



Newsletter March 2022

Dear Friends,

The church bulletin of our church in the Netherlands was in the making, so we were asked if we had any news, and if not, the editors could use some messages from our social media. That in itself is very useful of course! But, that kind of short messages can also sometimes be too little. It is up to me (Jurgen) to update you again on our ministry. Sit back and relax because this time the letter will be extra long. A lot has happened, and we don't want to cover it with some short summaries.

Christmas

Our good friend, Sylvestre, had come home. Normally he works all over the country but at Christmas he tries to be at home in Maroamboka. Sylvestre is also a deacon in the church in our village. It was the first time he saw the Gospel of Luke in Antanala. He was impressed and asked if he could use it in the Christmas services... I don't know what happened but Sylvestre completely switched to dialect. He normally speaks in the official language of the country, but during the Christmas services he didn't waste any time. He preached in dialect, he prayed in dialect, and he read in dialect. Sylvestre told the people how privileged they were that Vanya's father and mother had come to live in their village ... Okay, Okay! I think I'll hide under the bench for a while. He was clearly trying to show the people how important it is to hear the Gospel in your mother tongue. It was very special to be there.

Illness and Rain

But how tired we were as a family after the December month! Our friends in Manakara sent us a message. They had to go to the capital for a week, and they asked us to look after their house. We did not have to think about that for long. A house with good internet, no people at the door, and a swimming pool in the backyard. The children had to bring along their schoolwork, but Katja took care of a light programme. Every minute that the children had at their disposal was spent in the swimming pool! Katja went to the beach with a kite and I washed the car.

Unfortunately, halfway through the week I contracted Malaria. I once said to Katja that I was curious what that would be like ... Well, I rather have the old-fashioned flu! Fortunately, we had good medicine and after about three days I started to feel better. We did postpone our return journey. Not for too long! Because the weather forecast was not favourable. Continuous torrential rain would mean that we would hardly be able to reach our village. We packed our things. We couldn't load anything on the roof rack because of the heavy rain. We shoved as much as possible in the back of the car and we divided the children over the middle and front seats. We had to get home. Fortunately, our road was still driveable. Did I just write that I would rather have the flu than Malaria? Well, that was arranged the next day. I had just recovered from Malaria and was already back in bed with a fever, sore throat, headache and general misery ... I'll have to correct myself. I'd rather feel fit and healthy!

As the week progressed, one by one the children fell ill as well. Luckily not all at the same time. At the end of the week everyone seemed to recover a bit. Katja had kept things running while we were feeling poorly. But alas, when we were feeling better, Katja got sick as well. Sigh! Hopefully this was it for a while then.

Sadness

Then the weekend arrived. A sad weekend. A befriended family had taken their mother to a hospital in a larger city on Christmas Day. She had been ill for some time. Thursday afternoon, the son (Lendriana), who had stayed at home, came running into the village, crying loudly. He had just been told that his mother (53) had died in hospital. Two days later, his father came home with his deceased wife and the rest of the family. We held each other and we cried with together.

Mother was laid out in their own house on the hill. These people are sincere Christians and do not want anything to do with ancestor worship. This is not an easy position in our area. There was clearly a spiritual battle going on. Normally, the body is 'released' to be transferred to a central hut in the village. There, the spirits are then called upon, and worshipped. This is accompanied by constant loud music, strong alcoholic abuse and immoral dancing. Lendriana's father absolutely did not want to take part in this. Songs of praise were sung in the house, and prayers were sent up to our heavenly Father. The struggle continued unabated. Katja noticed how some people seemed to express the typical tendencies that we know so well from ancestor worship.



Some began to shout spontaneously and to move strangely. But Jesus' power is greater and the evil one did not manage to hijack the funeral service!

New Life and Car Accident

But, the trouble was not yet over. Lendriana's sister had come too. She was pregnant and you guessed it! The labour pains started. Three previous pregnancies had ended in miscarriages. Lendriana's father did not waste any time. He came to our house with a delegation of important men. He asked me to please take his daughter to the hospital. Money was not to be a problem because he would be able to find it one way or the other. There he is. The husband of the deceased woman. She had not even been buried yet, and already he had to go to work to get the best for his daughter. We reassured him and told him that we would gladly take her away. After all, we are brothers and sisters, and we are called to *'fiatiavana'* (charity).

