Madagascar Prison Ministry

By David P. Lerseth

Celebrating Mission, November 2026

FOMM Supports Prison Ministry

The largest program Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM) supports is the Madagascar Prison Ministry program (MPM). There are 83 prisons in Madagascar, a country with a population of 33.66 million people. FOMM has a prison ministry in 34 of the prisons. We add a new prison to our prison ministry as funding is available.



Map of Madagascar, public domain, courtesy of PAT Maps

WHY PROVIDE THIS MINISTRY IN THE PRISONS?

Madagascar's prison system faces critical challenges:

- **Overcrowding:** Facilities are drastically over capacity. Rooms built for 40 people often house forcing prisoners to sleep tightly packed on floors;
- **Pre-Trial Detention:** Nearly 40% to 50% of the total prison population consists of unconvicted Many individuals, including minors, wait years for a trial due to a lack of judicial resources; and
- **Living Conditions:** Detainees face severe shortages of adequate food, clean water, basic healthcare, and proper sanitation, leading to risks of malnutrition and disease.



View an Amnesty International video on the prison conditions in Madagascar

left: A gathering of prisoners

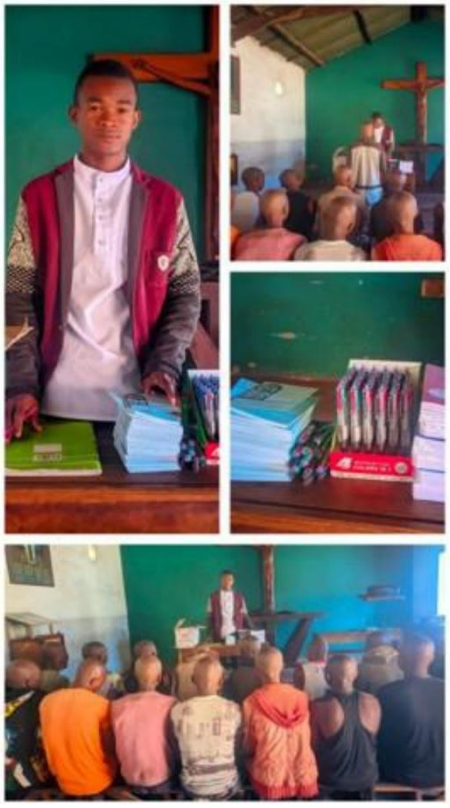
A PLACE FOR PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

In Matthew 25:36, Jesus says, “I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

The Prison Ministry Program is a congregational based program. First, a local congregation near a prison is trained how to provide a Christian ministry.

Then the pastor and members of the congregation go to the prison on a day of the week that a prison allows to have a worship service (baptisms, confirmation and counseling); to teach; and to provide clothing, medicine, food, Bibles and a vocational program).

Because of the poverty of the country, these congregations are given funding for travel to the prison and for their ministry.



right: Pastor Dieu Donné leading worship and teaching

THE CALLING OF PASTOR SOLOFONAINA Anjaranirina Dieu Donné

Pastor Dieu Donné (means “gift from God”) as we call him, began his ministry in the Fianarantsoa Prison by accident. He was serving in a local congregation while attending seminary and the pastor asked him if he would go to the prison and lead the worship service. He went, but was not enthusiastic about having to do this. It was the beginning of him falling in love with prison ministry and wanting to serve as a pastor in the prisons as his lifetime calling.

When FOMM’s Global Mission Educational Team visited the prison in 2024, it was visible that he loved what he was doing. He invited us to come to the prison for a choir concert by prison choirs. He also started inviting local congregation choirs to come to the prison to participate in the concert. In order to do this, he had to have the approval of the prison warden.

The warden told me, “What Pastor Dieu Donné is doing in this prison is having a great impression with the prisoners. It is amazing that his ministry of Word and Sacrament and Music is transforming the prisoners who have a total change in attitude and behavior. He gives the prisoners hope and a future with his ministry.”



Choir concert at Fianarantsoa Prison. Faces have been blurred for security reasons.



Prisoners who have been baptized

In June 2026 Pastor Dieu Donné graduated from the SALT Seminary in Fianarantsoa. A requirement for graduation was to write a thesis. The theme of his thesis is: "**USING GOD-GIVEN TALENTS AS A TOOL FOR THE REHABILITATION OF PRISONERS: A STUDY IN PRISON MINISTRY IN FIANARANTSOA, MADAGASCAR."** It is an amazing thesis and FOMM is working with him to have it published as a book to share with others who wish to develop a prison ministry.



right: Pastor Dieu Donné's graduation day at SALT Seminary



Spiritual care involves baptisms. Those wearing a white shirt are being baptized and the shirts are a gift signifying they have now become a child of God.

FOMM saw him as a prime candidate to work not only as a full-time chaplain of the prison but also to be a FOMM Program Specialist. This means that the Fianarantsoa Prison will become a training center for teaching other prison ministry programs to come and learn how to:

— Lead the Spiritual programs of the prison ministry, and
— Lead the Vocational programs of the prison ministry.

The FOMM Board of Directors approved a proposal for him to be called and to provide support for his ministry.

