

Report to Overseas Missions - Tikanga Pakeha on Madagascar Outreach Dec 4-31 2018

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What happened in Madagascar?

In December last year, our family was part of a short-term missions trip in Madagascar. Our aim was to support the work the Iris team was doing over there. Iris runs several households of children's homes for kids who can't live with their families due to abuse or bereavement. Before this short-term missions trip, our family completed the Iris Harvest School of Missions (Oct-Dec), which is a full-time school with teaching, a strong presence of God's Spirit and some opportunities to do short-term mission. Our missions trip was led by Iris Harvest School staff and all of the team had completed the Harvest School training.

As we had hoped, our time in Madagascar was an incredible opportunity to a) bless the longterm team there, b) love and serve the local people outside the team and c) start to work out what our Harvest School training might change about how we live. What did that look like?

a) Blessing the long-term team there

Our team leader strongly emphasised how encouraging our presence was for the long-term team of international missionaries and local Malagasy staff in the children's home. As a missionary kid who had grown up in Mozambique, he talked about how important it was for a local team when people visit, if only that it tells them their work matters enough to be worth visiting.

The long-term team Iris team in Madagascar is comprised of two parts: the core leadership team (a mix of international missionaries and local Malagasy people) and about 100 local staff that help run the children's homes.

One way we blessed the core team in Madagascar was to spend time with them as friends. They identified that they wanted to spend some time relaxing and having fun, because they sometimes work too much. We had most of the missionaries around for dinner at our house and prayed for them. Also, Chris really connected with one of the team leaders there. They became friends and spent time jamming together with a band and joking together. We also formed a particular friendship with another member of the long-term team. At the end of the trip, he joined our team worship and prayer time and was really blessed by it. He had done the Harvest School training himself and told us that he had lost some of his hunger for God since he'd finished it, but that that prayer time in particular had rekindled something in him.

One way we blessed the local Malagasy staff was hosting morning teas for each of the children's home's teams and praying for each staff member individually. They told us that these times were very encouraging for them. God seemed to really speak in these times through us to the staff. One morning tea, I preached on 1 Cor 13. That morning, Chris and I had treated each other rudely after a terrible night's sleep. Then, we had sat down to our morning Bible reading and it was 1 Cor 13. My message was simple: loving people matters. The women were really challenged by the message and asked for prayer to love the kids in the home patiently. At another morning tea, one woman asked for prayer to love her mother-in-law who she resented. I had an image for her that her mother-in-law had been given some painful labels (black dots, cf. *You Are Special*) and that God saw her with grace and gentleness. From what the woman said, this was a challenging and helpful image for their relationship.

b) Loving and serving the local people outside the team

We spent most of our time each day supporting the programmes the Iris team ran and connecting with the children in the homes. We did whatever Iris told us would be helpful. We painted a fence, preached at the children's homes church with skits and humour, preached to

the parents at the milk programme (a programme supporting families who can't breastfeed), prayed for mums and babies at the milk programme, wrapped hundreds of Christmas presents. And we played with the kids: soccer, crafts, singing, team-building, tag, teaching them to be gentle with Zoe (our toddler), and we facilitated an epic water fight. We were there over Christmas, so, at their request, we wrote a Christmas musical and performed it for the milk programme families, the Iris kids, the kids' club and at the rubbish dump community.

We also spent time connecting with people outside of the the Iris scene. One day, we walked around the streets and prayed for everyone we felt led to. One of our groups prayed for a family and saw someone healed. Another day, we picked up rubbish on our street. (There's rubbish littered all over the ground in Antananarivo.) The local team told us that a local person had taken a photo of us picking up rubbish and put it on Facebook with a caption (to the effect of): "This is how foreigners look after our streets. If they can do it, why aren't we?" On another occasion, at the request of the local team leader, Chris walked around the village dressed as Santa Claus and our team handed out lollies to all the kids of the village. They loved it. Some of them won't have received other Christmas presents.

