

Namoko mission team teaches and learns in Madagascar

By Cheryl Harman

This summer's mission team from Southeast Florida to our companion Diocese of Antananarivo in Madagascar called itself "Namoko," the Malagasy word for "my friend." Our Namako Team—Will and Cheryl Harman, Nancy McKirchy, Janet Thompson, Marcy Allen, Jacky Lowe from our diocese and Barb Johnson and Kathleen Burg from Tennessee—arrived in Morandava, Madagascar, on July 6, to begin our 12-day mission.

It was wonderful to see our friends, Bishop Todd and Reverend Patsy McGregor, at the airport to greet us. We hit the ground running, because there were 25 eager Malagasy from this region waiting to participate in the Alpha Course, which we had come to offer.

With help from our translator, Reverend Jocelyn, the rector of All Saints' Church in Morandava, the course went extremely well. We broke up into three small groups and discussed topics like, "Who is Jesus?", "Who and what is the Holy Spirit, and how can we receive this Spirit?" All participants graduated by learning something new about Jesus and exchanging of a "high five."

Things are done a little differently in Madagascar. The team and the Alpha participants continued the second and third day of the Alpha course by traveling three hours to the Chapel of Saint Andrew in Mahabo.

It was magnificent to see the church and the sign confirming that the Chapel of Saint Andrew in Boca Raton truly had a sister church halfway around the world. The recent offering from our Boca Raton parish to the Mahabo church bought beautiful pews, an altar and pulpit built out of palisander wood, prayer books—and now a cross, built while we were there, that is the exact replica of the one hanging in Boca Raton.

Artists Barb and Kathleen (Barb is a high school art teacher and Kathleen is her recently graduated student) adorned the church doorway with a painting that included the words, "*Mandehana amin' ny fiadanana ary manompoa ny Tompo*" ("Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.") The evangelist,

Benja, couldn't stop smiling and thanking us. We were given lambas (colorful sarong-like cloths that are worn as skirts), along with a weaving. The gifts we brought to Mahabo seemed small compared to what the members of our sister church gave us, especially their friendship.

We spent the night on the floor in the church. Mattresses had been brought for our comfort along with their best bedding, but there was no running water or flush toilet—a different experience for us.

On the road again, through rice fields and the Avenue of the Baobabs, we returned to Morandava for our flight to Toliara, where Patsy and Todd live. Toliara seems a much busier town than the other two we visited. Rickshaws called *pouse-pouse* were everywhere.

After dropping our luggage at the hotel, we headed over to St. Luke's, the church next door to the McGregors' home, in the middle of the slums of Toliara. The church is a haven and a gathering place for this neighborhood. The door is always open—in fact, the door was literally blown off by a recent tornado.

We again presented the Alpha Course, this time with 40 new participants. They were given an Alpha Manual translated into Malagasy. They worked hard as we presented the topics through a translator.

The culmination of this course was a celebration dinner. Each Alpha participant was given five invitation cards to give to their non-Christian friends, welcoming them to a dinner to learn more about Alpha.

Live chickens were bought, killed outside the church and cooked in pots all night long. Rice was boiled. Two hundred people came to the dinner, and all were served ample portions of chicken and rice on new plates purchased by our team. This event was so successful that we decided to declare July 11 of every year "Alpha Day"; our team has offered to pay all expenses for the people of St. Luke's to host this annual celebration for their neighbors.

The next stop on our journey was Holy Trinity Church in Sakaraha, about an hour-and-a-half from Toliara. Bishop Todd confirmed 12 people and baptized two babies. The church was packed, with pews outside to accommodate the overflow. We were served a lunch, Bishop Todd and Reverend

Toliara receives approval to become diocese

In late July the Synod of the Diocese of Antananarivo approved a resolution to create the new Diocese of Toliara.

Bishop Todd McGregor, who currently serves as area bishop for Toliara, which includes a large area of southwestern Madagascar, said that the resolution passed by about 90 percent in both houses.

McGregor expects the new diocese to be established by the end of this year. Its first task will be to elect a diocesan bishop; the area bishop will not automatically fill that position.

"Please pray for the transition period," McGregor requested.

Patsy were given a live turkey, and the three-hour service and celebration ended with all of us, congregation and guests, in a conga line singing "We are Marching in the Light of God."

After a visit to Isola National Park, where we saw Madagascar's native sifaka and ring-tailed lemurs, we took a two-hour trip by dugout canoe south to Soliara where the People Reaching People (the organization that supports the McGregors' ministries) will build a secondary school for the village in exchange for beachfront property.

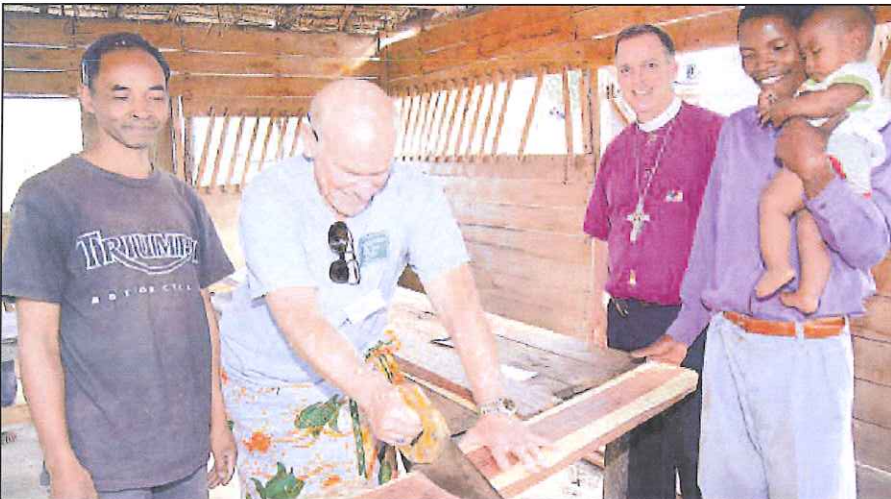
Poverty is relentless in Madagascar—children playing in the yard full of garbage, people using the streets and beaches as public toilets and families of 20 living in a stick house with only two rooms. But God rains blessings on this land, with hope shining in the people's eyes and beautiful colors of gold and amber in the landscape with clear skies and sparkling stars.

And the Malagasy sing like angels. They tried to learn the songs we brought, singing along with Will's guitar and Marcy's violin. We tried to learn their beautiful songs. This sharing of our cultures taught us we really are more the same than different. Namoko—friend—couldn't have been a better name for our team. Despite the language barrier, we made so many new friends. As we served, we received so much more than we gave.

Most of all we thank God for Patsy and Todd's true gift of hospitality.

The Namoko team is planning an evening's presentation about the mission trip this fall at the Chapel of Saint Andrew, Boca Raton, or St. James in the Hills, Hollywood. Date, time and location will be published in Grapevine on our diocesan website, www.diocsef.org and at www.peoplereaching.org. ■

BUILDING THE CROSS



As a Malagasy carpenter (left) supervises, Will Harman cuts wood for a cross for the Chapel of Saint Andrew, Mahabo. Bishop Todd McGregor and Benja, the evangelist for the Mahabo congregation, with his small son, watch the work. The completed cross is a twin of one hanging at the Chapel of Saint Andrew, Boca Raton.

Photo by Cheryl Harman