

## MADAGASCAR REGION

Official Languages: **French and Malagasy**

### Vision Statement

*The Triune God has called us from diverse nations and cultures to be witnesses of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to form an intercultural community that lives as a sign of ecclesial universality and human fraternity.*

### Mission Statement

*Imitating Jesus as our model, we commit ourselves to prophetic dialogue with adherents to traditional religiosity and with the poor and marginalized. In their midst we give caring pastoral attention to Christian families and to the youth.*

### 1. Societal Setting

Madagascar's population is estimated at approximately 24.4 million, with over 60% below the age of 24 years and a median age of 19.5 years. Life expectancy is 66 years, with some 75% of the people living below the poverty line. About 65% of the population is literate, and nearly one-third lives in urban areas. Agriculture provides about 26% of the country's gross domestic product, industry gives some 16%, and nearly 60% is attributed to the service sector. Its people are a multicultural and multiracial mix: Malayo-Indonesian (Merina and related Betsileo),



Cotiers (mixed African, Malayo-Indonesia, and Arab ancestry - Betsimisaraka, Tsimihety Antaisaka, Sakalava), French, Indian, Creole, and Comoran. Christians account for 41% of the population (23% Catholics), with 52% following indigenous beliefs and 7% are Muslims.

After a political crisis started in 2009 when a non-elected president took the reins of the country and prolonged the transitional period until the end of 2013, the country finally has an elected president who took office on January 25, 2014. However, people are disappointed when, after some years in power, the present administration has not done much to improve the situa-

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tion of the country. It has instead perpetuated gross corruption in the government.

Corruption in the government, particularly in the judiciary and police/gendarmerie, remains so unchecked that people are losing faith in these institutions. Instead of handing over criminals to the police and the courts, people in some areas are resorting to extra-judicial killings. There were also cases when people attacked the gendarmerie when the gendarmes freed recently

**(Our) task is to promote peace and order in the communities through dialogue and formation.**

\_\_\_\_\_ captured bandits or criminals after receiving money from them. Insecurity remains a big problem in many areas. The inefficiency of the police and gendarmes coupled, with the increase in poverty, drive people to resort to banditry.

Poverty is getting worse. There is not much palpable government support to help the people. The effects of climate change add to this worsening situation as longer dry seasons and droughts are being felt everywhere. This has lessened the productivity of farmers and could lead to famine in some areas. Many people are still practicing the slash-and-burn system, destroying forests and plants. Officials in the higher echelon of the government give permission to foreign miners, mostly Chinese, to exploit several areas causing irreparable damage, particularly to rivers and farming lands.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

The Church of Madagascar can be considered as a Church of the laity. With only a few priests, the Church in Madagascar relies on lay leaders in leading its numerous chapels or mission stations. Sunday celebrations are usually presided over by catechists. This active participation of the laity can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly during the time when reigning monarchs expelled all Catholic foreign missionaries. Lay leaders, particularly through the leadership of a lay woman, Victoire Rasoamanarivo, now beatified, preserved the faith through the active work of evangelization. Upon their return, missionaries were surprised to find not only a lively Church, but a Church whose members had increased.

At present the Church in Madagascar has 5 archdioceses and 17 dioceses. The SVDs are present in five arch/dioceses: the archdioceses of Fianarantsoa and Antananarivo, and the dioceses of Mananjary, Antsirabe, and Ambatondrazaka. In 2017, the country celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relationships between Madagascar and the Vatican. The Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, visited the country on this occasion.

The number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life is very promising. Forming these candidates and financially supporting them, however, are huge challenges for the local Church. Financially, the local Church depends upon external support.

The four major Christian Churches (FJKM / Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic) have a long tradition of cooperation, and they are bonded together in the so-called National Council of Christian Churches (FFKM). FFKM is considered a strong pressure group in the social and political life of the people. Recently, however, the credibility of FFKM is eroding due to the impression that several of its members are so embroiled in politics that they have become partisans. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Madagascar does not fail to address themselves to the faithful through their letters, exposing the situation of the country. However, their voice is not effectively reaching the faithful in the grassroots.

Muslims are getting more aggressive in their proselytizing activities. They are building more madras schools and mosques, paying people to wear Muslim garb, etc. Recent efforts of the Bishops' conference to dialogue with them prove fruitless as those invited for the dialogue try to proselytize even the Bishops. In general, there is a good relationship established with those practicing traditional religions, though some mistrust, particularly on their part remains. Greater effort has to be made for us to better know their beliefs and deepen our dialogue effort with them.

The intercultural living of the confreres in Madagascar is the most peculiar feature of SVD mission presence in the country. Though many congregations have also several nationalities in their ranks, the SVDs' ways of mixing different nationalities and their capacity to live together are remarkable.

