



Newsletter March 2021

Dear Family and Friends,

Here then an update regarding our return to Madagascar and Maroamboka, our home village. Please prepare yourself a nice cup of tea and take a seat because this time the newsletter is a bit longer than normal. We have a lot to share...

Leading up to our Return to Madagascar

All of a sudden everything started to move very quick. For example, at one moment we were busy with the departure somewhere in February 2021 and the next moment everything is pushed forward, to the beginning of January. We had been searching for a solution to return for months. There were special flights from Paris. But that was way too expensive: You first have to travel to Paris (with all your luggage), and the tickets were around 1500 euros per person. We also looked at tourist flights that were still allowed on a northern island of Madagascar. That seemed promising. The tourists would not be allowed to leave the island, but that would not have been a problem for us because we know people with a boat. Moreover, we would not fly as a tourist because we have a residence permit. However, this option was also dropped when we heard that tourists from Western Europe would be refused. Yes, we eventually even looked at the option of travelling to Madagascar on a freighter. But the ships are allowed to moor but no one is allowed to leave the ship.

The return Trip

You will understand that we were very happy that an opportunity eventually came through a humanitarian flight. As said, at first we planned to leave in February, but the flights were rescheduled to January. These flights departed from Johannesburg, South Africa. Fortunately, KLM flies on J.Burg several times every week. Call it luck! But we call it a blessing: We could book a direct flight to South Africa which only took 10 hours. There we stayed the night at the airport and next morning we continued with the humanitarian flight. There were other passengers as well, and we all had to be divided over the plane so that it would be well balanced during the flight. It was a small plane, so we had to fly over Mozambique to refuel and from there we made the crossing to Madagascar.

At Madagascar airport we were all tested for Corona. Not fun at all, a stick up in your nose! It was a relief to be back in a country with unchangeable social manners. A police officer came to us. He had received our papers (visas and residency cards) from the AIM staff. He introduced himself shaking hands and immediately began to speak Malagasy. Apparently he was aware that we were able to speak that too. He joked about whether we had brought him a present. Jurgen turned the joke around and, laughing, he and the officer put their arms around each other's shoulders.

Our Stay in the Capital City

We had asked our trusted hotel in advance whether we could stay during our quarantine. That was not a problem at all, and they were waiting in the parking lot with two vans. We had a great time in the hotel. Normally we cook ourselves but we were not allowed to go anywhere so we ate in the restaurant in the morning and evening. The staff were super happy to see us again after such a long time. The children could swim and play in the playground. After three days we were called with the message that we did not have Corona.

We stayed in the capital for about two and a half weeks. We still had to arrange a lot of things, but not unimportant, we also wanted to meet our good friends again. It was so good to see and talk to each other again (in real life).

Back in Maroamboka

In the meantime we are back with our feet in the mud. The mud of our village. Our friends and neighbours had heard that we would be back, so a big cleaning was organised around the house.



All the bushes had been trimmed, the ditch at the back of the house cleared, and the porch and path swept. Contrary to what we were used to around February, the road was doable. It hadn't rained hard for months and so the road was rock hard. Fortunately, the rainy season has really started now. The people waited a long time, but now they can rejoice in the fact that they have enough water for their rice fields.

It was good and also emotional to see everyone again. We have held each other and expressed our joy. They were especially happy because now something was about to happen in the otherwise very quiet village. They said that now someone might come to visit again with a helicopter. Yes, it had been very quiet for the past year. This is the way people here give a compliment: "We are glad that you are back, it was much too quiet."

Difficulties

Of course we are happy to be back home, but it is also emotionally difficult. We were immediately confronted with the hard facts. The mice and rats have not been able to resist the temptation. The wiring in the washing machine has been completely gnawed away, several school books have been used as nesting material and one motorcycle helmet has been used as filling for hungry mouse bellies. Clean drinking water was also a thing of the past. Not a single water pump was functioning any more, so we got our water, including mud and dead insects, from the rice field... just try washing your clothes in that kind of water. And then our internet connection. A telecom mast has been build near our village. So we had hoped that the internet would be better. Unfortunately Telma (the provider of the mast) has made the decision to only issue a telephone signal. So we are still dependent on the signal we get from a mast that is about 11 kilometres away from us. But that provider seems to have thought it might be okay to throttle the signal. Our connection, despite good equipment, is therefore worse than before. All in all, it was kind of a shock to be back home. There is a plan to dig a well behind our house. We will see when that will happen. Jurgen did not want to wait for this and immediately took action so that at least one pump is working again.

Good News

Several visits have now been made. Jurgen also visited Menja and he was pleasantly surprised. Menja has not been idle over the past year. He just continued with the translation work. The Gospel of Luke is now almost finished and the last two chapters can be digitised by Jurgen. But that was not all. Menja has also almost finished the book of Acts! What great news to have these Bible books available in the native language of the Antanala.

Jurgen has also spoken to Doris, the pastor of a young congregation. Doris said that the church has grown from 15 to at least 60 new believers. They use the Bible stories with pictures as teaching.