Pastor Dieu Donné's Reason for Serving in the Prison Ministry

Crumpled, Yet Still Valuable in God's Eyes!



"Imagine holding a new and clean $100 bill. It is beautiful, fresh, and valuable. Suddenly, it falls to the ground. Mud and dirt stick to it, and after being stuffed into a pocket, it becomes crumpled and wrinkled. When people see that bill, they may think, "This bill is dirty and damaged." But when it is picked up, cleaned, and straightened out, and then taken to a store or a bank, it is still worth $100. Its value has not changed, even though it fell into the dirt and became wrinkled.

The same is true for prisoners. They may have made mistakes, sinned, failed, or done things that led them to prison. To some people, they may look like that dirty and crumpled bill. But in God's eyes, they are still precious human beings. God has not canceled their value, because they were created in His image.

> "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."
>
> — John 3:16

Jesus did not reject sinners; He welcomed them so they could be cleansed and transformed. When a person repents and comes to Christ, God can restore that life, just as a crumpled bill can be straightened again.

Sin and prison may stain a person's life, but they do not remove that person's value in the sight of God. He receives prisoners because they are still human beings, and when Christ receives them, they can be renewed, lifted up, and given a new hope.

> "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"
>
> — 2 Corinthians 5:17

We thank God for His love and mercy. We also sincerely thank FOMM (Friends of Madagascar Mission) for supporting prison ministry in Madagascar through spiritual care, humanitarian assistance, and vocational training that brings hope and a new future to many prisoners.

Even when life has been crumpled, it is still precious in God's eyes!"
— Pastor Dieu Donné

Pastor Dieu Donné Develops a Vocational Program for Prisons Supported by FOMM

Most of the prisoners are not incarcerated because of violent crimes, but for stealing. With a nation whose average income per capita is $545.00 a year, stealing is a way of survival. So, developing a vocational program to provide a prisoner with a skill to make a living after being released from prison is a marvelous ministry.

A group of people outside of each prison work to manage the vocational program with the prison's approval. They manage the hiring of teachers, the finances and the selling of the products made.

Currently there are 3 main training programs:

Welding — The number one job in the world is welding and yet Madagascar has to seek welders to come to Madagascar form India and Africa to fulfill their need for welders.

Making Soap — In a country with great poverty, cleanliness is often not a priority because people cannot afford the necessary products.

Making Sandals — Many people go without wearing any shoes, some wear shoes and others wear a simple sandal made from tires.



Pastor Dieu Donné selects persons to be assigned to one of these vocational programs and a 15-week training program begins. At the conclusion of the training there is a graduation program and a certificate is presented to be used when out of prison to show that they are qualified with the skills to make these products. Upon their release from prison, the graduates are given a package of tools for their new skill to start their own business and earn a living.



Prisoners who have completed a vocational training program receive a certificate of accomplishment in a skill. Faces have been blurred for security reasons



Pastor Dieu Donne helping distribute food to the prisoners



The welding training class made this podium for the chapel

“I DON’T WANT TO SEE THESE PRISONERS RETURN TO CRIME!”

Pastor Dieu Donné says, “Changing the heart is important, but we must also prepare people for life after prison. In prison, we provide preaching, Bible teaching, Baptism, Confirmation, Absolution, choir ministry, and other spiritual programs.”

> *“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work…”*
>
> — Ephesians 4:28



Pastor Dieu Donné is a spiritual conselor to many prisoners, including the laying on of his hands and declaring their sins are forgiven.

“Our Vocational Training helps prisoners gain practical skills, work opportunities, and hope when they return to society. In addition to welding, soap making, and sandal making skills that can help prisoners earn an honest living after their release, we are pursuing other programs such as making jewelry, weaving baskets, etc. So far, 104 prisoners have completed vocational training, received certificates and given tools to help them begin a new life after prison. Currently, we are training our third vocational groups, with each training program lasting three months.”

“Thank you to FOMM for supporting these programs throughout the Madagascar Prison Ministry. You may also help support FOMM and make a difference in the lives of prisoners. Your support may help provide vocational training, tools, and hope for a new beginning. They are not prisoners forever.
Give them faith.
Give them skills.
Give them hope.”
— Pastor Dieu Donné

Next Steps in This Ministry

The prison ministry program in the Fianarantsoa Prison is our model of what a FOMM supported Prison Ministry should become: Changing their lives with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and giving them a vocation to provide for themselves after release from prison. It sounds easy, but it is an incredibly difficult ministry. But Pastor Dieu Donné believes he has been called by God (after all, his name is “a gift of God”) from that first day when he reluctantly went to the prison to conduct a worship service.

For more about FOMM's life-changing projects, visit https://madagascarmission.org/programs-projects/



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:

FOMM: https://madagascarmission.org/

MPM: https://madagascarmission.org/prison-ministry-program/

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

Map: https://madagascarmission.org/about-madagascar/

Amnesty International: https://www.amnesty.org/en/

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svynstziz2U&t=3s

Fianarantsoa: https://www.britannica.com/place/Fianarantsoa

Welding: https://madagascarmission.org/welding-programs/

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