



	Name: Derek and Jane Waller
	Location: Diocese of Toliara, Madagascar
	Our call: To make disciples and encourage young Christians
	Our role: Derek is the diocesan coordinator of disciple making. Jane is exploring possible roles in adult education while also working alongside Derek.



Dear friends,

A shining light

We want to take you on our journey to the fourth of our Rooted in Jesus leadership training conferences. We hope it will be a window into life here, the people we meet and the work we are doing. We'll save the best bit until last – the reason for the title.

Early Wednesday morning, the hired 4x4 with its driver arrived and we set off. Our team consisted of evangelist Florent, assistant discipleship coordinator Andry, our interpreter Jane (taking time away from her English classes) and myself. We travelled for just over an hour on the main road towards the capital. This was tarmaced and rather like an English B-road except for more potholes. We then turned south-east and the reason for a 4x4 became clear. The road turned into a mixture of sand and rock and we slithered through the sand and shook over the rock. At first the countryside was fairly bare, with just a scattering of low trees. People and villages were few and far between. As we drove on, the number of trees gradually increased turning into light woodland. Everywhere was so dry until we caught sight of and then crossed the only water on the journey, the broad river Onilahy. Five hours from

our start we arrived, hot and tired, at Betioky.

Betioky is a small town in the middle of nowhere. Although it's far from the sea, there is sand everywhere. For many years now there has been insufficient rain to grow much food and the last two years have been particularly bad. Some people resort to digging up wild roots to eat in order to survive. Few people are coming to the clinic in town from the countryside because they can't afford the transport or the medicine. Houses are mostly simple and small, many piling into each bedroom at night. If the reduced rainfall is the result of global warming, it's hard to see a future for Betioky and many other communities in the far south of Madagascar. Strangely, the poverty seems more desperate and extreme than the poverty we encountered in South Sudan.

Betioky, the newest parish in the diocese, was formed in April last year. The church is newly completed and attractive. There is no priest in the parish, although Rev Noely in Toliara has oversight. The evangelistic and pastoral work is carried out by evangelist Zefa



*Top: Typical Madagascar countryside
Above: The River Onilahy*





Above left: Inside Betioky Church

Above right: Florent, Jane, Derek and Andry

who for the past six years has had responsibility for nine churches in Betioky and the surrounding villages. We have great admiration for these evangelists, living in isolated places, with many responsibilities and few encouragements. Zefa often walks to the village churches. His wife Nikoloy works closely with him. Zefa is a gentle, humble man. On our first afternoon, we went through the programme with him and then prayed together. We rearranged the pews into a square and were ready to start the next day.

The timetable for the training was based on that of Rev Dr Alison Morgan, director of Rooted in Jesus, except that where she gathers training teams from Africa and the UK there were just two of us (Florent and myself) to teach. The training lasted from Thursday to Saturday, 8am to 5pm. I taught about the principles behind Rooted in Jesus, the role of God's Spirit in the life of the Christian and the joys and disappointments of ministry. Florent spoke about interactive learning and the pastoral care of their group. We both led "demonstration lessons" to show them how to lead and then had volunteers from the course practise

leading. We prayed for them to know more of God's grace, to be filled with God's Spirit (anointing them with oil) and to have a big vision for making disciples. On the Sunday I preached on Colossians 2:6-7 and led the communion service in Malagasy (still rather nerve wracking). We sang an especially composed Malagasy hymn for the course, gave out certificates to those we felt could lead groups and commissioned them for the work.

What were the highs and lows of this training?

The lows:

- The frustration of finding hardly anyone ready to start on the first day. So many drifted in late and so missed the session on the principles of Rooted in Jesus.
- We soon realised that not all who turned up would qualify as leaders. Of the 20 plus who came, several could not read – how were they going to lead a book-based course? Others were very young, hardly into their teenage years.

The highs:

- After leading a practise lesson, a student named Fiadanana came up to me with a big grin saying: "I love leading Rooted in Jesus!"
- A week after returning to Toliara, we phoned Zefa to find that he

was in the middle of leading a new Rooted in Jesus group for seven non-Christians. What a quick start!

- Marie Jean, a vet, arrived on the second day having walked 40 km through the night to come. Despite missing many sessions, she threw herself into the training, quickly picking up the method – we could hardly refuse her a certificate.
- The joy and enthusiasm of the singing and the praying lifted our spirits.

Having led four training conferences, it has confirmed our belief that follow up will be vital to starting discipleship groups and keeping them going. Leading the training is the easy part. The new trained leaders need all the ongoing support, encouragement and prayer that we can give them. Not everyone we have trained has begun a group, not every church has a group, but we rejoice where they are being formed. This spurs us on to lead more conferences in 2019.

On the Sunday afternoon, we made our slow and bumpy return to Toliara. On the way back we stopped at a village where local people were selling freshly picked mangoes by the bucketful. They cost around a penny a mango and our car was considerably heavier by the time we set off again.

What about the light? The light

PRAYER AND PRAISE



Above: Rooted in Jesus training

came, as in John's Gospel, in the shape of a person. Her name is Sister Claudia and she is a Roman Catholic nun at the convent in Betioky where we stayed. She welcomed us on arrival, rather puzzled as to who we were and why we had turned up – our booking had not got through. But she welcomed us with the radiant smile that rarely left her face. She found us rooms and we were soon sitting down to lunch with her and her seven fellow nuns. Sister Claudia runs a clinic and other nuns teach at their secondary school. All the nuns were delightful, and conversation and laughter flowed at every meal – as did the excellent food. But we formed a special bond with Sister Claudia. A particular quality of Sister Claudia is that she affirmed the gifts in each of us. So she delighted in Florent's way of

praying – he was invited to pray after each meal; she loved Andry for his youthful enthusiasm and faith and commended Jane and I for our willingness to enter Malagasy culture. She soon spotted Jane's love of mangoes and presented her with

a basketful from their garden to take home. Andry was inconsolable when we left her, so great was her impact on him.

Sister Claudia is a lady of gentleness and holiness. She reminded me of a chapter on holiness in Rowan Williams's book *Being Disciples*: "Holy people make you feel better about yourself than you are. The holy person somehow enlarges your world, makes you feel more yourself, opens you up, affirms you."

In Epiphany, when we remember the light of Jesus shining in the world, Sister Claudia brought his light into our lives – for this we are profoundly thankful.

In the peace of Christ,

Derek & Jane

PS: We've discovered that you can also send letters to us, although they will take at least a month to arrive. Our email addresses are below and the postal address is: B.P. 408, 601 Toliara, Madagascar

■ Bishop Todd is taking a sabbatical until after Easter. Pray for refreshment for him and his wife Patsy. Praise God for Bishop Samitiana, our assistant bishop, and pray for wisdom and strength for him.

■ We praise God for evangelist Florent, Derek's assistant. We are thankful that we share a similar vision. Pray for improvement in his English and our Malagasy, that by a miracle of grace we'll be able to relate well.

■ Thank God for the new Rooted in Jesus groups. May they continue and bear fruit in growing lives. Pray for the training conferences in 2019.

■ Pray for Jane's English teaching. Thank God that she has begun to teach the diocesan staff at the cathedral compound as well as Florent, and this is going well. Who is next?

■ The first round of presidential elections passed peacefully. The second round was between two bitter rivals and took place on December 19. Please pray for peace.

You can give online to Derek and Jane at:
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Left: A practical demonstration during one of the practice lessons