With a car full of helpers, because on Madagascar you do not travel alone, Abbey and I took the pregnant woman to a hospital 100 kilometres away. We delivered Lendriana's sister safely. Besides Abbey, I had only two local ladies in the back of the car on the way back. After I had strapped them into the safety belts, we drove home, satisfied. It was raining and the roads were slippery. So I took it easy. I remember that I said to myself: "*Calm down, slowly does it! We are in no hurry*". There was the last curve before we had to get off the main road. I let go of the gas, and drove slowly through the curve. I could already see the exit.

But then the rear of the car started to slide away. No need to worry! That sometimes happens on these roads. I corrected calmly and the car came back into a straight line. But then the rear wheels suddenly seemed to get a grip and the whole rear end bounced to the left. One of the rear wheels slid into the verge, the second followed... With a loud bang, the rear of the car sank into a deep ditch and before I knew it, the whole car flipped over. We made a 360-degree sideways roll and landed back on our wheels.

We looked at each other, startled. Nobody was hurt! Not even a scratch! The car? The back was crushed like an old tin can. Now what? I called Katja first. Katja in turn called our friend the mayor (Tiana). Tiana immediately went out with three men to fetch us. Then I phoned our friend Peter in the capital. Peter arranged for two mechanics to pick up the car.

Tiana arrived and he immediately went to work. The car had to be moved, so they took the spare wheel and swapped it with the front wheel that was bent. On that side of the car, the shock absorber had broken off and the coil spring had sprung away. After a long search, they found the coil 10 metres away. The coil was back on, the spare wheel was tightened, and they started car. I saw how they drove the car from out the verge without any help and parked it further away at a small house. There the people guarded the car until the mechanics arrived in the middle of the night.

Meanwhile, the car has arrived in the capital, badly damaged. Finding a new car is not easy. At the time, we found this car after a search of 5 months. It is not difficult to find a normal 4x4. It is something else to find one that is strong and big enough for our area and family. So Peter's mechanics are looking for a donor car. They are going to try to provide our car with a new bodywork. Meanwhile, I am busy with the insurance.

Waiting and Trusting

Well, there we were. Waiting for a repaired car, hopefully as soon as possible. Until then, there was not much we could do. The vegetables were running out, but we still had a big supply of fruit. Mangoes for breakfast, mangoes for lunch and mangoes for dinner. We tried to keep calm. There was not much we could do ourselves at that time anyway.

We focused on the beautiful things that took place as well. The baby of Lendriana's sister was born healthy. They were back in Maroamboka. In the meantime, other friends were busy thinking about how they could help us with, for example, fresh vegetables. Yes, we are blessed with many friends!

Cyclone

This newsletter is a bit more gloomy than you have come to expect from us. And we are not finished yet because we have not yet mentioned the cyclone, Batsirai.



It was widely reported in the news. We had enough time to prepare everything. We tied the roof with ropes and reinforced it with bamboo. We deepened the ditches around the house and on top of the mountain. We had the huge lychee trees behind our house pruned and stored away as many things as possible.

Now, we had to wait and see! Saturday 5 February brought the first rain. Gradually, the wind also started to increase. The wind became so strong that the rain was blown under the roof. The water was also blown through all the cracks and holes in our walls. Katja had to mop up the water every ten minutes. School supplies, electronic equipment, wall decorations had to be secured. We had to place the tables in the middle of the house, and we piled our stuff on top.

I regularly went out to work through all the ditches to remove obstructions from branches and debris. That was quite scary because all sorts of rubbish was flying through the air. But the ditches had to keep flowing otherwise we would get all the water from the mountain straight through our yard. When that amount of water comes pouring down, there is not much left you can do.

Finally, we went to bed. First, we had to put some plastic bags above the bed so that we would not get wet, and we tried to get some sleep. It was a restless night. At one point, we heard a tremendous cracking sound and thought that the lychee tree had been blown over. Fortunately, it was 'just' a huge branch that landed on our bamboo fence about four metres from the house.

The day dawned, and we got up at 05:30. What would we find? In the house, the damage was not too bad. Several school assignments (papers and drawings) of the children were soaked through. Outside it was a big mess of branches, leaves and fallen trees.