Other Developments

Katja found a severely malnourished child during a walk through the village. The baby was two months old, but looked like a newborn. The mother had problems with her breasts and did not or hardly breastfeed because of the pain. Instead, they gave the child condensed milk (that very sweet stuff that is used as topping on desserts). Katja immediately started to give advice and helped the mother. It was a shock for the mother. They are not used to people who are so direct and confrontational, they prefer not to get involved in these matters. At first the mother had some reserves, but now she listens carefully and trusts Katja.

It is emotional to see those small, skinny children. Just today, a young woman came to us with a two-week-old baby. It turned out to be the grandmother. The mother of this child had suddenly died last week. This child was now also fed with condensed milk. We insisted that she could take over breastfeeding from her deceased daughter - after all, she herself has a two-year-old who is still being breastfed. But now we discovered the main problem. Mothers do not feed another's child, even if that means the child dies. It is a taboo, it is not allowed by the ancestors. These ancestors once so decided this in their 'immeasurable wisdom.' Very tragic because bottle feeding is simply not available here. Also, the Lord God, in His wisdom, made sure that mothers can feed each other's children. So why should we think to know better.



The pressure is very big because people are really very much afraid of the ancestors. "Are you breaking a taboo? Then all ominous events will be your fault." We told Grandma about God and how the Lord wants us to care for one another: "Love your neighbour as yourself." We talked about the power of Jesus and why we are not afraid of the ancestors with all their rules. Of course one always hopes for miracles, but it is clear that they do not always take place. Fear often rule over common sense. We helped by getting milk powder from the big city (3.5 hours drive).

Then another mother came to us with her sick daughter. They had already been to the doctor. He gave a vitamin injections because that would cure 10-year-old girl. Whether he could cash the money right away. Katja looked at the girl and decided to use a Malaria test. And yes, she had Malaria. The most aggressive kind (*Plasmodium falciparum*). We gave the girl from our own medicines and two days later she was playing again. This story is not an isolated story. This girl was the first in a long series of children and adults that we have now tested and provided with medicines. We ran out of tests quickly and used the aforementioned drive to the big city to buy more malaria tests. It is very strange to be busy with our normal activities in this way. One moment you are teaching your own children, the next moment a child is brought in that is so sick that she cannot even drink or eat on her own – thus having to pour the medicines in her mouth, hoping she will swallow it.

A Different Life

You might understand our life here has taken on very different forms than in the Netherlands. The problems that people, and we too, experience here are quite different from the average problem in Europe. Enough food, clean drinking water, illnesses, fears, drought, poor healthcare, are all primary matters that are securely organised in the Netherlands.

It is also asking a lot of our children. Yet they are doing very well. They enjoy the life we have here. They go into the woods or enjoy a fight between a big black spider and our cat... Yikes! They also go for a swim in the river and then come home, covered in mud. During the rainy days they play with Lego that we were able to bring from the Netherlands. Education has now also fully started up again. That is of course a lot of work, but they are doing very well. We are blessed with children who are happy with little things and who like to do new things, children who enjoy the simple things of life.

Finally

We are grateful to serve the people here in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not say that because it sounds so beautiful and Christian-like, but because it is the truth! Jesus Christ is all-powerful. With Him and only through Him we can break through the taboos that reign here. This is a spearhead of our preaching: Jesus is conqueror and stronger than any ancestor. Only through Him and with Him may we come to God the Father. We would like to pray for us. Maybe making it a daily commitment to the Lord. Not only us but also for the Antanala. Many of the people here are still so trapped in the world of fear! Pray that they will come to recognise Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Pray for us to stand firm. In turn, we will pray for you, our brothers and sisters in other countries. May you also be a witness to the people around you. May you also grow in the love of the Lord.

Katja & Jurgen

Vanya, Issa, Abbey, Dani en Simeon Hofmann



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Support us!

Mandate form (UK donors)

Donors from other countries can contact the following offices:

US: receipting.us@aimint.org

EU: supporterfinance.eu@aimint.org
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NL: finance.nl@aimint.org
Tel: +31 (0)317 7124 67

Please go to our website for more details about how you can support us.

Things to pray for:

We are thankful because:

- 1) we serve a great God;
- 2) we are back home;
- 3) we feel supported and encouraged by you and many others.

Pray that/for:

- 4) the fear of the people;
- 5) we may be strengthened in the Lord;
- 6) we will trust the Lord in everything;
- 7) the local Christians may grow in faith;
- 8) peace in our hearts and minds!

Where do we live?

Location Openstreet Maps:
Maroamboka, Madagascar-
21.59506/47.87529

Location Google Maps:
Maroamboka, Madagascar-
21.595055,47.875621

Disclaimer

Thank you so much for your interest in our ministry to the Antanala people on Madagascar. We greatly appreciate the love and support of the wonderful people that God has put around us. This ministry is much larger than our family, and we cannot do it alone.

You have either signed up to receive this newsletter or you have been an important part of our lives and we thought you would like to know about our journey. If at any point you no longer want to receive this newsletter, please unsubscribe:

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