



FIHAVANANA

Living,
Loving,
and Learning
in Madagascar

May 2018

Pasaka, Paska, or Paka?

No matter how you spell it, Easter is a big deal here in Madagascar. Alahadin'ny Sampan-drofia (Palm Sunday) kicks off a week full of church services. During Holy Week, FLM Lutherans all over Madagascar attend an evening service every day. The biggest events, however, happen on the Saturday before Easter and on Easter Monday. Late on Saturday night, church choirs and congregations gather for Tafika Masina—Easter caroling! “Tafika masina” literally translates to “holy war,” though the term encompasses any event during which people spread the good news. And spread the good news we did. My mom and her friend (who were visiting from the U.S.!), my host mom, and I joined a group from church to go door to door and proclaim the resurrection. Hymnal and flashlight in hand, we sang as we traipsed across neighborhoods, rice fields, narrow paths, rickety bridges, and steep stairs until we reached a congregation member’s home. Once gathered around the door, we began singing an Easter hymn until the residents opened the door or a window. Then we all shouted, “Velona Jesosy tompoko! Fiadanana ho an’ny tokatrano!” Jesus is risen! Peace be with you and your household! And then we began singing and walking again, until we arrived at the next home. And on and on for three and a half beautiful hours of hope, joy, and fellowship. The other major Easter event (aside from Sunday church, of course) is the Easter Monday picnic. Families, congregations, and organizations meet for a day in the great outdoors filled with games, food, and fun. Easter in Madagascar is truly a time of joy and celebration—as it should be!

MALAGASY WORDS OF THE MONTH

MILAMINA TSARA NY FIAINANA:
Life is good.

MISALASALA:
to go back and forth on a decision

SOLONTSAINA:
computer
(literally, “brain replacement”)

ONDAM-BODY:
pouf (for sitting on)
(literally, “butt pillow”)



Playing cards at the Easter Monday picnic.

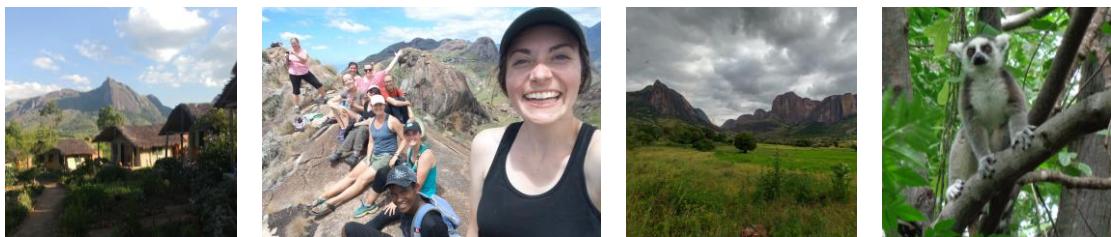
Travel Log

March and April were full of adventures both in and out of my community! Here's a glimpse at what I've been up to:
Ranomafana



In early March, my host family, neighbors, and I took a day trip to Ranomafana, a town two hours outside of Fianar known for its National Park and thermal baths. We spent the day picnicking and swimming in hot, hot water!

Tsara Camp



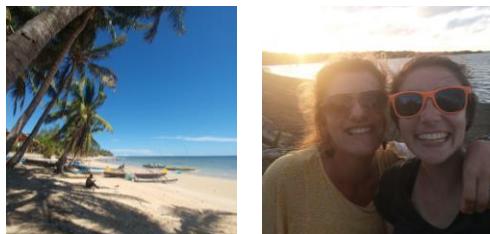
Mid-March brought the second retreat of the year. Reunited with the Madagasgals, I ventured four hours south of Fianar into the mountains near Andringitra National Park. We stayed at Tsara Camp, where we enjoyed fellowship, processing our experiences, "glamping," mountain climbing, and incredible scenery. On our way back to Fianar, we stopped at Anja Community Reserve—and saw ring-tailed lemurs!