In the village, a total of 22 houses were completely blown over and another 8 houses were heavily damaged. During the night, the affected people moved into other people's houses. Almost all houses had suffered from the rain and wind. Rice, coffee, cloves, blankets, clothes ... everything was wet. What a mess! But no one was injured, and we had no deaths. Of course, the material damage is not nice at all, and for a lot of people it is a real disaster, but everyone agreed that we should be grateful that there were no victims.

In the course of the day, the damage became even more apparent. Many of the fruit trees had lost their fruit in the wind. The cassava fields had been washed away and landslides had pushed away the water pipes of the water pumps. Fortunately, the rice fields were still largely intact.

No Clean Drinking Water

But now what? Without a supply of clean water, it becomes very difficult in a village of 800 adults. Two men went looking for the pipes. It turned out that they were the metal pipes that were directly connected to a large basin up in the hills. These pipes are difficult to get and very expensive. They were nowhere to be found, probably buried somewhere under a metre-deep layer of soil, stones and rubble.

Fortunately, we still had about 500 litres of rainwater available. But with a family of seven, that is not enough for a week. Eventually, we got our water from a small well just outside the village. However, that water did not stay clean for long. By now, the whole village got their water from there. People stepped into the water with their dirty feet and used the tree next to the well as a toilet.

We do have a water filter, but it is only for drinking water. We could not filter enough to wash ourselves. The frustration increased. It is not nice to wash your children in water that already smells bad before you even used it. In situations like that, skin infections and intestinal problems lurk.

Reflection

Yes, a lot has happened. The intention was to use the past year to think about future ministry. I wanted to finish my translation work and as a family we wanted to think about how we could continue our ministry from a bigger place.

Maroamboka is a fantastically beautiful place to live. We enjoy nature and the great diversity of fruit. At the same time, Maroamboka is also a very difficult place to live. Clean water is a constant challenge that takes a lot of time.



We also have to deal with a constant stream of people—twelve people a day is no exception. People come to the door from 6.30 in the morning to 7 in the evening, seven days a week. But what do you do when someone, seriously ill, is brought to you on Sunday morning? We often sent people away with the message that we are not doctors. But sending away someone with malaria was not an option, because there was no medicine for miles around.

This busyness began to take its toll. The translation work was delayed and the children found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on their schoolwork. Katja and I were actually tired all the time and that did not help in enthusiastically teaching the children. And I too, started to visit the villages reluctantly (something I normally really love to do).

Capital

Still, we managed to keep things running. But, as I said, from December onwards, everything accelerated considerably, with the cyclone and the absence of clean water as the low point. The Tuesday after the cyclone, we made the decision to go back to the capital for a period of time. The next day, I started calling and in the evening we received a message from a German friend that we could rent his house. The next day we received a phone call from Peter van Buuren, and he told us that he would send his colleague to pick us up and then travel from a bigger town to Antananarivo by bus.

We left the house as we used to do when we went away for a long time. And now we are in the capital. Surrounded by good friends and the vegetable market nearby. No people at the door and no stress about clean water. We have been in Tana for a little over two weeks now. Especially during the first week, it became clear how incredibly tired we all were.

In the meantime, we have had some talks with the leadership of AIM. In all conversations, they expressed their support. They are happy with our decision and want to help thinking through what our next steps are going to be. Our wish is to continue working among the Antanala. We will see how the Lord leads it. We are happy and feel blessed with all the support and help we get and already have received.

Our friends in Tana are wonderful. They have cooked for us. We have been able to borrow furniture from MAF and good friends told us we can borrow their motorbike, so I don't have to take a taxi all the time. It's great to visit each other, have lunch together after the church service. Hearing each other's stories and praying for each other!

We also know that many of you are standing around us in prayer. We are receiving encouraging messages, and we have already been able to speak to some of you through video calls.

It is clear: *"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it."* 1 Corinthians 12:26

Together with you, we want to put our trust in the Lord! For God is good, all the time! And all the time, God is good!

Many blessings,

Katja and Jurgen
Vanya, Issa, Abbey, Dani and Simeon.

Jurgen & Katja

Serving God on Madagascar



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[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 have so many good friends;
- 3) we can look back at a busy but fruitful period;
- 4) we feel supported and encouraged by you and many others.

Pray that/for:

- 5) the local Christians learn that they too can preach the Gospel;
- 6) we will trust the Lord in everything;
- 7) we will hear and understand God's voice when it comes to our future plans;
- 8) we are able to get enough rest.

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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