

I WAS A MISSIONARY  
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I was a missionary. Or at least that's what they told me, and called me. The reason I say it like that is because it was so brief, my being a missionary. Brief as it was I'm here today to tell you about it, to provide a glimpse into the life of an LCMS missionary. When I was asked to speak I made the statement that I would have to be honest, telling the good and the bad, and I was told that that's exactly what was required. So here it goes.

To provide a needed background let me start this way. In the year of our Lord 2010 I had an itch. At that time I was a dual parish pastor in Minnesota, I'd been a pastor for 18 years, and my itch was to do something mission-oriented. Part of this desire, I must confess, was a natural wanderlust in me; I do love to travel. I spoke with my dear wife about this and explained my desire, and being the incredible spouse she is, agreed to let me go, for a time.

I'd heard of various mission opportunities through the LCMS but really didn't know much about them. As I looked into it more I learned about LCMS Mercy Medical Teams. At that time the sainted Maggie Karner, may she rest in peace, was the organizer and leader for the few teams that went forth. Also at that time the teams were given directive through LCMS World Relief and Human Care, under the leadership of Rev. Matthew Harrison. Maggie had arranged for future medical teams to include a chaplain, so I learned. The role of the chaplain was not specifically defined at that point, but it's always good to have a clergyperson along, so the thinking goes, if for nothing else than for "good luck!" I had opportunity in the fall of 2010 to potentially be away from my pastoral duties for a couple of weeks (as I think back I think it was during District Pastor's Conference), the length of a typical trip, and I read that there were two teams going forth in October, one to Kenya and one to Madagascar. Both sounded exciting, and I had no preference. I called the International Center and was able to speak with Maggie, told her of my desire and availability, and that I'd hoped to go in October and didn't care which team, that she should choose for me and let me know. She eventually linked me with the team to Madagascar, and so it begins.

October 2010 was the beginning of a incredibly blessed relationship with the people of Madagascar, the Malagasy, and the Lutheran Church in Madagascar, the Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy, hereafter called the FLM, that continues to this day. In fact, on that very first trip, there was a Malagasy Lutheran pastor who accompanied us as an English translator by the name of Rev. David Rakotonirina. I remember distinctly a conversation that Pastor David and I had at one of the clinics on that first trip. We were sitting on a wooden bench that was too small for me and just right for him, as is the case of much of Madagascar in relation to me, and he was telling me in great detail how he fully intended to become the next president of the FLM, and that it would be happening soon because the current president was coming to the end of his presidency. At that time Pastor David was the president of one of the six Lutheran seminaries on the island. To jump ahead a bit in this story, as of November of 2016 he became the Presiding Bishop of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, and is still to this day. And, the FLM is nothing to shake a stick at in the realm of world Lutheranism. You likely have heard that they rejoice in a membership of somewhere between 4-6 million baptized, it's hard to accurately record a fixed number, and they are growing steadily. On my last trip to Madagascar in August of 2017 I was amazed to see the number of Lutheran churches being built, many of homemade bricks baked by parishioners, and the buildings built by same. Thanks be to God!

As a result of that initial trip to Madagascar I was smitten. In general I would say that I learned of a great need, all over the island to be sure, but in particular in the FLM and it's agencies. As a nation Madagascar is almost always listed in the top 10 of the poorest countries in the world. A current ranking has them at #9. A recent population figure is nearly 26 million, living on an island that's roughly 227,000 square miles, or as I used to describe it in presentations, 2.5 times Minnesota. The life expectancy at birth in 2016 was 65.9 years. That said, as is true worldwide, and for all of us, the Malagasy need Jesus, and all of Him in truth and purity, through His word and holy sacraments, for the sake of eternal salvation. To that end there was and is the FLM. But as Pastor, er, Bishop David made clear, and also so many other pastors and lay people that I now call my friends and family in the faith, the FLM needed, and needs, help. I learned that the FLM has 6 seminaries, as I mentioned earlier, and that the church operates 8

Lutheran hospitals, and that there are a number of Lutheran schools on the island, one that we became particularly close to out in the bush in an area called Nanatonana. Now that's an exciting trip, if you can keep from breaking your neck, and/or rolling off the road, and rolling and rolling and rolling.

After the 2010 trip and my return I had many conversations with Maggie Karner about Madagascar and future trips. As a result of strong relationships with the Malagasy Lutherans, especially in the city of Antsirabe, the location of one of the Lutheran hospitals and the base for our Mercy Medical teams, Maggie was determined to not only continue sending teams but to do it at least twice a year. And I was eager to help, if at all possible. Recall that I was a dual parish pastor in Southeast Minnesota, I had a job. I'm overjoyed to say though that those dear Christians in Minnesota that I was blessed to serve, Trinity in Waltham and St. Paul's in Hollandale, embraced Madagascar, and the Malagasy, and the FLM, right along with me. They supported me, and they supported the work to come, wholeheartedly. In particular they were willing to let me go, each year from 2010 to 2014, twice a year, that we might all somehow serve and support our family in Christ, in Madagascar. There was also fundraising and support given to the seminaries, the hospital in Antsirabe and the Lutheran School in Nanatonana. In those 4 years, 2010-2014, I traveled the 20,000 mile round trip 7 times as chaplain and team leader. My connection to the Malagasy and the FLM became stronger/closer, obviously, and I became even more aware of the need there.