### 3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	10	37.0	44.4	40.5
<b>Education</b>	0	0	3.5	0
Schools	0	-		
Universities	0	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	2	7.4	5.6	2.4
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	2	7.4	11.1	7.1
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	7	26.0	11.5	21.4
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	3	-		

#### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	6	22.0	18.2	23.8
Retired/Sick	0	0	3.5	0
Others	0	0	3.2	4.8

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Most of the SVDs here work in the parishes. We have seven parishes and hundreds of mission stations. In some of these parishes or mission stations confreres help in developing mission schools. We have one formation house in Fianarantsoa, with its extension in Antsirabe. We also take care of the Diocesan Catechetical Center in Mananjary and the JPIC ministry is very active in this diocese in helping people.

### Characteristic Dimensions

**Biblical Apostolate:** In the parishes, biblical groups were established and Bible sharing is being encouraged among the people. Different communities prepare and study for months in order to participate in Bible quizzes which are held during big events in the parishes. Biblical formation is also being offered in some of these parishes.

**Mission Animation:** Mission promotion is done primarily through our intercultural living and active work with the people. Mission awareness is also promoted through talks or conferences in the parishes.

**JPIC:** Some groups are being formed and organized in some of the parishes regarding JPIC, whose task is to promote peace and order in the communities through dialogue and formation. Some parishes are also active in planting trees and educating people about the environment.

**Communication:** Communication is particularly stressed in the capacity of each confrere to

preach the Gospel and in his ability to develop close relationships with the people.

### Priorities among Congregational Directions

**Primary and New Evangelization:** Our action plan for this priority focuses mainly on how to better prepare ourselves for our task, which in general is being accomplished. As for our work, the usual regular community visitations, particularly in areas with more than 60 mission stations, and the annual pilgrimage to the center of the parish or district are being continued and are very beneficial in strengthening the faith of the people. A confrere in the place where traditional customs are strong, tries to adapt these customs to our Christian beliefs. Through this effort, several traditional kings have embraced the faith.

**Promotion of the Culture of Life:** Our action plan focuses on educating people about life. This is emphasized particularly in our preaching and in helping particularly those women who contemplate abortion or who have difficulties after giving birth to twins, a taboo in a particular ethnic group in the diocese of Mananjary. These actions provide assistance to several families in difficulties, helping them decide to keep their children instead of abandoning them.

**Family and Youth:** Through the different organizations of the parishes, youth and family formation is being fostered. These organizations give the needed support group and right referrals, especially to the youth.

**Social justice and Poverty Eradication:** In Mananjary where the JPIC of the SVD is very active, the help provided to the people, especially in the villages, is greatly appreciated. By educating people about their rights, helping them to procure basic documents like birth certificates, and helping them particularly in their legal woes, the JPIC ministry has helped a good number of poor people.

**Integrity of Creation:** In this place where the slash-and burn system is still widely practiced, the initiative of some of our parishes to lead their parishioners to plant trees and educate them about the importance of protecting the environment are very much welcome. These efforts have resulted in some hectares of land being planted with trees.

### Collaboration with Other Congregations

The SSpS are not present In Madagascar. We have, however, a very close collaboration with other religious, especially those in our parishes. To assure a more coordinated ministry, pastoral programs are planned with them and done with their close cooperation. Other than these, depending on the communities, we have common recollections, meals or celebrations.

### SVD Lay Partners

As a region, there is still no official initiative to form a lay partner group. However, confreres in the parishes are encouraged to form groups of SVD friends. At present there are three parishes

that have their own group of SVD friends. Their number is still limited and they are still in the process of knowing our Society better, especially its charism, through the help of the inputs given by some of the confreres. They are also actively involved in our parishes and some groups hold regular Bible sharing.

### 4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clerics	26	23	20
Brothers (final vows)	1	2	1
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	1	0
Scholastics	2	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	44.6	42.5	39.9
Nationalities	8	12	9

**Spirituality:** Communities in the region follow a program of common daily prayers and mass. Though not regular in some communities, Bible sharing is being practiced. The annual retreat is done alternately with the diocese and with the region as a whole.

**Community Life:** Regular community meetings are being encouraged as well as community recreation.

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**Leadership:** A leadership formation program was held once in the region during the past three years. Fostering leadership is particularly done through giving concrete responsibilities to confreres in their communities.

**Finance:** Confreres make an effort to live a simple lifestyle. The parishioners in our parishes are encouraged to financially support their pastors. Communities with lands for cultivation are enjoined to make them productive. The region, on the other hand, is trying also to develop its lands to make them profitable at least for the near future.

**Formation:** The formation team is in the process of gathering the suggestions of confreres concerning initial formation and making their own proper evaluation of the program, which will be discussed during the assembly in 2017. Concerning ongoing formation, there is a regular gathering of those under 5 years in perpetual vows, and recently there was also a gathering of confreres who celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> years in vows or of ordination. During the assemblies, certain formational input on different topics is also given.