



In this letter

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Things to pray for

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- 2) that the visa request procedure has started (we have our temporary prove);
- 3) that we are able to make many new contacts;
- 4) that we have a language helper.

Please pray for:

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- 2) our further orientation;
- 3) peace concerning our sick parents;
- 4) the eight un-reached people groups on Madagascar;
- 5) that we'll receive our residency cards soon (prove that we live here).

Contact

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Newsletter February 2016

Dear friends,

It is February 2016. Three months ago we've arrived on Madagascar—10,000 kilometre from home. Everything is strange, everything is different. With this letter we would like to bring Madagascar and ourselves a bit closer to home.

Language

Besides getting used to the culture learning the language is our first priority. The people of Madagascar do not or hardly speak English and we have a hard time with the French language. The latter is not even a big problem. French is one of the two official languages on Madagascar, but many Malagasy are not that fond of this language. Around 1895 Madagascar got colonised by the French and this ended in the year 1960. Still, many Malagasy know stories in which the French play a very dubious, not to say a very bad role. In that sense by many the French language is still considered as the language of the oppressor. People respond surprised when we say that we are learning their own language. Hearts are opened and not a few are more than willing to help with the good pronunciation.

The right pronunciation... Well, that is less straightforward as one might think. While one person swallows half of the word, another seems to glue them together. Just take a saying like 'no problem'. We use that when someone apologises to us. Here to answer to an apology is '*tsy many no na*'. Phonetically this sounds like 'tsea/màn/neann'. Another example is the question 'how are you doing' (*fahasalamanao*). The answer could be '*tsara fa misaotra*' (fine, thank you). The answer needs to be swallowed somewhere in the middle which sounds phonetically like this: 'tsarrafàmsotrzz'. Well, try to make sense of that!

We are happy that we are blessed with a language-helper. Her name is Filamantra (say: Felamàntrzz) and she is very strict on our pronunciation. Katja is using a different method than Jurgen does. Katja's method is more orientated on vocabulary while Jurgen's more on conversations. This way we complete each other.

In our turn we pass, that what we have learned, on to the children. We sit down and repeat the lessons. They enjoy it and try to practice during the bus rides or on the market. Especially the many encouraging responses contribute to their self-confidence. A nice example was last week when Issa wanted to ask for a wooden plank at the local carpenter. He wrote down what he needed to ask and boldly walked up there. In no time three carpenters gathered around him and listened at what he was asking. After several attempts from Issa's side they got the message and Issa received his plank... '*cadeau*' (gift)! Later Issa brought them a sweet treat.

Contacts

While living in the capital we are busy making many new contacts. On Madagascar having good contacts is more important than good diplomas.

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Among these contact are missionaries of other organisation. We got to know a man who is working in a small village just outside Tana. He is training new church-leaders. To do this he travels to the village and stays there with his family for a week. We hope we can join them one day just to see how he is organising this work as we would not like to reinvent the wheel. We also got to know a lady who has good contacts in the car business. Cars are very expensive on Madagascar but through her we might have a better position for negotiation. Together with the mechanics we've got to know we can make a good decision (provided we need one).

The Children

The children are doing fine, they seem to have found their way around. They enjoy being outside—climbing trees, playing knight and catching chameleons. Playing with neighbouring children comes easy for them as they all speak the universal 'shall we play' language.

School work is going great as well. Sometimes they have to make longer days. Especially when we just arrived we had many interruptions. People just came by for a visit and we've spent much time getting the visa done. Katja does not always get the work done in a normal week because of these interruptions. The children do not mind as they know that there is enough time left to play and on top of that they do not consider education as a punishment. They've also done some tests these last weeks. The results were more than satisfying. Their overall performance are just very good which is a relief knowing that much has changed in their lives these couple of months.

It is encouraging noticing that they look forward to the move towards an un-reached people group. They realise that this location is just temporarily. They regularly ask when we finally move. We have explained that, in order to tell people about Jesus, we need at least understand the language.

