



Name: Derek and Jane Waller

Location: Diocese of Toliara, Madagascar

Our call: To make disciples and encourage young Christians

Our role: Derek is the diocesan coordinator of disciple making. Jane is exploring possible roles in adult education while also working alongside Derek.

Dear friends,

“We have come to worship him!”
Matthew 2:2

It was our second morning in Toliara. Just before 6am, everyone on the cathedral compound was making their way silently to the cathedral. The sun is already warm as we join them. Once inside we scatter to quiet corners around the building. A hymn is announced and all sing, some in harmony, and the building fills with praise. After 10 minutes of singing, silence once more descends and all open their Bibles and read. In the last 10 minutes the leader calls us to quiet prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and intercession before ending with a concluding prayer.

At 6.30am, we move out of the building – the first person standing by the door greets the second (salama! peace!) who then takes their place next to them. The third greets the first two and takes their place and this continues until all have greeted one another and formed a circle. After a few words from Bishop Todd we disperse.

This 30 minutes with God is part of the life of the cathedral community, a daily rhythm, taking place every day except Sunday.

It is early days – we write after three weeks here – but we sense that worship is the heartbeat of the Diocese of Toliara. The stones of the cathedral shout out the central place of praise. Opened in 2016 it is a large and beautiful building. The outside is finished in an almost white local stone. The inside is open and spacious without pillars to mar the view of the imposing altar with a simple large cross behind. On our first Sunday we worshipped in the cathedral.

The tradition is higher than we are used to. There was no denying the reverence with which Holy Communion was celebrated.

There were surprises too. At the peace everyone held hands and sang a song of peace, swaying from side to side. And during



Top: People leaving the cathedral after Sunday worship

Above: The cathedral at 6am prayers



Above left: Sakaraha church

Above right: The beautiful gifts that we were given at Sakaraha.



communion we sang with great gusto the revival hymn “There is power in the blood” – the most popular song during communion in our time in South Sudan!

A memorable moment for us came at the end of the worship. We were invited forward to be warmly welcomed by the congregation. The bishop then asked the two of us to hold out our hands ready to receive. Everyone rubbed their hands together to get them hot and then clapped 10 times before pushing their hands towards us, sending their blessing to us. A clap blessing is a first for us!

Not all the churches are grand like the cathedral. On Advent Sunday we were invited to accompany Bishop Todd to a confirmation two hours’ drive away in the town of Sakaraha. The journey gave us our first proper glimpse of the countryside. As we travelled north east we gradually climbed and the countryside turned

from spiny forest made up of dense low bushes, adapted to dry weather, to more open savanna. The further we travelled we saw more evidence of crops being planted and larger trees growing. We passed through several small towns very similar to those in other parts of Africa, with simple mud dwellings and basic shops. It had rained in some places during the day and on the way home we saw naked children bathing in the puddles along the roadside – any water is precious.

The church in Sakaraha was down a dusty dirt road on the edge of the town. It was small and simple with stone walls and a metal roof, holding around a hundred people – and very hot. The worship was alive and the singing loud – how the Malagasy love to sing at the top of their voices. There were around 18 confirmation candidates, women, teenage girls (dressed in white and veiled), two men and a boy. The bishop led the worship with reverence and spoke engagingly and with humour to the candidates.

After the service each candidate was photographed with the bishop and their family and supporters; all held their certificates and new

Bible proudly to the camera. There was no doubt that this day meant much to them. Towards the end of the four-hour service Archdeacon Henry presented us with gifts which showed how much our presence was appreciated.

Afterwards all were fed the Malagasy staple of a large helping of rice with a little sauce. Before we ate, we were invited along with Bishop Todd to the Archdeacon’s home, which is next to the church, for cocktails! Cocktails turned out to be delicious nibbles made by his wife Olivia, along with Coke and Fanta. He had organised this extra celebration for his two nieces who were confirmed that day and he had invited their school friends and neighbours.

In these first weeks we’ve felt like babies, unable to understand or be understood. Very few Malagasy speak any English at all. We speak and people look mystified; they speak and we haven’t a clue what they are saying. Yet worship communicates beyond words. We join in silent prayer together and we sense that God is among us. People pray for us and we don’t understand the words but know we are being

PRAYER AND PRAISE



Above: Bishop Todd confirming one of the teenage girls

blessed. The hymns make no sense but the singing lifts our hearts. And best of all bread and wine need no language. The body of Christ is available to all and we receive gladly alongside our brothers and sisters here.

The Diocese of Toliara, led by the bishop, is committed to evangelism and church growth. We'll be excited to learn more about this in the coming months. But we are very glad that our first impression is that this Diocese puts worshipping God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, first. It's not that we find worship natural. We often prefer to be busy doing rather than worshipping (or sleeping rather than waking early

to pray!). And genuine worship means shifting the focus away from ourselves onto God and that's not easy because our lives naturally revolve around ourselves. But deep down we know that we are most fully human when we are worshipping.

We are then in a right relationship with ourselves, the world and most importantly, our Lord. Putting God first puts our lives in the right order.

So with the help of God and the encouragement of the worshipping community here, we pledge ourselves to prayer and worship. We join with the church in Toliara, the suffering church in South Sudan and the wise men in worshipping the Christ. May we encourage you to do the same!

With our love in Christ

Derek & Jane

You can give online to Derek and Jane at:
churchmissionsociety.org/waller



Contact details:

revdwaller@gmail.com
janewaller@gmail.com

Left: St Patrick's Cathedral - just 100 metres from our room