distances to a river just to fill a pail with water, and the children are usually given the task of collecting water.



Retrieving water for the family



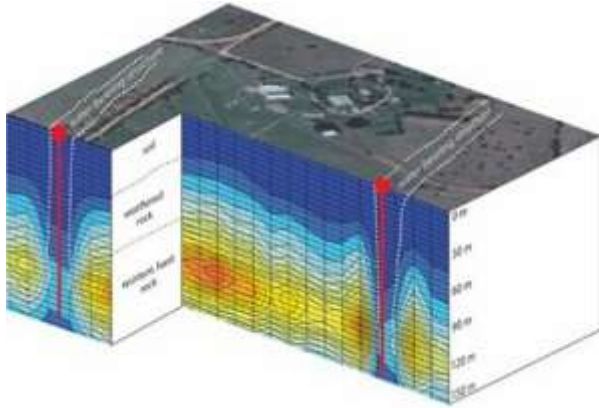
The area in red receives approximately 15.7 inches of rain a year and is the region in which FOMM is digging wells

For thousands of years, the people who settled the southwest areas of Madagascar have had to deal with drought and lack of food. The reason? Beneath this area of Madagascar there is solid granite, upon which is a shallow layer of soil. During the rainy season (a very few months of the year), this soil absorbs the rainfall and the people are able to get water from the rivers and water wells. During the rest of the year, the rivers run dry and the water table disappears, making it a difficult task to find water. Thus, the area is one of the 4th largest areas where drought and famine is likely to happen each year.

Water is a necessary source of life, growth, health, and community resilience. But since it has not been consistently available every month of the year, the lack of water has cost the communities sickness, famine and death. With this in mind, the Betroka Synod of the Malagasy Lutheran Church in the heart of this region of drought invited FOMM to become involved in creating a Water Well Project. As a result, in 2024 FOMM developed a “Living Water” Program for the Lenten Seasons and received nearly \$100,000.00. With these funds we were able to do great things in bringing water to two communities:

1. Betroka city

With the help of a non-profit partner, Madagascar Water Project, we drilled several water wells through the shallow topsoil and 25-40 meters (82-131 feet) into the hard granite. With the help of electronic devices, we discovered cracks in the granite where water could be found in abundance. A location in the granite was found beneath the Lutheran Grade School yard. A well was struck and water gushed forth like the story of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness. People watched and shouted with joy!



Electronic equipment is used to locate pools of water deep beneath the rocks

below: Water gushing from a newly-drilled well

In Betroka there are five church institutions within a 1 kilometer (about .6 mile) of this well:

- A Lutheran Grade School
- A Lutheran High School
- A Toby (a retreat center),
- A SALFA Health Clinic
- The Betroka Synod Offices



A water tower was built and water lines were hand-dug to these institutions to provide an abundance of water. Another well was drilled in the same location for the general population to come and draw clean water. In addition, we built several bathrooms and shower rooms.



A water tower to provide water to numerous church institutions

Modern bathrooms and showers





People watch what they have never seen before – drilling for water

2. Mananovy city

About 50 miles south of Betroka we drilled another well, built a water tower, and hand-dug water lines to bathrooms and showers to provide water to two Lutheran institutions:

A Toby

The Mananovy Bible School

In both locations, the wells provided water to the institutions and to the community and were life-changing gifts to the people of Betroka and Mananovy!

“Thanks a Million!” Program



With the success of the “Living Water” program in 2024, the FOMM Board of Directors approved a “Thanks a Million!” program. This will continue the effort to bring clean and abundant water this arid region where FOMM works, supporting the mission of bringing the Gospel to the people who have not heard the message of Jesus Christ!

The Future: As We Move into Celebration of the Next Years of Mission in Madagascar

Our aim is to dig 300 **new wells** in southwest Madagascar. FOMM has conducted research in this area and deployed a professional hydro-logical investigative team to the region to prioritize areas for the location of wells.

Drilling a new well



A village "water station" guarded with a fence, a concrete slab and a hand pump that is tamper-free to keep it from being stolen

In addition, there are **hundreds of existing wells** that are not producing water and need repairs. The pump parts are either broken or stolen, and in some cases the wells have been filled with rocks, leaving a community without water. Some organizations in the past dug wells but never returned to check on them. Our program provides for quarterly inspections of the pumps and assigns a local person to contact us if there is a problem with the well. They have identified 1,000 such wells.



The cost to repair a non-producing well costs between \$1,000 and 1,200. These wells are lifesavers and each will benefit more than 1,000 people, making this a very cost-effective project.

Pumping water from the village well

Get Involved!



Our aim is to dig 300 **new wells** in southwest Madagascar!

For more about “Thanks a Million!”
and other life-changing projects,
[Visit](http://madagascarmission.org) madagascarmission.org



Pastor David Lerseth served parishes in Rosholt, SD; Bartonville (Peoria), IL; and Aberdeen, SD. He also served as an assistant to the Bishop in the former Iowa District of the ALC and as Executive Director of the ELCA Office for Global Mission Support. He is the founder and current Executive Director of Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM).

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Links:

Madagascar: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Madagascar>

Norwegian American Lutheran Church:

<https://www.norwegianamericanhistory.org/exhibit/norwegian-immigration-to-minnesota/norwegian-lutheran-church-in-america>

FLM: [https://www.cgmmag.com/wp-](https://www.cgmmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/MalagasyLutheranChurch_DavidLerseth_HistoryOfMission_January2022.pdf)

[content/uploads/2025/04/MalagasyLutheranChurch_DavidLerseth_HistoryOfMission_January2022.pdf](https://www.cgmmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/MalagasyLutheranChurch_DavidLerseth_HistoryOfMission_January2022.pdf)

SALFA: <https://salfa.org/>

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

Betroka: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betroka>

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

Thanks a Million: <https://madagascardevelopment.org/>

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