In the winter of 2013 I received a divine call from Trinity Ev. Lutheran in Cole Camp, Missouri, to be their pastor. In the consideration of that call I was fearful that my Madagascar work would come to an end. The folks in Minnesota were so supportive and eager. I wondered if I accepted the call to Missouri if they would receive the opportunity to support this mission work in the same way. After nearly 14 years in Minnesota I did accept the call to Trinity, Cole Camp, Missouri, and I was installed there on the 5th Sunday in Lent, April 6, 2014, after taking what I thought might be my last trip to the island in mid-March, prior to our move to Missouri. Thanks be to God, the dear Christians at Trinity were eager to hear about Madagascar, and the work, and guess what, they wanted to work in it too! I showed them some of the hundreds of pictures, and told them some of the stories, and they were right there with me. So much so that

when the next MMT rolled around in August, not even 4 months after my installation, they sent me off again on the 20,000 mile trip, trip #8, with peace and blessing, provided I would return to serve them. And I did. And in October of 2015 there was trip #9.

A strange thing happened though before the October 2015 trip. In July we had a visitor at Trinity, on a Sunday morning at the Divine Service, and I vaguely recognized him. After the service he introduced himself as Darin Storkson, and he wanted to talk. Darin was at the time working for the Office of International Mission. We had a bible class after the service so we sat in my office after the class and, in summary, he asked if I had any interest in full time mission work. I answered that, in my mind it wasn't out of the realm of possibility, but that I was newly called and installed at Trinity. Then he asked what I would think about Southeast Asia. And I responded that it would be a great place to visit; my wanderlust coming out. He went on to say that they were looking for leadership in SE Asia, but I was thinking, as he was talking, about Madagascar. I finally told him that I had no real desire at the time to serve in SE Asia, but as a pastor I was always open to the call of the Holy Spirit through the Church. I found out later that the reason why Darin had come to talk was because of the extensive work done in Madagascar. This was the beginning.

Keep in mind that in 2015 that the LCMS is now into the hegemony of Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison. At least in part, to refute those who would say that President Harrison is not missional, or mission-minded, or the least bit concerned about missions, the Harrison team is determined to get missionaries into the field, do I dare say come hell or high-water. To be sure there were some deployed there already, obviously. I'll make mention of some of those in just a little bit. Additionally, through the work of LCMS Church Relations, and in particular, Dr. Al Collver, doors to international Lutheranism were swinging wide open. Huge Lutheran churches such as Madagascar, Ethiopia (Mekane Yesus), the Tanzanian Lutherans, and smaller Lutheran churches, such as those in Kenya and Uganda, were eager to make connections with us, or have us connect with them, however it might be said. I make mention here of the East African Lutheran Churches because these I'm most familiar with, some more than others. It was, and still is, quite exciting that we are, in many cases, creating and generating new relationships with our confessional brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world.

In August of 2015 I received a telephone call from the International Center, the Office of International Mission. Rev. Dan McMiller was calling. Rev. McMiller, as right-hand to the OIM Director, Rev. John Fale, was calling to recruit. At that point he simply asked if I'd considered full-time mission work. I told him that I hadn't really thought about full-time work until Darin Storkson showed up and talked with me about SE Asia. We talked awhile and he was aware of our work done in Madagascar so I eventually told him that if I were to consider full-time mission work that it would make sense, with all the connections I'd made in Madagascar, to do it there. I simply blurted that out without really expecting any consequence because I know we didn't have an official working relationship with the FLM. At that time the president of the FLM was not what one might call a friend of the LCMS. In essence he was allowing especially the Mercy Medical Team work of the LCMS for the sake of the people and at the behest of some, like then Pastor David Rakotonirina. There was also some theological education taking place by short-term teams through Concordia Theological Seminary - Ft. Wayne, led mostly by Rev. Dr. John Pless. The phone call ended, I told Michele about it, and I went back to work at Trinity.

Another phone call came about a month later, September 2015. Rev. McMiller informed me that they were ready to call me as a full-time missionary. To where, I asked. To Madagascar, he said. Really? How? The expectation was that Pastor David Rakotonirina would be elected president of the FLM, as he himself predicted, and that once he was elected, and installed in office, the door would be open for residential missions in Madagascar. What I didn't know at this time was that they also were going to call a nurse, that turned out to be a very dear friend and sister-in-Christ, who had gone on several MMT trips to Madagascar, to residentially serve in Madagascar too. This arrangement is in keeping with the rule, I'm not sure if it's a written rule to be honest, that when missionaries go into the field that they would go in (at least) threes. Reason being, so we were told, was for native companionship, and for safety. So, eventually three of us would be going to Madagascar, by call of OIM, myself and my wife, and Molly, that is if calls were to be truly extended and accepted by us.

