

# Professor and Six Students Spend Spring Break in Madagascar

By the Rev. John T. Pless



Funded with a grant from the LCMS Board for Human Care, six fourth-year seminarians and Professor John T. Pless traveled to the African island of Madagascar on an expedition of mercy. CTS students participating were Jesse K. Cearlock, Ross E. Johnson, James E. May, David M. Menet, Steve R. Parks, and Joshua V. Schneider.



The group was hosted by CTS Doctor of Ministry candidates, the Rev. David Rakotonarnia and the Rev. Joseph Randrianasolo. They were privileged to worship at two Malagasy Lutheran Church congregations, visit two seminaries, a Lutheran school for the blind, Lutheran hospitals, a center for the care of the poor, and several village-like encampments for holistic care (spiritual and bodily) known as tobys. “One of the things that most impressed me on this trip was to see, firsthand, the Gospel in action. The Lutheran Church in Madagascar has a history that is rich in showing forth the love of the Gospel in acts of mercy and human care,” shared Seminarian David Menet. “Whether it be in the Lutheran hospitals, the Good Samaritan Center which feeds the poor, the school for blind children, or the holistic treatment centers (tobys) that

provide healing for body and soul—all these and more serve as wonderful examples of our Lord’s instruction to care for those among us who are less fortunate. The Lutheran Church in Madagascar does indeed have a firm understanding of what Jesus meant when He said, ‘Freely you have received, therefore freely give’” (Matt. 10:8).

A rigorous travel schedule included time in the capital of Antananarivo, a city of over four million inhabitants, and Fianarantsoa, some nine hours to the south. While in Fianarantsoa, the CTS group visited the graduate seminary of the Malagasy Lutheran Church and presented books to each student and to the library. “The Lutheran Church of Madagascar is truly a shining light to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The opportunity to be in their midst and witness their faith was an honor. What is bound to follow is a relationship of mutual assistance and teaching between the Lutheran Church of Madagascar and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” commented Seminarian Jesse Cearlock.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church traces its origins to the work of Norwegian missionaries in 1866. It is now a self-standing church body of over three million members. Although it is a member of the Lutheran World Federation, the Malagasy Lutheran Church does not ordain women and it is seeking to strengthen its grasp of confessional Lutheran theology. The mercy expedition is one of several positive connections that Concordia Theological Seminary has with the Malagasy Lutheran Church.

While the Malagasy Lutheran Church is stricken by poverty when it comes to worldly wealth, our brothers and sisters there are very rich in the things of the Spirit. Many people walk for three or four hours each Sunday to attend a Lutheran service. These services are thoroughly Lutheran in their confession, reflecting the Bugenhagen-Danish liturgy. They are enhanced with beautiful, melodic singing

and the services often last three hours. “This trip was an exciting opportunity for me to see how fellow Lutherans across the globe have grown up with the same faith in Jesus Christ that we have and how that faith gives birth to love for their neighbor,” offered Seminarian Joshua Schneider. “In such an impoverished nation, it was deeply humbling and also edifying to see how—like the widow who offered her mite—the Malagasy Lutherans give from their own to those who are even less fortunate than they are. They are filled with such joy and exuberance about their Lutheran faith that shows itself in their worship and song, in their compassion for others, and all their daily life.”

A video was produced while on this trip and each of the students who participated in this trip will be available for congregational presentations. If your congregation would be interested in having one of these men give a presentation, please contact Professor Pless at 260-452-2271.

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