



One of the many stunning views along the road from Antsirabe to Fianarantsoa.

FIHAVANANA

Living,
Loving,
and Learning
in Madagascar

November 2017

Sufficient Grace

For the past couple of months, cases of plague throughout Madagascar have been on the rise. Plague is endemic to Madagascar, which means there are cases every year. The difference this year is that there have been cases in cities; normally, plague primarily affects the countryside. Additionally, the strand currently spreading is the pneumonic plague, which can be passed relatively easily via coughing. Because of these factors and others, the YAGM program decided to temporarily relocate all of the Madagascar volunteers to South Africa, where we will have time to assess the situation. We plan to return to our host communities in mid-November.

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”
—Philippians 4:11

None of us were in immediate danger; our relocation to South Africa is precautionary. God works in mysterious ways. He has a way of giving us exactly what we don't know we need. When we, the ten Madgagals and our country coordinator, arrived in Johannesburg earlier this week, emotions of an incredibly diverse range were running high.

None of us expected to leave our host communities a mere month after our arrivals, and that unexpectedness led to shock, frustration, excitement, anger, hope, sadness, and more. On our first morning in Joburg, a Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) youth convention invited us to join their morning devotion and bible study. The main messages of the bible study? Trusting that God provides. Seeing what first appears to be a problem as a gift from God instead. Learning to be content in every circumstance because God's grace is always sufficient. Somehow, the speakers knew exactly what message I needed to hear. This may not be how I pictured the third month of my YAGM year starting, but I am trusting that God has a plan. I'm excited to discover how He continues to work through us here in South Africa. Our relocation might have been unexpected, but I am hopeful that it will turn out to be a wonderful gift.

SCENES FROM MY NEW HOME IN FIANARANTSOA



Looking out over the city on my uphill walk back to the SALT campus.



My church! Just inside the entrance to SALT and approximately a three-minute walk from home.



Villa MELCAM, home to my apartment, guest housing, and two families' homes.



Sifting rice with my host mom and other women as we prepare a meal for the congregation.

Mary, Martha, and Accompaniment

During the first couple weeks at my placement, it seemed like I heard the story of Mary and Martha every day. To recap: in Chapter 10 of Luke, Jesus visits Mary and Martha’s home. Mary sits and talks with Jesus, while Martha rushes around cooking and cleaning. Martha, angry that her sister isn’t helping, complains to Jesus, who tells her that Mary has chosen what is more important. She chose to be in relationship with Jesus, to set aside her preoccupations, and to be present.

The more I heard this story, the more I thought about how well it spoke to the mission of accompaniment. The most important things I’ve done and the most meaningful experiences I’ve had in Fianar thus far are not my hours spent teaching and working. My favorite moments have been those in which, to an outsider, it might’ve appeared that I was doing nothing. Like the time

I spent an hour standing on the side of the road listening to my eight-year-old host sister talk about school. Or the time my host mom and I laughed until we cried over a story she had just told, the green beans we were supposed to be cutting quite forgotten. Or the time I chatted with a pastor on my porch while he waited for his water bucket to fill. Or the time I, laden down with my purchases from the market, stopped outside a hotely (a Malagasy restaurant) to have a conversation with a student from SALT who was enjoying his lunch inside. Or the time I went with my host mom to the seamstress’ home and sat quietly, listening and not understanding a single word, while they chatted. Or the time I hung out with one of the staff members at FaFaFi for over an hour when class was unexpectedly cancelled.

Accompaniment is all about being present. It’s about being willing to set practical tasks aside and make spending time with other people a priority instead. It’s about learning and growing together. It’s not about constantly “doing” something, at least not in the typical sense of the word; sometimes, it’s about doing nothing. It’s about making time to simply *be*.

MALAGASY WORDS OF THE MONTH

ADALADALA (uh-doll-uh-doll-uh):

Crazy; silly (This is my favorite word so far!)

AKORY ABY (ah-coo-ree-ah-be):

Hello; good morning (It’s the equivalent of “salama” in Fianar’s regional dialect.)

VAZAHA (vaw-zaw):

Foreigner

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Like the pages “YAGM Madagascar” and “Young Adults in Global Mission - ELCA” on Facebook for updates about the YAGM programs in Madagascar and around the world!

Donate:

I am still working towards my fundraising goal of \$5,000. 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 92 other YAGMs in your prayers this year. Thank you for your love and support!

A Timeline of Rachel’s YAGM Year So Far