Again, I hung-up the phone and told Michele. After the phone call in August we had briefly talked about the commitment of full-time mission work. At that time we had 3

grandchildren, one of those in utero, and of course the children that go with the grandchildren. I was barely a year into the call at Trinity, Cole Camp. We both have elderly mothers that live in Missouri still, who would need more and more care in the days ahead. To move to another country was almost beyond us, especially to be so drastically separated from said family. I know, such is mission work, for many, but now it was us. We were made aware that the best way to transition to a new life in a new country was to essentially liquidate our old life. No, not 'off' the children, but to give away, throw away or sell that which we own. That meant for us 33 years of married stuff, some we used and wanted to keep into old age, and a lot that we'd forgotten about, moved with every move, and stored in the basement - like the rest of you, to be sure. There was the option of keeping it all and putting it in storage for the years we were in the field, but that was not financially viable. In the end, we did end up keeping a few things that amounted to a storage unit of 150 square feet in Omaha, Nebraska. I was now 56 years old, Michele 52, and we were to begin a new life, as it were, and that in one of the poorest countries in the world? Our daughter, Naomi, quipped, "aren't you a little old for that?"

It brings to mind what then Joseph Ratzinger wrote in his essay CHRIST, THE REDEEMER OF MANKIND. He writes: "Of course, to non-Christians, our faith that Jesus is not merely an enlightened man but rather the Son, the Word itself, toward which all other illuminations and all other words tend, might seem presumptuous. It is all the more urgent that we not view such knowledge as our accomplishment but that we instead remain loyal to the truth that the encounter with the Word is a gift for us, too, which was given to us so that we might give it to others, freely, as we have received it. God made a choice, established some for others and all for one another, and we can only acknowledge in humility that we are unworthy messengers who do not proclaim ourselves but rather speak with a holy fear about something that is not ours but that comes from God.

Only in this way can the missionary task be understood. It cannot mean spiritual colonialism, the subjection of others to my culture and ideas. The model of missions is clearly prescribed in the way of the apostles and of the early church, especially in the commissioning discourses of Jesus. Missionary work requires, first and foremost, being

prepared for martyrdom, a willingness to lose oneself for the sake of the truth and for the sake of others.” (On The Way to Jesus Christ, p. 70) There it is, at the last, “a willingness to lose oneself for the sake of the truth and for the sake of others.” First and foremost! Oh, and of course “being prepared for martyrdom.” Really? We shall see.

After the phone calls in August and September of 2015 there were more to come. Eventually it was said that there would be a divine call coming from OIM in October, 2015. October came and there was no call, yet we were to be patient, so we were told. November, no call. December, no call. We were wondering what was going on. We were on pins and needles waiting. Part of the situation was that OIM, at least at that time, issued calls to several people at one time, in one fell swoop. One of the reasons for this was that they could be prepared to receive in one large group, in St. Louis at the International Center, for the sake of missionary orientation, all those who accept the call to the mission field. So there were a large number called by OIM in October 2015, but not us. Our time finally came in January of 2016. Finally, it was decided to extend a call to us, to serve IN Madagascar.

Those of you who are pastors and those of you who know the life of a pastor know how gut-wrenchingly, mind-numbingly exhausting a call can be. I was to tell the family in Christ at Trinity, Cole Camp, God’s dear people, who I had come to love quickly and easily in just a little over a year there, that I now had another call. They too already knew of my love for Madagascar and the work there, they’d grown to love it as well. With a divine call in hand now it was time for Michele and I to decide what to do. Michele would tell you if she were here that it was my call and my decision. She, quite literally, lovingly and faithfully, has said that about every call that I’ve ever received. There is the family, but her belief and mine is that it’s God’s doing, and He will provide...always has, always will, wherever we’re at, and for all eternity. At this point it was just the two of us at home, but the grandchildren and the children, what of leaving them? And what about the stuff? We both agreed that purging was not the problem. The problem is where to go with it, how to disseminate or dispose of it, ALL. But, obviously, more to the heart of it was the call, the work to be done. Where can I best be used, and serve best? God had provided the many opportunities to work in Madagascar over these several years. I’d established so many contacts there, and become very familiar

with the work there. What was His purpose in all of that, I prayed. And here at Trinity. Newly their pastor. My eagerness in joy to serve them with all that Jesus gives. And, that we were not (yet) 10,000 miles away from our beautiful granddaughters. Hugs, kisses, holding and touching, laughing and playing mean so much to us, and to them. As if you didn't know, I say all this to encourage you to see the commitment of missionaries overseas, out of country, away from home and family. Again, as Ratzinger wrote, "a willingness to lose oneself for the sake of the truth and for the sake of others." This is true, mostly, so we thought.

The call finally came, early in January 2016. I took nearly the entire month to decide. The decision was mine, and I made it, but not without my wife and her wise words, and her steadfast love, as always. Such a decision, such a commitment. Let's go. So I accepted the call of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, all of you, through the Office of International Mission to be one of the first residential missionaries, along with Michele, and eventually nurse Molly, in Madagascar. I arranged a meeting on a Sunday evening, after a morning Divine Service, to tell the congregation at Trinity. I was heartened and terrified at the large number who showed. It seems they knew what was coming, the tears began to flow even before the ultimate words were spoken. Those dear people though understood the working of God. They knew that the same God who called me there, and who called me to mission work in Madagascar, would provide for them again, if I should go. He is faithful, even when we are not. He is merciful and loving, and gives to us so that we can do the same. Trinity gave me a peaceful release into the work to be done in Madagascar, whatever that might be. When the call document came my official title was Strategic Planning Developer. In essence I was to find ways to resource the Malagasy Lutheran Church, as needed, theologically, medically, or in other ways, and in so doing to bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord as opportunity was given me. Realize though that we were not yet in fellowship, altar and pulpit, with the FLM (and still aren't) and that Pastor David was not yet President Bishop David. The election for president in the FLM was slated for September of 2016. I was fully aware of these political matters in the FLM, and how it was going to impact us. My assumption though, (and yes I have been told of another way to understand the word 'assume') my assumption though was that the FLM, the Malagasy Lutherans must know

