



# FIELD NOTES

Writing to you from Nairobi, Kenya

September 9, 2014

## Photos in Focus



## A Sister Church Half-Way Around the World

Sitting between the bishop and his family, Shauen is comforted as despite the language barrier and strangeness of this place, he recognizes a Lutheran church in worship - one packed full at that. Bishop David Rakotonirina pulls out his tablet computer as the first hymn begins, pulling up the songbook app and helping Shauen follow along. The words rising around him in song are meaningless to him, but the resonating chords and tune of the hymn bring a form of translation deep inside where the hymn is already rising in his heart. Fidgety children next to Shauen help him fight the temptation to burst into song in English from the front row. As the service continues, Bishop David opens his Bible and flips to the back where the complete liturgy is found along with all of the readings of the day, grouped together for every Sunday in the church year. Shauen recognizes element after element of the liturgy as the service progresses, just like at home. He didn't imagine he'd find a sister church so similar to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) on the African island of Madagascar, much less one so similar to us and twice our size!

Between the terraced rice paddies, French baguettes, and variety of tribal groups hailing from Asia or Africa, Madagascar is a magical melting pot of cultures. Rice is consumed with every meal but baguettes and French-style sandwiches are com-

monplace. The roads are narrow and curvy - the Trump family often joked as they traveled that there isn't one straight mile of road in all of Madagascar. But despite the mix, contrast, and variety of cultures and traditions, the Malagasy Lutheran Church celebrates a heritage that unites it with Lutheran tradition around the world: liturgy, hymns, vestments, law and gospel preaching, the catechisms and Book of Concord.



*Rice Paddies of Madagascar*

In Madagascar, that heritage has a history practically like our own - just about as old as the LCMS and only recently discovering what we share in common.

On the advice of the bishop, the Trump family stays on the coast while Shauen and the bishop set out inland. A few miles of tarmac outside of town they turn in onto a dirt and mud road, transiting through forest, jungle, and rice paddies, over bridges made of a few planks of wood, and literally to the end of the road. There they hire the canoe for the trip across the river and climb up the path into the village on the other side. This small town of Ankaramalaza is the premier site for the commissioning of the Mpiandry, or shepherds, laypeople who do the work of intercessory prayer and exorcism among the Lutherans of Madagascar. So we said the LCMS and Malagasy Lutheran Church were similar - not exactly the same! This business of casting out bad spirits is one ministry we don't have in the LCMS - but not for *(continued on page 2)*

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## Prayer Requests

- For wisdom and discernment for Shauen as he walks alongside friends and partners in Eastern and Southern Africa
- For Krista as she bears the burden of night feedings for Isaiah
- For peace in Kenya and this part of the world
- For the battle against ebola in West Africa

## In Praise

- For Carlotta, our dear friend who is spending six months with us between high school and college
- For Shauen's visits to Ethiopia and Madagascar

(continued from page 1) theological reasons - which leaves it open for expression in a place like Madagascar where the spiritual realm with its battles is much closer to the people than it appears in the West. The commissioning service is preceded by a week-long conference. The church is about 30% beyond capacity, holding upwards of 1,200 people in the aisles, on the steps to the altar,



*River View from Ankaramalaza*

and squeezed into the pews. Outside of the church at every window and door, people are sitting on the ground, eager to hear while remote speakers are set up hundreds of yards away, each with their own group gathered around, and the conference proceedings are broadcast on a microcell FM station. Nearly every person Shauen sees is taking notes during each lecture, listening with rapt attention and furiously writing to capture as much as they can during each of the eight lectures each day.

When the generator quits, one of the attendees raises up the first line of a hymn and the people join in song, hymn after hymn while the technicians try to get the generator running again. As soon as the generator is back in operation, the keyboard organ joins the people until the hymn is finished and then the lecture continues. As darkness falls, the bishop and Shauen retire for the night to the sounds of amplified Malagasy preaching, hymns, and - if Shauen could hear it - hundreds and hundreds of pens and pencils scratching on notebooks. In the middle of the night, a glance at his phone (which has no signal) tells Shauen it's 2:30am. The generator isn't on but the people are singing hymns already, already gathered in the church, already staking out a seat for the day if they can get one. They'll

sing and share testimonies under a pastor's supervision until the first lecture of the day. The bishop and Shauen join the conference again around the third lecture of the day - after breakfast. Through translation, Shauen hears in the lectures references to Luther's explanations in the small catechism, Luther's Large Catechism, the Athanasian Creed, and the

Augsburg confession, deep and powerful blocks of quotation read out in further explanation of a point the teacher is making. Several times a day the people sitting in the aisles and the steps of the altar are ushered out for a few minutes so everyone else can bring forward their offerings. On days where there is no worship service with Communion, the Mpiandry do their work in the ritual of general exorcism, with those about to be commissioned dressed in their street clothes and accompanying the Mpiandry dressed all in white, praying over the people.



*A Very Crowded Church*

Over the course of the nearly two weeks the Trump family spends in Madagascar, Shauen visits individually with about half the bishops of the church and spends time in the river-side village of Ankaramalaza and the family together attends and observes at two Sunday mornings services, spends a day with the LCMS Mercy Medical Team working near Antsirabe, travels uncountable hours by van (including a 16-hour trip the first day), enjoys and explores the variety of cultures of Madagascar, buys some of the best vanilla pods in the world, and makes some new friends. Madagascar is one of the countries that is now part of Shauen's responsibilities as LCMS Area Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, a position he accepted earlier this year.