

Seeds in Good Soil: Training Pastors in Holistic Ministry

An Update of the Fruits, Vegetables, and Environmental Education Program (FVEE) of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM)

Dear Friends,

In the parable of the sower (Luke 8), not all seeds grow and bear fruits, for a variety of reasons. But “other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” Teaching seminary students in Madagascar about growing vegetables and fruits and growing native trees for environmental education is much like this parable. One might think that the seminary students and their spouses who take the course taught by the FVEE might not necessarily be particularly interested in growing fruits and vegetables. But the FJKM believes in holistic ministry, in caring for people spiritually and also physically. The training provides the students skills that can be applied to help their families, their churches, and the people in their communities, many of whom do not have enough food to eat.

When the seminary students graduate, they get sent to the far reaches of Madagascar and often pastor 5 or even 10 or more rural congregations. They take with them a piece of paper from the FVEE that says “good for 10 fruit trees, redeemable any time in the next 3 years”. Many wait until their families are settled in their new communities before returning to Ivato Seminary to get their trees.

My colleagues and I have long recognized that a shortcoming in our training program is that follow-up with the new pastors is insufficient. The basic problem is that travel in Madagascar is very expensive (fuel costs over \$4/gallon) and the pastors are dispersed far and wide. So, it is just not feasible to visit all the pastors who have received trees. But we keep our ears open and take advantage of opportunities to meet with pastors to learn about what they are doing.

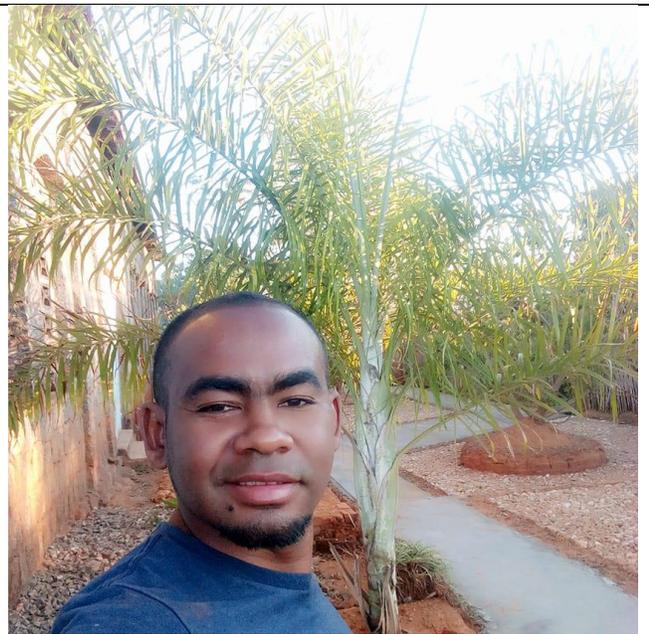


Pastor Tafita Razafindranaivo with one of his lemon trees at Angarazy.

One such opportunity was a meeting of the Evangelism Department at Manakara in SE Madagascar in September 2021. My colleague Rolland Razafiarison was invited to speak on behalf of the FVEE at the gathering. While there, he met many

of our former students. One of these, Pastor Tafita Razafindranaivo, is an evangelist at Angarazy near Morombe in SW Madagascar. While in seminary he was greatly influenced by a video Rolland made where Mme Voahangy from Beambiaty told about what it takes to successfully grow tangerines. Among the trees Pastor Tafita received from the FVEE were 7 grafted citrus trees. He started growing rootstocks using seeds from a locally available citrus and began grafting his own trees using scions from the 7 trees. He eventually grafted 1500 trees. Though Pastor Tafita has struggled to get the trees enough water and fertilizer, 700 of these trees are now producing fruits, grown on 7.5 acres of land. Lemons and oranges are doing the best. He is now sending citrus to be sold in Toliara, a big city 200 km to the south.

Another pastor who applied what he learned in seminary about growing trees is Pastor Laurius Velondeha from Dabolava near Miandrivazo in western Madagascar. My colleagues and I visited Pastor Laurius at Dabolava in 2018 on a trip with the head of the Evangelism Department, Pastor Triomphe Randriamisaina. Germain Andrianaivoson told me recently via WhatsApp, “On that trip, we were 1 for however many” meaning that of the half-dozen or so evangelists we visited on that trip, only Pastor Laurius showed an interest in the trees we provided and in integrated growing trees into his ministry. He got 4 trees from his allotment from seminary in 2017, then 14 others when my colleagues and I visited in 2018. He got more trees from the FVEE in January 2020 and other trees from other sources. Now there are about 20 trees growing around the church. Among those who have been impressed is the mayor of Dabolava, who has asked Pastor Laurius to do trainings for people in the community and to provide trees for others to grow.



A living Christmas tree: a flamboyant tree native to Madagascar planted by Pastor Laurius Velondeha at his church at Dabolava.

Pastor Laurius with a native palm (*Dypsis madagascariensis*) planted next to his church at Dabolava.

A few days after Rolland spoke to the evangelists at the meeting in Manakara, many of these same pastors went to the Mango Palace at Mahatsinjo for a training. Rolland and Germain led the 3-day fruit tree training from 28-30 September for 28 pastors and 24 volunteer technicians. The plan was to train the pastor and a lay person from all the evangelism posts from areas of the country where mangos do well. Many of the participants are from southern Madagascar, where many people are currently severely malnourished from lack of food. Pastors Tafita and Laurius were among those who took part in the training. The trainees learned to grow and propagate fruit trees. They practiced grafting mangos and citrus. Each of the trainees took home 6 trees: 3 grafted mangos, a grafted avocado, a citrus, and one other fruit tree. Many left the training with enthusiasm for doing more to use the potential of fruit trees, especially mangos, to help

alleviate hunger. Pastor Tafita plans to start growing and grafting mangos. Pastor Laurius is planning to set up a fruit nursery. Rolland and Germain told me that they expect good results from at least 20 of the 28 evangelism posts.



Training for pastors and volunteer technicians from FJKM evangelism posts: trainees preparing fruit trees to take home, 30 September 2021.

Like farmers everywhere who sow seeds, my colleagues and I have been working to increase the number and percentage of sown seeds that grow and bear fruit. We have spent years laying the foundation needed to help low-income farmers take advantage of fruit growing to get on a path out of poverty. The foundation work has involved gathering a collection of promising fruit tree varieties, developing propagation techniques, setting up nurseries and planting orchards, building the Mango Palace at Mahatsinjo into a place where trainings can be held, and developing the volunteer technician program. These efforts are now beginning to bear fruit. This past year the FVEE held 11 trainings for FJKM pastors, volunteer technicians, church members, and farmers. Two of these trainings had 50+ participants. This work will be continued in 2022, with an emphasis on extension into southern Madagascar where poverty is at its most extreme.

In August, the FJKM General Assembly (Synoda Lehibe) voted to extend the work of the FVEE to all of FJKM's synods in Madagascar. This is affirmation of the FVEE's work to promote growing fruits and vegetables as means to help reduce poverty and malnutrition. It gives the FVEE an opportunity to expand beyond what my colleagues and I ever imagined. We will begin training representatives from each synod in 2022.

My colleagues and I look forward to a few years from now when the people who participate in these trainings will start getting mangos and other fruits from the trees they plant and when others in their communities will be growing fruit trees as well.

All of this could not be done without your prayers and financial support. Many thanks to all who are supporting this ministry.

Peace in Christ,

Dan Turk

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