that we will be coming to live in their midst, to work with them. Surely they were aware of this. I must admit that I do participate in Facebook. It is a source of communication. A significant number of my “friends” on Facebook are Malagasy, even Pastor (Bishop) David. The Sunday night that I announced to Trinity congregation that I was accepting the call to Madagascar, later in the evening I posted in my status on Facebook that I had accepted the call to be a missionary in Madagascar, and went to bed. The next morning, very early, the phone rang. I think it was OIM Director John Fale calling this time, pretty sure, but if not him then McMiller. With a strident voice I was told to remove the post from Facebook immediately. Here’s where it gets crazy.

Consequently I was informed that while I was truly the missionary to Madagascar, that I would be going to Madagascar when the funds were provided for me to go, and that I would have the role of Strategic Planning Developer, publicly, that is, via Synod publicly, I would be designated as missionary to “French Speaking Africa.” A couple of things to note in this regard. I would be put under the directorship of the East Africa Area Director, Shauen Trump. While there are quite a few French-speaking countries in West Africa, former colonies of France, there is only one in East Africa, a place called Madagascar. Granted, one would have to know a smattering of geography and history to figure this out, but it could be done, especially by the Malagasy. Also, while my Synodically official designation was as a missionary to “French Speaking Africa,” I was told that in my support-raising I could specifically mention that I was going to Madagascar. In fact, the power-point presentation that I gave was entirely about Madagascar, some of you saw that, and Synod was fine with that. It had to be approved, after all. Additionally, in time, when Mission Central got involved in the support-raising, I was asked to submit “many, many photos” of my involvement in Madagascar to be used in Mission Central’s presentations about our upcoming mission work. More on Mission Central later.

The transition to being employed by LCMS Inc. didn’t take place until March of 2016. I mentioned earlier that it was the practice of OIM to extend missionary calls in bulk, as it were, in order, in part, to facilitate a group missionary orientation. So, in March a large group of missionaries gathered together in St. Louis at the IC for orientation. Also there were the area directors, I don’t recall if all ADs were there, but

the AD from East Africa was there. Because Synod wants the wider church to know of their work, in particular the eagerness to call and deploy missionaries, one of the very first things that takes place at missionary orientation is a group photo. Maybe some of you have even seen the recent group photos of missionaries in the Reporter or the like. We all wore our Sunday best. I had on my Anglican collar. The photographer put us all together in perfect order, before the altar in the IC chapel. The photo was ready to be taken when the word came that Michele and I should be removed. We weren't allowed to be in the photo. In retrospect Michele said that's when we should have run far, far away. We weren't given a clear explanation for our removal at the moment, but began putting pieces together based on what I said earlier. We were still living in the parsonage in Cole Camp at this time and you can imagine, when the photo was published, the comments from the folks at Trinity. "Are you pulling our leg being a missionary?" "I thought you went to missionary orientation." They, of course, were kidding us, but it was for us a bit troubling and sad.

The orientation was a two-week affair. It was helpful but as you might imagine only the tip of the iceberg. One thing that we thought was quite strange was that our AD communicated very little with us in those two weeks. He was forced to, I suppose, when the East Africa team of newbies got together at the St. Louis Zoo (getting us ready for animals and their noises), but we thought him to be very stand-offish. I honestly didn't give it a lot of thought then, but in retrospect I think I understand why he was that way. Also, in the first week of orientation I received an email from Mission Central. For those of you who don't know, Mission Central is a support-raising arm of LCMS Missions. It was created by an LCMS layman, Gary Theis, a retired banker, and is located in Mapleton, Iowa. That said, Gary would say that Mission Central was created by his Boss, as He points to a picture of Sallman's 'Head of Christ' hanging in his office, behind his desk. Gary is very sincere about this, to be sure. When I was a pastor in Minnesota I first heard of Mission Central and Gary Theis. It is a fact that Mission Central, through the diligent work of Gary, and now Brent Smith, is able to raise millions of dollars for various missionaries. The reason I say 'various missionaries' is because it is the case that decisions are made at Mission Central who should be funded, and who not, by Mission Central, from those called to be missionaries by the LCMS. I must state

at this point that I still have problems with this, and I think you should too. From our class of missionaries there were two that Mission Central decided not to support, although one finally received approval and support by them, and was able to enter the field, the other not. The truth is, in our current missionary funding system, Mission Central can make or break a missionary.