Fianarantsoa, Ranomafana, and Ambalavao



Over Easter break, my mom and her friend Heidi came to visit for a week! We spent a couple of days exploring Fianarantsoa and hanging out with my host family, then set off for Ranomafana. While there, we trekked through the jungle and were lucky enough to encounter six different species of lemurs and many more chameleons and frogs. We also spent a day in Ambalavao, where we visited the largest zebu market in Madagascar, a handmade paper-making workshop, and a silkworm workshop, as well as a sidetrip to Anja Community Reserve for more lemur spotting. It was truly a blessing to have the opportunity to share and to experience my community with people from home.

Toliara



Towards the end of April, I spent a weekend in Toliara visiting Lauren, one of the other volunteers (and my fellow Minnesotan!). We explored the city, went for many pousse-pousse rides (a rickshaw-type of transportation), soaked up the sun, drank fresh coconut milk, swam in the ocean, and admired baobab trees!

Learning to Lean



Between my host family, neighbors, community, and the Mada YAGMs, I am always in good hands.



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Donate:

For more information or to make a contribution, visit my personal fundraising page at support.elca.org/goto/RachelMann.

Pray:

Please consider keeping me and the other YAGMs worldwide in your prayers this year. Thank you for your love and support!

I don't like being sick. I don't like to skip class or work. I don't even like admitting that I'm sick. And I certainly don't like going to the doctor.

Getting sick, cancelling class, telling people that I'm sick, and going to the doctor, all in a foreign country where I don't really speak the language? Count me out.

When I get sick in the U.S., my plan of attack is usually to tough it out until my immune system fights off whatever is causing the problem. If it got serious, I would eventually go to the doctor. But here in Madagascar, where it's not only possible but common to get a parasite from the water or fruit, where a minor illness could be something more serious, toughing it out and saying "let's wait and see" isn't necessarily a safe or a smart option.

When I came down with some strange symptoms shortly after returning from retreat, I knew I had to tell someone, no matter how much I didn't want to. Making the phone call to my country coordinator to ask her what to do was not easy for me. I felt silly, like I was making a big deal out of nothing. I felt like a child, like I should've been able to figure out what to do on my own. I felt vulnerable, like I was telling someone way too much information about myself. And if making that call wasn't hard enough, her advice was to talk to my host mom. So off I went to spill all the details about my current health status again. And then we went to see the nurse who works at SALT's infirmary, and I had my first-ever experience of trying to explain my symptoms across language barriers—and of anxiously waiting for my host mom's translation so I could hear what was wrong with me. And then we went to see a doctor at the hospital the next day.

Going to the doctor was certainly an adventure. I had no idea where I was going or what was going to happen. I didn't understand the doctor's questions or instructions. I didn't know if the medical equipment was clean, if the examination was thorough or comprehensive, or if the suggested medicine would take care of my symptoms. So, with the choice to either panic or trust, I decided to trust. I relied on the people going out of their way to help me and put all of my faith in them. I relied on my host mom to communicate for me. I relied on the hospital's procedures. I relied on the doctor's expertise. It wasn't easy to let go of the reins completely. It wasn't easy to trust, but, surrounded as I was by unconditional love and support, it was possible to relinquish control and lean on others instead.

It turned out I didn't have a parasite or serious illness, just a minor infection that cleared up in a few days. Letting go and going to the doctor not only resulted in better health but a better understanding of myself—and a better understanding of the importance of allowing other people to help me. Part of the reason I decided to do YAGM was to see if I could do it. Could I live in another country for a year? Could I teach abroad? But I've discovered that this year is also about learning what I can't do—and, more importantly, learning how to rely on the people who can. And I've learned that it's okay to ask for help. It's okay to admit that I don't know how to do something. Like how to go to the doctor on my own. Or how to effectively wash a towel by hand. Or how to cook the mysterious vegetables I bought at the market. Or how to clearly communicate what I want to say in Malagasy. "Lean not on your own understanding," Proverbs 3:5 says. And I'm learning to trust those words. I'm learning that there's no shame in admitting that I can't do something on my own—because needing other people is not a weakness; it's a strength. I'm learning that it's okay to depend on other people. I'm learning to lean.