

News from Madagascar from Bishop Todd and Sam

New Diocese of Toliara

The big news for us is the diocese of Antananarivo approved the creation of the new diocese of Toliara in July. The province confirmed this in October.

Update on Bishop Roger

I spoke to a couple of folk at head office today. There still seems to be confusion about the future situation with Bishop Roger. The latest we know is that he is still recovering, in Mauritius.

Tree Planting in Fianarantsoa and agricultural projects

I was given some info about a tree-planting project which we're going to fund in Fianarantsoa. The proposal we received was for replacing trees being chopped down, to also provide a barrier against the wind and preserve the soil. The project aims include teaching local people the importance of protecting the environment. The grant of about £4,700 will be used for preparing a tree nursery and providing employment for a couple of people – a 'technician' and someone to protect the trees. Valerie

We started a few women's agricultural projects last October. Now we are praying for rain.

Visits to England

I have applied for one of my clergy to attend the clergy training at the Canterbury center in June 11-26 for two weeks.

I'm also planning on being at the international Alpha conference in June (4-14). I hope to be in England for 10 days (including two weekends). I hope to visit St. Luke's in Maidstone and maybe another church. Plus I hope to see you while there. Our main focus for this year is to raise funds for the cathedral in Toliara. We expect it will take two years to raise the funds. It may be good to see how the diocese of Canterbury could become involved. We expect it to cost about \$225,000.

Building work projects

We have purchased land in Toliara (two hectares) and have started building the bishop's gathering place (residence). We are now constructing the second floor. We have also just completed another building which has three rooms to be used by our student clergy/evangelists. We have 11 in our programme which we started in January.

We have just started building the rectory in Sakaraha. Please pray for the church community because we have had four robberies at the temporary rectory over the last two years. It is hard to find clergy to stay there.

We have completed the following in the Morondava parish: three temporary wooded churches (Tanadava Benjamin, Mangily, and Ambatokely), one permanent rectory in Tsimahavokely.

We also started work in Ft. Dauphin last year. We have just purchased some land with the intent of constructing a church once we have the deed. I went there in August and baptized 53. I'm planning on returning in March for confirmation. We have about 200 members there.

Love +Todd

Free child computers to schools

OLPC is an American project which supplies free child computers to schools in Africa. They have given 100 computers to the primary school in Ambatoharanana. The computers are not at all like the computers we are used to: they are small enough to be carried home by the children, they are water and dust resistant, very difficult to break, and need only five Watts of electricity to run and charge their battery. The computers have special software so that the children can design their own quizzes and activities, and the computers are wireless enabled so that the children can work together as a class.

Four Americans have come to the school to teach the staff and pupils how to use them. They have been teaching the staff for several weeks, but today the children were introduced to the computers for the first time.

Here are two children with their mother looking at the new computers with a mixture of delight and amazement.



Today, five students from College were ordained in St Lawrence's Cathedral. Reverend Solofo and Reverend Fenitra are still with us in their fourth year at College. Reverends Sendra, Zo, and Emira have left us to lead parishes. They had all been on a silent retreat of three days to prepare for their new responsibilities. The cathedral was full as the ordinands prostrated themselves before the bishop and took their vows to serve God and the Church faithfully. Here ordinands do not sign the 39 Articles of the Church of England, but they promise to follow the Anglican Prayer Book.

Solofo and Fenitra return to College tomorrow to continue lessons and prepare a dissertation. I teach Church History, so we will be looking at early Anglican leaders in Africa: Philip Quaque, the first African Anglican priest in Ghana in 1765, and Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African Anglican bishop in the 1864.

Love Sam

Additional information at www.peoplereaching.org

Political update

ANTANANARIVO, Jan 26 (Reuters) - Madagascar's embattled leader opened the door on Tuesday to the possibility of pushing back the date of widely criticised elections scheduled for March on the Indian Ocean island. The move is unlikely to

appease African nations and foreign donors who have urged Andry Rajoelina to share power with his political rivals.

Parliamentary elections are slated for March 20 but opposition leaders and foreign diplomats are concerned a unilaterally organised poll will lack credibility and transparency.

"The government is ready to meet with all stakeholders and political parties to discuss the elections. If it is March 21, 22 or 23, or even earlier, it's not a problem" Rajoelina told reporters.

"No political party or movement will now be able to criticise us that the date of elections is our decision alone," he added.

Rajoelina, 35, last weekend snubbed the African Union's top diplomat, Jean Ping, once again rejecting calls for a consensus government to be formed without delay.

Ping left the leaders of the world's fourth largest island with two weeks to respond to a compromise solution that stressed a consensual outcome.

Jan. 27 marks a full year since street protests against former President Marc Ravalomanana's leadership on the mineral-producing island turned violent. More than 100 people died in street battles with the security forces before former disc jockey Rajoelina toppled Ravalomanana in March, with the help of dissident troops.

Leadership squabbles have blighted the political scene ever since, stunting economic growth and scaring off foreign investors.

Donors who stress that frozen aid worth hundreds of millions of dollars will only be released once there is a roadmap towards restoring constitutional order that is backed by all sides.

African leaders want Madagascar accords respected

Leaders of the 53-member African Union want Madagascar's rival politicians to stick to the agreements meant to help the Indian Ocean island out of a prolonged crisis, an AU official said on Tuesday.

The leaders adopted a resolution urging the parties in the Madagascar crisis to respond by Friday to compromise solutions given to them on January 21 by AU Commission chairman Jean Ping, the bloc's Peace and Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra said:

"The resolution states that the summit has taken note of the compromise solutions presented ... to the Madagascar parties and asks them to give a positive answer."

"We have already started getting replies from some of the parties but we are waiting for the response of the party that took the unilateral decisions that have called into question the agreements," he added, referring to the country's strongman Andry Rajoelina.

Rajoelina led weeks of violent protests early last year that ended in the ouster of then president Marc Ravalomanana.

The military-backed overthrow prompted the AU to suspend Madagascar from the bloc until a return of constitutional order.

Efforts to resolve the crisis sparked by Rajoelina's March 2009 coup have stumbled owing to his intransigency over a power-sharing accord reached with rivals Ravalomanana and two other former presidents. - AFP