I hope you know by now that the way missionaries are supported financially and prepared for deployment and further support in the field is by their own fund-raising, and through the incredibly generous help of Mission Central. Because Synod Inc. does not foot the bill for missionaries from their general fund, missionaries are tasked to go door-to-door so to speak, to ask for support and long-term funding. Personally, I would like to see this changed. I have born witness to territorialism among missionaries because of this, something akin to “why are you going to my church?” I do greatly approve of the visitation to congregations by missionaries whenever possible, but I believe Synod should receive funds and distribute as needed. My opinion. I was blessed in the first week of Mission Orientation to hear from Gary, an email all in CAPS, asking for photos of my work in Madagascar so that he could begin raising funds for us. And in reality, because of the support that he brought in for us, which was the majority of what was needed to deploy and live, we were able to finally go. Now, again, Gary would say it wasn't him but his Boss, and of course he's right. A word about Gary. I mentioned earlier that he is my brother in Christ, he is yours too. If you know him you know him as I do, you know that he is extremely energized, to say the least. His energy is truly unbelievable. I've always surmised that it's the banker in him, by the Holy Spirit no doubt, that allows him to 'find' so much money for the work of missions. I know that there are those who have trouble with his 'approach' or maybe his 'tactics,' and even his words and theology, as do I, at times. These are real concerns and should be taken seriously, and dealt with in an evangelical, brotherly manner, with words of correction, help and support if necessary. Because Gary is a brother in Christ, I worked with him as such, spoke honestly and truthfully with him, prayed for him, just like any other member of a congregation that I would serve. I believe that Gary knew, and still knows, that we are not political allies in a churchly manner. He was a bit nervous about my clerical collar, but we have respect and love for each other in Christ. And while we never live by

the 'bottom line', we should recognize the service he provides for the church, and give thanks to his Boss for it, and for him. I would add that if you're not willing to work with Mission Central then you should at the very least be willing to encourage God's people toward the support of the mission of the Church, as they do. Satis est.

The orientation ended. After the two week orientation in St. Louis, Michele and I joined with a Mercy Medical Team to Madagascar so that Michele could see what she might be getting into first hand, this was her first trip, my tenth. We didn't know exactly where we would live in Madagascar when we moved. While being based in Antsirabe on the MMT, Antsirabe being a huge city of hundreds of thousands south of the capital of Antananarivo, we were led by a realtor, in our free time, to see some available homes there. This really hit home for both of us that this move just might happen, we might soon live in Madagascar. Upon our return to Missouri at the end of March Michele and I were off, on the road, to raise support for the missionary going to French-Speaking Africa, aka, Madagascar. As is the case with all missionaries I can't tell you how many thousands of miles we drove, to congregations in the US and to Canada. There is a group of Malagasy in the Toronto area, and we were invited there tell our story. We were given a budget number from the IC to shoot for in support-raising. The folks at the IC get together and determine how much money it will take for a missionary to deploy and to survive, hopefully, for a couple of years until the next support-raising foray. Practically, so we were told, when 80% of the total number is raised in gifts and pledges then the missionary can deploy. After deployment happens then every two years the missionary returns to gin up his base. For our deployment TO MADAGASCAR, mind you, the total figure was just over \$200,000. This included typical budget items such as the care of the missionary and his family, salary, health care, housing, a car if necessary, etc., and can include anticipated expenses to establish an office and those things necessary for office work. We weren't given an itemized budget, per se, other than salary. I have to say that I was a bit embarrassed, then and now, by the salary. I'll say this much, it was about \$20,000 more than I've ever made as a parish pastor. I'll say this too. I've never owned a house, never been able to, always lived in parsonages as well. It was shocking to me to learn that the AD who has been in Africa for 8 years owns two houses in the US, and lives in a huge two-story house in Nairobi that rents for more than \$3000 a

month...mission money. I don't begrudge anyone possessions, but this does not seem in line with the ordinary LCMS pastor's life. There are other elements to the financing of missionaries that I have issues with and don't have time to mention in this presentation. I encourage you to be informed though about how mission monies are being used, and be willing to express your opinions on such to the leaders in St. Louis.

Our support-raising having begun in April, and with the huge support of Mission Central funds, we were given the "green-light" for deployment already in August, 2016. During this time we were frequently in contact with our mission class especially with those going to East Africa. We learned that the AD was in fairly regular contact with them, but we heard quite literally nothing from him. It didn't bother me necessarily that he didn't contact us, even when he was in the states, but I did wonder why. When we were informed in August that we'd been 'green-lighted' we were eager and ready to go. Possessions mostly liquidated, support-raised, our children mentally prepared for our departure, ready. August came, and went; still in the US, still visiting congregations. No word from the IC or East Africa. September came, and no word from the IC or East Africa. Literally, no word. Michele and I were very frustrated, and no one was speaking to us, not even the paid support person at the IC. I eventually was fed up. We were based still in Cole Camp so on a Monday in the middle of September I called the office of OIM and told them I would be down the next day to talk. The next day I drove the 2.5 hours to St. Louis in the morning and went to the office of OIM. I met initially with the Director, John Fale. I asked what was going on, why weren't we deployed. John hemmed and hawed and said that East Africa was not ready to receive us yet. I didn't think of it at the time but when I look back I believe that when he said 'East Africa' he meant the office in Nairobi, specifically the AD, and not Madagascar. John mentioned that maybe I could deploy to the Uganda and teach in the theological college of the Lutheran Church in Uganda. When I heard that I was ready to blow a gasket. In my evaluation of the mission call foremost was that we would be going to Madagascar. Madagascar, not Uganda. He also mentioned Ethiopia and teaching there. I finally said that if we weren't going to Madagascar we'd just stay here and I'd remain a parish pastor. I was certain that Trinity, Cole Camp would welcome us back with open arms. John quickly said that we would be going to Madagascar.

