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The LONGS To Madagascar



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Bonjour and Salama Ireo from the Big Red Island of Madagascar!

Before I get started, let me just say that many people reached out to us with concern about the cyclone named Freddy. Yes, it did hit Madagascar, but before the storm made it to shore, it weakened and also went south of us. We actually had very little wind and rain, so thank you for praying for us!

It's the beginning of a new year and, as many of you may remember, I love the new year! It is a time to start fresh, and, as you may also remember, now that we have returned from furlough, we aren't just starting a fresh new year, we are also working on starting a brand-new baby church.

Here in Madagascar, there are some cultural things that need to take place when you start working in a new area. One of the most important things we needed to do was to show respect to local leaders, introduce ourselves, and state our intentions. So, the first person we met with is the man that I called, "the Big Man" in the area where we want to start kids' ministry. I now know his name is Théo, and he welcomed us to start working and teaching the Bible stories to the kiddos who chase me when I run.

Then, we met with the leaders of the government in our area. Our section of the capital is divided up into a large area called a commune, and then a smaller area, which is what we call a fokantany. So, with some Malagasy pastries in hand, we went to meet the commune officials. When we arrived, we were met by a very excited former student from one of the very first English outreaches we were part of before we began work at the first church plant. She welcomed us in, introduced us to everyone, and then sent us away with the assurance that they will help with whatever we need as soon as we met with the president of the fokantany.

The fokantany offices are always busy, so I wasn't sure how warmly we would be received. We went to the fokantany office armed with more Malagasy pastries and a big green Stanley thermos full of coffee. When we went into the office of the president, we did all of the formal greetings, stated our intentions, and then presented our pastry gift and began serving coffee. You should have seen their faces light up! They welcomed us with open arms and even gave us a gentle scolding for not coming sooner.

Since that day, the president of the fokantany has gone to work helping us find a piece of property where we can meet. With his help, we have just pulled the trigger on renting a former sewing factory. It's not huge, it needs a little work, but it will be a place for us to get started. We are excited and we want to say thank you for praying with us as we continue to move forward with this new work.

Before we close, I want to share one more thing that we are excited to report, and to ask for your prayers concerning our son, Gabriel. Gabe has been studying and preparing for a future in missions in college. He is in his senior year and one of his graduation requirements is to do a semester abroad with a veteran missionary. So, a few weeks back, Gabe left Missouri and flew to Bangkok, Thailand where he will shadow and work with our friends Shane and Katie Salmon, as well as other missionaries, for the next 4 months until he returns to the US to graduate from college. Please pray for him as he learns from those veteran missionaries, and pray for direction for where he will land after he graduates in May.

Thank you for your prayers, and know that we are also praying for you!

Phil & Vala Long