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| |  | | --- | | May 2017 Newsletter from Ben Smith, Young Adult in Global Mission, serving in Madagascar. | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/0b0cb761-b238-4d51-8d9c-8ae7d128a619.jpg | | The Lutheran church near where I teach in Vangaindrano (there are several Lutheran churches in the town). It is currently been renovated and expanded, as visible on the right. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | To Vangaindrano!             Wednesday I traveled to Vangaindrano. In addition to teaching in Farafangana, I teach at the hospital, seminary, and the school in Vangaindrano. Originally, I was traveling to Vangaindrano to teach every three weeks, but this last time it had been over 4 months since I last taught there.  In January there was an outbreak of plague in some of the rural villages surrounding Vangaindrano; it may not have been a problem in the town, but since I teach at the hospital, the decision was made that I should wait it out.             After a late night preparing the extra lesson plans, I struck out at first light, 5:30 AM to catch the first taxi-brousse. In the past I’ve caught a brousse as early as 5:00 AM but Wednesday, I was the first one to arrive at the brousse station – the brousse doesn’t leave till it’s full so I settled in for a wait. People started setting up their food stands across the road from the station. They’d arrive, with a man pulling a rickshaw next to them; the rickshaw’s seat is pilled with everything for the food stand: ingredients, cups and spoons, a mat for the table, and a charcoal stove is hanging from a hook on the back corner of the rickshaw.             I bought a cup of tea and two mofo baolina, balls of fried dough not unlike a donut, from one stand for breakfast. I met a man named Tom, we passed the time talking and although, as usual, I didn’t understand most of what was said, we enjoyed each other’s company. At 7:15, after about an hour and a half of waiting, the taxi-brousse was ready to depart and all twenty-two of us passengers piled into the van. It’s about 55 miles to Vangaindrano or a two-hour drive; as we pass through villages, the brousse often stops to drop people off and then pick up new passengers. | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/1e7e583b-1ac8-4f33-aaf2-609a6b1312a2.jpg | | My friend Tom whom I met while waiting for my taxi browse. He is holding the shovel he uses for work. |  |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/91da4138-ca83-48ff-849a-457b52743c44.jpg | | Food stands across the street from the taxi brousse station in Farafangana. Farafangana has two stations; the one for traveling to Vangaindrano is located outside of town and is little more than a line of three or four busses on the side of the road. | | | | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/91c1aa14-112e-43bd-937b-f1136f096349.jpg | | The taxi-brousse station in Vangaindrano. It's located in the center of town, right next to the market, and is thus always busy and crowded. |  |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/bae40ee8-a738-48d8-8863-2aa557e3d3cf.jpg | | The long steps leading to the Lutheran church in Vangaindrano. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | I arrived in Vangaindrano at about 9:30. The brousse station is right next to the market, a pretty busy part of town. Here there’s a number of stalls selling general goods, vegtables, hardware: across the street there’s a man with a whole collection of pipes, gears, and other bits of machinery laid out on a large cloth on the ground for sale. Like in Farafangana, there’s also a number of simple street food stands set up with tea, coffee, various fried snacks. I pick up a glass of juice and a candied coconut wafer to help get me going again after dozing on the brousse ride. I walk down the road before turning off and going up about a hundred and twenty steps to arrive at one of the Lutheran churches in town. Many of the buildings of the Lutheran Church in Vangaindrano are gathered together into a kind of enclave on this hill. The church is as one end of the hill top, up on the highest point. This year they have been doing a lot of construction work on the church, expanding both sides of the building so now it’s about twice as wide as it was originally. Behind the church and down a small slope is the Lutheran School in Vangaindrano – College Lutheran Vangaindrano – equivalent to a K through 12 school in the States. Off to the left, on the side of the hill, sprawls SALFA Vangaindrano, the Lutheran hospital. Continuing past the school, and across a short bridge is STPL, the Lutheran Seminary, located on it’s own little island hilltop from which it looks out towards the river over residential districts and fields.             Almost as soon as I’d reached the church, I started running to friends and students from the seminary. “Where have you been?” “It’s been such a long time!” “Welcome back.” “You’re here to teach?” Some were speaking in English, others in Malagasy. Next it was visiting the director at the hospital and seminary to set up my teaching schedule for the next two days before my eleven o’clock class with the teachers from the school. Later this month the teachers will be going on a study retreat at a national park; so next week they are having a show and fundraiser. So they asked me to help them rehearse one of their skits in English, a skit many of you may be familiar with from day camp, “If I was not a counselor, a \_\_\_\_\_ I would be.” Although for us it was, “If I was not a teacher…” | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/dc38992b-04bd-4935-9e97-e01995694585.jpg | | Some of the older students at College Lutheran Vangaindrano dancing during the December school celebration. All of the classes, from the kindergarten through the teachers, had prepared a song, dance, or skit. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | After class I meet up with one of my host brothers, Saky (pronounced like Shaq, the basketball player), for lunch. He is studying to be a pastor at STPL, and I am able to stay with him when I visit Vangaindrano. Saky lives in a single room on the seminary campus with a roommate, a fellow seminary student. At about 10 feet square, it’s cozy but serviceable. Outside chickens, ducks, and turkeys wander around freely, they come and they go. There's a phrase in Malagasy: Akoho mahalala mody - The chickens know home. Almost everywhere you go in Madagascar you just see random chickens and baby chicks, even just nosing around in the gutter on the side of the street. It seems like there's absolutely no system of poultry ownership but the chickens apparently know and come back home every night.             Saky cooks lunch outside over a charcoal stove – cooked cucumber and tiny, krill-sized shrimp served, of course, with rice. To drink we have ranan’apango or burnt rice water. After the rice is cooked, it’s scooped out of the pot leaving behind what’s burnt on the bottom and sides of the pot. The pot is filled up with water and put back on the stove to make what is like a burnt rice tea. There’s only one chair around the table so Saky sits on edge of his bed while we eat lunch. After lunch there’s time to rest and take a nap before my evening class at the hospital. After class, I return for dinner, which is rice and leftover cucumber and shrimp from lunch. After some reading and lesson plan preparation it’s time to sleep. | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/1d63ba44-ade9-47f8-9b34-10ea1534f28f.jpg | | STPL, the seminary in Vangaindrano. The large building on the left is the primary classrooms. |  |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/7c9d5d38-ae3c-4bf9-8002-a2103b8e5089.jpg | | SALFA Vangandrano. SALFA is the largest, Lutheran run healthcare system in the world. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | The next day began with a walk back into town to buy tea and mofo baolina for breakfast. Then I’m hurrying back up the steps to the church and the seminary for morning chapel at 7:30. Afterwards I have class with one group of students at the seminary where we go over the calendar, the church calendar, and some holidays, both secular and religious, for which we discuss different traditions.  At 11 o’clock it’s another class at the Lutheran School and afterwards it’s time for lunch. Just after one o’clock I meet with the regular English teacher at the seminary; he’s invited me to observe one of his classes at another school across town. It’s a high school class, we have some fun practicing introductions and asking each other questions. Although it’s a two hour class, I have to leave after only an hour to make it back to the seminary for my four o’clock class, however before I leave the students ask if we can get a picture together as a class, even the school principle walked over to join the picture (unfortunately I had forgotten to bring my camera).             After my second class at the seminary, it’s down to the hospital, SALFA, for a five-thirty class with the director and some doctors but that is cut short when the power goes out at about five-forty. | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/d65d2b2b-d88d-44ca-a608-f479c3231d32.jpg | | The house where I stay with Saky in Vangaindrano. We live on the left side downstairs. Another seminary student and family live on the right side of the house. |  |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/a98b89a7-a326-4096-9bd2-1d3370b08cda.jpg | | The view from the back of the seminary, overlooking the river and rice fields around Vangaindrano. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | I’m sitting outside near the charcoal stove while Saky is cooking dinner, some small fish to be served over rice. Our neighbor, who lives on the other side of the bottom floor of the building, is out with his two-year-old daughter. The night is cloudy with very little light so my headlamp, on a low setting, is perched on my knee providing some light for us. A little bit later, our neighbor’s daughter starts waving at her shadow from my headlamp and playing with her shadow. I turn up my headlamp so the shadow is easier to see but the stronger shadow frightens her and sends her running into her dad’s arms. She keeps peeking out at the shadows though and is shortly back to waving at her own shadow. I make some shadow puppets, including a chicken and a rabbit, for both her amusement and the adults.             It’s now Friday morning and I have to return to Farafangana for my class there this afternoon. I go down into the town to the brousse station, but before I get on a brousse I wander through the market to buy volandalana, literally fruit of the road. It’s a Malagasy tradition that whenever you travel, you bring back fruit from wherever you’ve been as a gift. I buy thirty oranges, tangerines, and mandarins to bring back for my family (half my family was out of town traveling and it still took us less than two days to eat all that fruit; we eat a lot of fruit here). It’s about an hour wait at the brousse station before I leave and then a two hour drive back to my hometown, Farafangana. I’ll be back again in another three weeks. | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://gallery.mailchimp.com/c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c/images/642b7542-40a4-4c1a-bff3-10904c692752.jpg | | The bumpy road back to Farafangana. On top of the other brousse you can see a rickshaw, or pousse-pousse as they are called here. Here in Madagascar anything, from a pousse-pousse to poultry or a live pig, is perfectly normal to see on top of a brousse. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | If you would like to support me, the YAGM program, and the work that we are doing, please donate at [https://community.elca.org/yagm/give](http://elca.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c83b680f4bd4191c1102f675c&id=67e80b716a&e=9b63414546). Thank you. | | | | |  | | --- | |  | | |