At noontime I was invited to lunch with the assistant director, Dan McMiller. That too was a very strange conversation. Dan made offhanded comments like 'maybe we could make you your own area director,' (in Madagascar). I wasn't sure if he was kidding or exactly what his comment meant. Again, in retrospect, I could see that if I were my own AD then I wouldn't be answerable to the East Africa AD. In the course of the meal it was mentioned that there was concern about the wife of the East Africa AD. It was known that when the AD made one of his (too) many trips to the US that the wife and children would go to the local Vineyard Church in Karen where they lived, rather than go to Uhuru Lutheran Cathedral, in downtown Nairobi, where the East Africa office usually worshipped. He mentioned to me that I might possibly help with that situation by providing a place of worship in Karen and putting a stop to the foray into the heterodox church by the AD's family. He explained that before deployment to Madagascar we would orient in Nairobi for a period of time, and that would give me such an opportunity. At any rate, the conversation with both Fale and McMiller did help in that we were seemingly (back) on course to live in Madagascar soon. The ball started rolling and by the first week in November we were on a flight to Nairobi, our African adventure finally begins.

In September 2016 we had received the seemingly very good news that Pastor David Rakotonirina had been elected Presiding Bishop of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, as he himself predicted. We heard this news from our friends in Madagascar, not from OIM, and they, the Malagasy were excited because they believed we would be coming to Madagascar to live, even if it wasn't made known in the public church media, here or there. So when we left for Africa in November we knew that we would be touching down, overnighting in Nairobi, and catching a flight to Madagascar the very next day to attend the installation of Pastor David as Presiding Bishop of the FLM. We would be representing the East Africa office, in particular the AD, because he was once again in the US. The AD makes many trips to the US. Mission money. This too is troublesome to me. We have these wonderful things called Skype, Facetime and other venues to communicate. Mission money, not well used, in my opinion. So we were representing EA, and the official representative from the LCMS was Church Relations Director, Dr. Al Collver. This was the first time to meet Dr Collver in person. We didn't

speak a lot, but what was made clear to us was that we would be transitioning rapidly and that came not only from Dr. Collver but from the new Presiding Bishop himself. We heard it from both, with our own ears.

The installation was a spectacular affair. It took place in an outdoor arena, attended by thousands. Dr. Collver, Michele and I were guests of honor, taking our place on the front row, along with some of our friends from Antsirabe, who also have high positions in the FLM. Nothing hidden about the LCMS presence, at all. At the reception meal afterward Dr. Collver was given the opportunity to make a speech, to bring congratulations from the LCMS, and he took opportunity to mention the potential of future work to come between the LCMS and the FLM. We heard it with our own ears. The morning after the installation we had breakfast with Bishop David and he was clear about his eagerness to have a residential LCMS presence, and the opportunity to work together.

Within a day after the installation we returned to Nairobi. Michele and I immediately joined a Mercy Medical Team in an area south of Nairobi called Lenkishon where the Maasai live. We didn't have a 'home' in which to live yet, the AD was still in the US with his family, and we lived in his African mansion, in the guest quarters, until his return and until we could secure our own home. With his return came the conversation of what to do until we deployed to Madagascar. It was suggested that I could serve as the chaplain at the office for the East Africa team. At that time there were 8 of us from the LCMS, and 3 Kenyan employees. I know this for certain because we each had an office on one-half of the second floor of an office building in Karen, where we lived. This is significant. We all had offices, where we were to report to work 5 days a week. Offices, where missionaries sit. I asked the AD what he expected from me and he told me to decide. I decided on prayer each morning and evening, using the prayer offices, Matin and Vespers, Morning and Evening Prayer, with the exception of Wednesday morning when we would have the Mass, the Divine Service. It was quite the task. There were only 3 of us ordained. My colleague Rev. Jon Clausen was ready to help on occasion, but he was speedily trying to learn Swahili so he could be deployed to teach. The other ordained was the AD and he showed no real interest in helping with the services. On Sunday mornings we would gather at Uhuru Lutheran Cathedral for the

Divine Service, the pastor there being Rev. Isaiah Obare, son of the Walter Obare Omwanza, now former Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK).

This was the arrangement through November of 2016, and my work. At the end of November the AD told me that the ELCK was looking for a mission start in Karen , the suburb of Nairobi where we lived, and he and they wondered if I would get that started. Where, I asked? In the our office, was the response. We did have a conference/meeting area where we gathered for worship daily, the only problem with this location was that when the entire East Africa team gathered there we nearly filled it up ourselves. The Clausings have 9 children, Wolfs have 5, Trumps had 3 at the time, plus the assorted adults. There wasn't much room for others, in our newly formed 'mission church.' In time, through the Sunday offerings I had a beautiful altar and pulpit made, along with a hand-carved crucifix that hung above the altar, all from native wood. Those of you who have seen the handiwork of African artisans can imagine how beautiful it was. At the end of November we were entering Advent so I offered midweek Advent services. Each Sunday we gathered together for the mass. Christmas came and we had a Christmas mass at our office church. By this time I'd approached a couple of Kenyans that I'd become acquainted with about joining with us, and they did. In a Facebook post/photo of mine just last week of the pastors who were gathered for the ordination of my son-in-law, one of these Kenyan women, Linda Peter, wrote "can see my pastor looking good." It gave me joy. In fact, over the course of the short time there I did catechize 2 women and their children, and they finally joined the Lutheran church at Uhuru Lutheran Cathedral.

