

Derek and Jane Waller

Link Letter no. 14 | December 2019

churchmissionsociety.org/waller

CHURCH
MISSION
SOCIETY



The call in action

Dear friends,

Every now and then something really good happens in our lives and all we can do is say, "Thank you, Lord." That's how we feel about our friendship with Florent.

In September 2018, Bishop Todd suggested that we speak informally to evangelist Florent about the vacant role of assistant discipleship coordinator. These chats together often ended in laughter because we couldn't understand him nor he us. We took the laughter (rather than frustration) as a sign that we would be able to muddle through together. And so it has proved. He's gradually learnt to decipher our flawed Malagasy and we have tuned in (at least some of the time) to his language.

Florent moved from the north of the diocese to Toliara with his wife, Justine, and their four children in October 2018. Since then we and Florent have travelled the length and breadth of the diocese leading Rooted in Jesus training conferences. We've guided him through his first ever flight – how do you explain to an alarmed Malagasy that turbulence doesn't mean that the plane is about to fall apart? We've let him in on the delights of Marmite – we don't think he will try it again. We've watched him, like many Malagasy, consume huge mounds of rice and then looked on in amazement as he crunched through chicken bones!

For many years Florent has been a full time evangelist in the diocese. Evangelists play a key role in planting and nurturing new churches. This year, Bishop Todd invited Florent to become a permanent deacon. Florent stayed with us the night before his ordination and we helped him by ironing and adjusting the fit of his clerical clothes. On 25 August we shared his joy and that of his family as he was ordained. Here was recognition of the quality of his life and his gifts for ministry.

What makes Florent so special?

Prayer: When he arrived at our home after we had been away for a month, Florent's first action was to take off his cap, bow his head and thank God for our safe return. Prayer is part of his very being, as natural to Florent as breathing. So we've prayed together for the sick and the possessed, at the start of a long journey and over a cup of tea. We've asked him to pray when our children have needed prayer. Florent has the heart of a pastor and that heart is revealed when he prays.

Scripture: On the days that we work together, we take it in turns to read a short passage of Scripture. Florent's choice is always thoughtful and meaningful to him, and often to us too. Scripture feeds and nourishes him and in turn, in his teaching and preaching, he feeds others with the bread of life.

A common mind: Here is a wonder. How can a Malagasy brought up in the rainforest of eastern Madagascar, two days' walk from the nearest road, with limited opportunities for education, and a British missionary couple find themselves

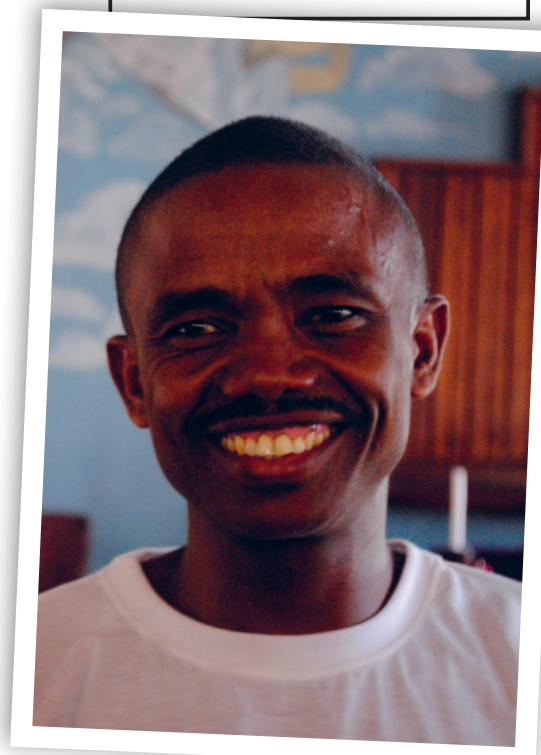


Name: Derek and Jane Waller

Location: 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.



Florent

Continued over the page

in agreement on so much? On training courses we all seem to know when things are going well and when they need adjusting. Like us, he understands that growing disciples is a long and costly process. Changing long-held beliefs about spirit and ancestor worship will not happen overnight. We know that there are no easy answers, only the Spirit of God working through our faithful service.

Family values: We've observed how close several Christian leaders are to their families. The wives of clergy often work hand in hand with their husbands. They are affectionate to their children and dedicated to their care and education. Florent is no exception. He and his wife sacrifice much so that their eldest son can study at university and their younger children have the uniforms and equipment they need for school.

Fun: There is usually a smile on Florent's face. Jane teaches Florent English and there is often laughter as he tries out new words. He also gently teases us about our Malagasy but underneath he is very encouraging. When Derek preached his first sermon in Malagasy, Florent couldn't be there but his wife Justine came to cheer Derek on.

So we thank God for Florent and for his friendship and partnership in the gospel. We ask you to pray for him. Since his ordination, alongside his discipleship duties, Bishop Todd has appointed him as deacon in charge of Fenoarivo, a parish of several churches. Fenoarivo is a few hours' travel to the south of Toliara along very bumpy roads. He makes the journey there and back each weekend. Pray for Florent and us as we seek to put together a programme for discipleship workshops for 2020, building on the training we have completed. Pray for Florent and his grasp of English and the improvement in his skills of administration.

Which has more lasting value – implementing programmes or investing in relationships?

We often reflect on this question. Of course, they are not necessarily opposed to each other but often go hand in hand. But they can be in tension. We can put the completion of a programme before the well-being of those implementing it. We can invest all our energy in the programme and not the participants. We complete the programme but lives are not changed. We tick all the boxes but nothing is different.

As we engage with this question in the light of the New Testament, we see that Jesus, and Paul after him, had a clear vision – a glorious programme for the salvation, reconciliation and new creation of all things. Yet they never let this purpose detract from their relationships. On the contrary, their vision was worked out through their deep investment in relationships.

With our love in Christ,

Derek and Jane

Photos from top to bottom: Florent, Justine and their children; The ordination of Florent Benja and Gaston by Bishops Todd and Samitiana; In a church in his new parish; With friends visiting the famous avenue of baobabs



GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

Did you know that CMS has an online hub full of free mission resources to help you put your call into action? Videos, audio interviews, prayer materials, theological journals, mission partner stories and church resources... it has everything you need to go deeper in mission: churchmissionsociety.org/resources

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

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

Contact details:
revdwaller@gmail.com
janewaller@gmail.com

Church Mission Society is a mission community acknowledged by the Church of England Registered Company No. 6985330 and Registered Charity No. 1131655 (England and Wales) and SC047163 (Scotland).