



ALONG WITH PASTOR KRISTIN

Pastor Kristin Engstrom, ELCA Global Missionary

June 2025

Faith in Action in Madagascar



A nurse from the Malagasy Lutheran Church Healthcare System cares for people affected by hurricanes.

In the ELCA, the theme of “God’s Work. Our Hands.” has motivated ELCA congregations to put our faith into action in tangible ways. One of the reasons I enjoy serving as an ELCA global missionary is the opportunities I have to learn how our Lutheran companion churches around the world are also doing God’s work with their hands.

In March, two hurricanes blew through southern Madagascar over a two-week period. In the southwestern coastal region of Tulear, excessive rains flooded towns and high winds lifted off roofs. In response, churches opened their doors to provide a place for people to sleep, they worked with the government to distribute emergency food, and doctors and nurses from the Malagasy Lutheran Church Healthcare System, which receives support from the ELCA,

treated people who were wounded while wading through flood waters. They also distributed free malaria medicine, since flood waters breed mosquitos, which bring malaria.

Malagasy church leaders do not ask *if* they can help their neighbors who are affected by frequent natural disasters in Madagascar. Instead they find the resources and connections to help more people.

A second way the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) engages in God’s work is in their understanding of the work of the church. In Madagascar, most people have just enough (and often not enough) to meet their daily needs. As a result, the church sees itself as an agent of development in people’s spiritual and physical lives. The diakonia department leads projects that empower vulnerable people. A new project teaches sustainable farming practices in drought-prone areas. Recently, I have also been invited to teach on stewardship and sustainability at synod gatherings. Our siblings in Christ in Madagascar, like in the ELCA, are working together to use the gifts of God to do the work of God with their hands.



MLC Vice-General Secretary Toromare, Pastor Kristin, Sofia Synod President Eugene Bernard teaching about sustainability.

Accompanying Pastor Kristin

My work as an ELCA Global Missionary is possible thanks to the generosity of many congregations and individuals in the ELCA. Thank you! You can contact me at kristin.engstrom@elca.org. You are also invited to support me as an ELCA Global Missionary here. Previous newsletters are available on my blog alongwithpastorkristin.blogspot.com.



Pastor Kristin Engstrom

I serve as the ELCA Representative with the Malagasy Lutheran Church, one of the largest and fastest growing Lutheran churches in the world. I have been an ELCA global missionary since 2016, serving first in Senegal and then Zambia, before coming to Madagascar

I’m originally from the midwestern United States, and served as a parish pastor in New Jersey for six years prior to beginning my call with ELCA Global Mission.





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Gender Justice Celebration: Walking Together

In 2024, the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) started a Gender Justice Project, which is supported by the ELCA. The goal of the project is to teach women and men ways to walk and work together to strengthen the church and communities.

Over the past year and a half, the project has led teachings, Bible studies, and conversations at synod gatherings, men's gatherings, women's gatherings, youth gatherings, prayer leader gatherings, and theological seminaries. Every time the Gender Justice project holds a workshop, both women and men approach the Gender Justice Coordinator afterwards with more questions and much thanksgiving. Over time, the project has incorporated teachings on feminine hygiene, marital preparation, and marital relations as well.



Theologian Sija (National MLC Women's Organization General Secretary), Theologian Holi (Gender Justice Coordinator), and Theologian Marguerite (MLC Women Theologians Vice-President) teaching about Gender Justice.



Washable Feminine Hygiene Pads

In response to the lack of sustainable resources for feminine hygiene products, the project has also started to produce washable feminine hygiene pads, which have been very popular and in high demand by women of all ages. The biggest surprise has been the demand from older women who use the pads as protection from urinary incontinence issues.

When possible, I accompany the Gender Justice project leader to important events and workshops. Since I am the only ordained woman present in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (women can study to be theologians, but not yet ordained pastors), I am usually the first ordained female pastor people have met. I am always received with kindness, followed by many questions about the biblical and cultural background for women's ordination in the ELCA.

In May, the MLC national church council decided that every MLC synod should begin a conversation on women's ordination in the Malagasy Lutheran Church. Then, at the next national church assembly in 2028, the assembly will vote on the ordination of women in the Malagasy Lutheran Church. Please keep the Malagasy Lutheran Church and the Gender Justice Project in your prayers as the church enters this time of prayer and faithful discussion in preparation for the vote on women's ordination in 2028.



Pastor Kristin with the Pastors of the Betioky Synod. I preached in worship and taught about the history of women's ordination in the ELCA.