We entered 2017 with this schedule. The AD did inform me though that we would be traveling to Madagascar toward the end of January and we could begin the search for a home there. You can imagine the joy we felt. Molly and I also began an on-line class to learn Malagasy, the native language in Madagascar. As the end of January drew near I would ask him when we were going, shouldn't we get our travel arrangements made? He would respond evasively, and finally before January was up told me that we weren't going, that "Bishop David was not prepared to receive us at this time." I didn't know exactly what he meant. In truth I only thought in terms of the trip, not

the entire mission. So I went back to work, in the office, East African office missionaries gathering together everyday, in the office.

Sometime in early February came the devastating news for us. Molly and I were called into the AD's office. He told us outright that we "would not be going to Madagascar now." We looked at each other in disbelief. I asked if we would ever be going. His response was that there might be an opportunity to go "several years from now, or maybe not at all." At that point he immediately transitioned into options for us. He told Molly that she could join the West African team in Burkina Faso, and likely move to Togo in time, which she eventually did, and that he'd already spoken with the West Africa Area Director, Gary Shulte, about it. Sounded like a done deal for her. Molly was shocked. Molly loves Madagascar and its people every bit as much as I do. The AD turned to me and gave me an option. I could go to Uganda and teach in their theological college (where had I heard that before?) or I could stay in Nairobi and continue with the mission church, and serve the EA team as chaplain. I too was crest fallen, I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

Being an obedient missionary trooper I, at least at the start, accepted this ultimate decision without question. In fact, the AD made travel arrangements for himself, Michele and I, to travel to Jinja, Uganda, meet the Ugandan pastors, and teachers at the college, and consider the potential of moving there. We somewhat grudgingly went along, I must admit. The trip didn't take place for several weeks. A very interesting element in all of this is that I was receiving messages intermittently from my friends in Madagascar asking when we were coming, including messages from the Bishop himself. He wanted to know why we hadn't moved to Madagascar yet. After the trip to Uganda we were certain that we didn't want to move there, and I truthfully say it didn't have anything to do with the potential work. Rather, we had made up our minds that it might be best to wait in Nairobi, not move to another country, and see if the door to Madagascar would 'miraculously' open for us. This in light of those messages coming from Madagascar.

We stayed in Nairobi and I continued with the mission church, and work in the office, an office missionary. I thought it strange that the ELCK leadership, namely the Bishop, didn't come at some point to recognize or dedicate this 'mission start,' in the

name of the ELCK. That never happened. I should say too that there were times when we did leave our offices. Some of those were to make a showing of the LCMS, such as at the dedication of the dormitories at a school in Lenkishon that's supported jointly by the LCMS and ELCK. For sure we left for the annual retreat (vacation), which we certainly needed (not so much), planned by the AD's wife, who also planned an educational retreat whereby someone from the US would come to make us smarter. She received separate missionary wages for planning these events, something that I believe could have been done in office. Additionally there were groups irregularly coming from the US to do various kinds of mission work. Then some of the office would spring into action for the time that the visitors were around. This, for me, was another troubling aspect of what I witnessed in East Africa missions. There wasn't a day-to-day mission effort, in my opinion, as there might have been. There was office work. Two of the missionaries there who have been there many years have consequently married Kenyans, another real problem, in my opinion. The original mission assignments for these two are completed, but they have been reassigned to other tasks that don't seem to amount to much at all, in part I believe to stay in Kenya. One has the title of Communications Director now. I wonder how many of you have received communications from the East Africa field? The AD was at the time working on his doctorate and was at his computer each day, unless traveling to the US. This probably sounds a bit snarky, but in reality I want you to know, as I said at the start, some of the good and the bad. Mission funding can be very hard to come by, and shouldn't be wasted or misused. You should know too what exactly is going on in the mission field, and how the funds are being spent. So please be diligent.

One of the truly magnificent things happening in the field, and in East Africa is the theological education that is taking place, at the theological seminary of the Mekane Yesus (Lutheran) church in Ethiopia by Rev. Eric Stinnett and Rev. Mark Rabe, and newly in Tanzania by Rev. Jon Clausing. These men are excellent pastors, educators and missionaries. What I observed first hand though was at Neema Theological College, sometimes referred to as Matongo, which is the 'seminary' of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. In my opinion theological education this is where the truest and best mission work is being done in all of LCMS missions. The men studying at

Matongo toward ordination, and the women preparing to be deaconesses, from Kenya and the surrounding countries, are so eager to know the full truth of God's word and are committed to our Lutheran Confession. Serving them there were two outstanding missionaries, Rev. Dr. Tom Aadland and Rev. Charles Froh. Rev. Clausing taught there for a time too before moving to Tanzania. I traveled there several times, the last to deliver Pastor Clausing for a week of teaching, but also to deliver several boxes of Luther Service Book for the graduating students. Dr. Aadland has served as dean at various times, and is a wonderful exegete and instructor of the Holy Scripture. Pastor Froh was dean of the chapel and was diligent in teaching the students the prayer offices, the Divine Service liturgy, and hymns from LSB. Pastor Froh has since retired, and the seminary is in need of some of you. Most recently Pastors Peter Bender and Steven Brill have taught there.