c) Working out what our Harvest School training might change about how we live

While we were doing our Harvest School training in Madagascar (prior to this missions trip), we felt God speak to us very clearly with a long-term call to share Jesus' love on the streets and church revival and a short-term call to go on the road for the year to share Jesus' love up and down New Zealand. We were also convicted of parts of our lives that were not submitted to Jesus. The missions trip in Madagascar was a chance for us to start to work out our missional calling and figure out what a laid-down life looks like. This opportunity to start working out our calling before coming home was a blessing because we had a chance to i) try out different missional strategies, ii) cultivate new habits to sustain us and iii) 'not feel it' and recognise low times as part of missional life.

i) Trying out different missional strategies

We had the opportunity to enlarge our missional repertoire and give stuff a go. We had chances to serve (e.g. picking up rubbish), pray and encourage (e.g. for the staff), connect (e.g. eat and play with the kids), and talk to people about Jesus (e.g. walk down the street prayerfully and offer to pray with people we met and talk to them about Jesus). We got to see what things flowed well, what blessed people, and what didn't.

ii) Cultivating new habits

During Harvest School training, our time was very full and scheduled. We were in class almost everyday. We heard amazing stories about what Jesus is doing and were invited to respond in an environment where worship was led and held by a team of talented musicians and Spiritsensitive people and the Holy Spirit was obviously working in lots of people in significant ways. If we had then gone straight home, it would have been easy to fall into old habits, associated with our previously normal way of life. The time we spent in Madagascar after Harvest School was a space to figure out how to initiate and sustain our own habits of intimacy with Jesus, to guard our enthusiasm and seek God's guidance.

iii) Not 'feeling it'

We were not eye-witness to any dramatic moves of God during our extended outreach in Madagascar and we experienced some practical challenges as a family. We often found ourselves 'not feeling it', especially when tired from broken sleep or sickness, or when disappointed when God didn't do what we'd hoped. It was so helpful to experience disappointment, tiredness and blah-ness when these things could not be blamed on our circumstance. Here we were, in Africa, with an amazing team of passionate Jesus-lovers who had just done Harvest School, and there were days when I just wanted the fridge to work, the toilet to flush, or the light to turn on. I just wanted comfort, convenience and some quick wins. This trip had some great opportunities to experience mission when they don't *feel* fantastic, even though we knew we were doing lots of useful, encouraging things, at other times it did feel fantastic and ultimately God wanted us there and was using us. In the future, this trip will encourage us that 1) yes, God is faithful and does work through us and 2) even when God is at work, I don't always feel excited. There will be no circumstances where *this* kind of encouragement is not relevant.

How was the money used?

The generous funding given to us by OM-TP paid for our living costs while in Madagascar with Iris Global (food, accommodation and transport), our visas and some financial support to the long-term missionary team there (the children's home).

How have we and are we 'sowing back' into our parish?

We have 'sown back' into our own parish by sharing our stories from our time overseas to quicken imaginations with the breadth of ways to partner with God, the power of God that we can witness when we seek it and the value of going wherever God calls. We wrote an email home, we shared at St Thomas' (our home church), we hosted a lunch for our church to talk more in-depth about our trip and we have taken every opportunity for 1:1 conversations with people in our church about our time overseas. On April 14th, we will run the St Tom's service,

together with our friends Tim and Kate (who came with us to Madagascar), to share still more of what Jesus has done in us and what we're walking into next as full-time missionaries.

We anticipated that some of the most compelling 'sowing back' would be people catching the vision from our own transformation, hunger for God and missional life. We were right. While we were in Madagascar, we felt God call our family on the road for the year to share him and his love with people across New Zealand. Since our return, we felt Jesus invite us to give most of our stuff away, live by faith and go as he leads. God has provided us with some clear confirmation of this call, a house bus and so far two destinations that have been perfect. People in our church have expressed to us that they are challenged and inspired by our life for Jesus.