Difficult Moments

Aside from all positive experiences we also have lesser moments. Both Katja and Jurgen have left an old grandma behind (94 and 95). At this age you might seriously ask whether you will see each other again. Secondly, Jurgen's father was diagnosed with prostate cancer just before our departure. Although this kind of cancer can be treated very well, it still causes some nervous moments as the death of Jurgen's brother Peter is still fresh in our memory. Then thirdly, we received some bad news about Katja's mother. Seven years ago she was diagnosed with kidney cancer which was treated. Now doctors found that the cancer has spread which can only be treated palliative. For now, treatment is not necessary as she is still feeling well. Hearing this news was very discouraging. Closer examination showed that the spreading started seven years ago and that it is not growing fast. Hearing this was a relief and we hope that this will mean that she will be able to enjoy life in her nice cottage for many more years..

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We find it difficult not to be able to physically support our family. We have phone calls regularly and it is good to hear each others voice so now and then. We feel blessed with our brothers and sister. Jurgen's brother and sister (Jeroen and Karla) said that we shouldn't worry because will they look after father. Katja's brother (Cid) is also a great support. He is visiting their mother regularly and helps her as often as possible. He is also very encouraging on the phone. We respect him a lot, all the more so because the mother of his spouse is also suffering of cancer.

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Further Orientation

In January we've uploaded a [video](http://jurgenenkatja.nl/?p=89&lang=en#24) (http://jurgenenkatja.nl/?p=89&lang=en#24) about the progress from our departure until January. In this video we already mentioned several options about our future ministry. Our heart goes out to the most un-reached people group on Madagascar, the Tanala. AIM is examining this group for some time now and reading the available information makes our heart jump of joy and excitement. The region can be reached by one road on which several, somewhat urbanised, villages are located. However, the majority of the Tanala live in small, remote and hard to reach villages hidden away in the bush. Many Tanala speak a dialect which is still, as far as we know, unwritten. At the moment we are learning the national language which will give us an grammatical and pronounce advantage when we learn their dialect. Theoretically the Tanala should understand and speak the national language. However, we do not assume that the remote villagers enjoyed formal education, which is needed to learn Malagasy. In that sense we have to be prepared to learn a second language. The latest surveys demonstrated that this people group seems to be open for missionaries.

Yet, it is not sure we are going to work among the Tanala. We have to discuss this option a bit more with AIM's leadership. We will have to find out whether we can get all the logistical and relational in place. Per 22 February, AIM-Madagascar's leadership will be handed over to a Malagasy lady, Rosina. She knows the island and the people very good. Together wit her we will have to find a contact person in the Tanala area. This is mandatory because on Madagascar (especially in small communities) it is very important to have someone who is well known to introduce you to the people. Furthermore, we will have to find a good house. This house can be located in the more urbanised villages. Because these villages are located next to the main road it makes it the perfect place for people to sell their goods. This will help us to befriend people from over the whole area. This is a slow process for the Malagasy do not quickly befriend people outside their own social group. It would be nice to start this process half way this year, but as said before, it is not as simple and straightforward.

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Again, this is still an orientation. There are some more option but the process stays the same: moving to a nearby location, making contacts, learning the dialect, win the trust of the people, then possibly moving to a smaller village and, if the situation is suitable, starting a new team. We have to be careful not to go about with a western mentality. In Holland we are used to do things quickly. We have 'targets' and want to meet them as soon as possible. Relations are fine but need not to be in the way of progress. Work and social life are two separate things.

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Our Malagasy friends urged us not to fall into this attitude on Madagascar. There is nothing wrong with goals but these can only be reached through good and solid relationships. Relations are very important on Madagascar and need to be maintained at all time. Breaking a relation is considered to be one of the greatest sins. Establishing something new means that one must be willing to invest time. We believe it is worth it and that it will bear fruit in the long haul.

We are looking forward to start this work. We'll keep you informed!

This was it for now. Thank you for your involvement!

Many blessings,

Jurgen, Katja, Vanya, Issa, Abbey, Dani & Simeon Hofmann

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