The students at Matongo crave every opportunity to learn more, to deepen their faith, and that for the sake of others. They are envious of the theological education that we receive and look for us to impart that knowledge to them, if possible. The ultimate goal, for the men, was ordination and a return to their homes, or somewhere in their home country, to preach the alone saving Gospel in its truth and purity. Truth and purity is key! As you may know Christianity, as such, is rampant in Africa, especially East Africa. There are home-grown churches and denominations, as well as main-line, and every stream of heresy that you can imagine. Because the people are, as a whole, very poor they are especially susceptible to word of faith preachers, prosperity gospel preachers and pentecostal preachers in general. This is why the men at Matongo, and the other seminaries mentioned, want to know and need to know the entire truth of the Scripture and our confession. As a missionary to Madagascar I was looking forward to making use of some of you pastors gathered here today, to come and teach, so that the pastors in these countries would be properly prepared to preach the truth for the sake of eternal salvation for those who have ears to hear. I'm hopeful that some of you will begin to think about such mission work, even for just a short-time deployment. I think Dr. Detlev Schulz says it so well in his book MISSION FROM THE CROSS (p. 166), when he writes: "So far, I have argued in favor of a missionary proclamation that preaches the entire Christ and that neither robs the Gospel of its substance nor fails to link it to the

actual historic ministry of Christ on earth. Missionary proclamation is a faithful testimony to what Scripture teaches about Christ; it is a doctrinal commitment to Him. If the Church in mission were to withhold any truth from her listeners or 'water down' the Gospel message, she would have to deal later on with the disastrous effects of that deficiency when the newly converted attempt to replace that deficiency with traditional or self-constructed tenets. In part, that very situation has led to syncretistic belief systems, an amalgam of Christian and traditional pagan beliefs. No church and no community is immune to that danger. Preachers who are afraid of bringing the whole Christ and the entire Gospel to their audience for whatever reason are held accountable to the Lord Himself, who wants to reach the hearts and minds with the fullness of His words." It's the entire Christ that the seminarians want to know in order to preach and faithfully proclaim the entire Gospel message, and do battle against not only pagan beliefs, but against heresy in the church. There is much that we can do from the LCMS to help with this, and should do it...INTENTIONALLY! My paper is complete now because I've used "missional" and "intentional" in it, let the hearer understand. But there is the finale.

My African missionary story begins to come to an end in May of 2017, just over a year from the time of orientation. Since it appeared even more surely that I wasn't going to Madagascar, and that was the goal of my mission call, I asked to return to the states and to parish ministry. This request was not received well, but was eventually granted. I was then told by the AD to wait in Nairobi until a call came from the states. I was given the opportunity to name a few districts in which I would like to serve if it were possible. The AD received that information and told me that he would contact the District Presidents for me. I learned later, from several of the DP's that that wasn't done. Into July, when I'd heard nothing from the districts or DP's I took matters into my own hands and wrote them myself. That didn't go over well either. In August of 2017 there were to be national elections in Kenya and we were encouraged to leave the country for safety reasons. We made one last trip to Madagascar and while there were inundated with the usual question, and again from the leadership of the FLM, 'when are you coming?' The next question of course was 'why' are you not, and for that we didn't have a direct answer. I can't say that I have one today. This is still part of my frustration. As I've tried

to explain, especially in the forepart of my paper, there are so many wonderful opportunities in Madagascar. I do hope and pray that we haven't missed the boat when it comes to partnering with the FLM.

The joy for me in the time that I spent in Africa was the opportunity to preach much; that is, after all, what a pastor does. I preached regularly at the office in the prayer offices, and at our Divine Services. I preached at a Kenyan wedding for one of the office staff, and I preached at a funeral for a 12 year-old boy, a Maasai Lutheran boy, who was tragically killed at his school. I also had the joy of catechizing 3 Kenyans into the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the office I encouraged and consoled the staff, and at times Kenyan and Ugandan pastors who I had come to know and love as brothers.

I agreed to present my story, and it's unique to me and my situation. There are other stories, from other missionaries, maybe you know some of those. My hope in speaking is to encourage you in giving, in support, and in involvement and oversight of the LCMS mission task. Only Christ and His word are perfect, we certainly are not. One pastor recently told me that the circuit in which he lives wants to become more involved and to know exactly what is happening in world-wide missions, and that so that they can, in good conscience, support and encourage support, with greater fervor. That's what I hope for you too. It's one thing to see the glossy pictures and hear the 'successes' of mission, but to know the whole story is better, much like the preaching of the law and the Gospel.

I titled the paper, and began the paper with the statement "I was a missionary," past tense, but I truly believe that I am still a missionary, present tense, even as I serve Trinity Ev. Lutheran in Blue Hill, Nebraska and Zion Lutheran in Red Cloud, Nebraska. I want to provide one more quote from Dr. Schulz's MISSION FROM THE CROSS, he writes: "For His universal mission, the Holy Spirit has thus called the Church to cooperate,... To this end, the Church remains faithful to her missionary task by calling men into the ministry who will engage in the means of the Holy Spirit, that of proclaiming God's Word and celebrating the Sacraments. And in a broader sense, each Christian, as a member of the royal priesthood assumes special missionary responsibility in God's mission according to his or her own abilities. In this way, the Church becomes the

instrument of the ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit through which He speaks and does His work.”

I am a missionary.