



# NEWS BULLETIN

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## The "Good News Hospital" at Mandritsara in Madagascar

As part of our first 2024 "More on Missions" focus our elder Brian Rawlings gave us an illustrated presentation about the work of the Good News Hospital in the village of Mandritsara on Madagascar. He explained how he first became involved and how God is at work there. At that time Brian's wife Sheila was employed by the Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) in Newbury and they were both members at Newbury Baptist Church.

The AEF Personnel Director, attended the same church and on one occasion in 1993 she gave a talk there about the work of the AEF. She spoke about some land that had just been purchased by AEF in a town called Mandritsara on the island of Madagascar and the "*buy a brick*" campaign underway to raise funds for the building of a medical unit there. As she was speaking Brian heard a distinct message from God – "*one day, you will be going there!*" He told us "This was not something that normally happened to me, but the call was so clear and unequivocal that I had no doubts that it would happen."

The money raised was enough for Phase 1, consisting of a basic out-patient medical centre, a laboratory, X-ray, pharmacy and a small basic operating theatre. Building began in 1993 and it opened in May 1996. Whilst waiting for these facilities, AEF had hired a building adjacent to the bumpy grass airstrip in the centre of Mandritsara, which was used as a clinic. The hospital was called "*Hopitaly Vaovao Mahafaly*" (HVM) literally "*The hospital with news that makes people happy*" in short "*Good News Hospital.*"

Right from the very beginning, the priority was not on providing much needed medical care alone, but on reaching the people of Madagascar with the gospel, and because of this God has blessed and prospered the work there.

Brian took the maximum leave he was allowed and his employer kindly agreed to donate the survey instruments necessary, including a theodolite and have them air-freighted to Madagascar. Sheila, of course, working for AEF, had no problems in getting the time off. So, in mid-October 1996, their adventure began.

The area around Mandritsara was originally considered unreached by the gospel, one of the reasons it was selected for the work there. Most of the surrounding villages had never heard of Jesus, or even seen white foreigners!

Most of the people Brian and Sheila would need to deal with would only speak the local dialect or possibly Malagasy so he needed to have an interpreter. Thankfully they were accompanied by a Belgian missionary who had taken time out from furlough.

When they went to the airport to collect the survey instruments that had been air freighted over, customs didn't believe the value stated and asked for an extra £50 in duty to be paid. Sheila and Brian looked at each other – on his last day at work, someone had surprisingly given him £50 saying *"I am sure that something unexpected that you hadn't budgeted for will occur. This is to help you out!"* Brian comments *"What a marvellous God, who knew our needs in advance and met them in a wonderful way."*

Brian recalls *"Our arrival at Mandritsara on the grass airstrip caused quite a reception committee – many local children had rushed to see us, along with some of the hospital medical staff. The main purpose of my visit was to start the foundations for the Phase 2 buildings, so the next morning I was driven to the hospital."*

*My work involved setting out the lines of each excavation for the foundations of every building, supervising the digging of them out to the correct level, supervising the concreting of the foundations, then placing of granite blocks up to ground floor level, and finally concreting the ground floor slabs. I also needed to teach the use of the surveying instruments for the future when I was no longer there."*

The hospital is also a Training hospital for **African Christian surgeons** under the PAACS (Pan African Academy of Christian Surgeons) program. It's a 5 year program to train and disciple young African doctors to become highly skilled and compassionate surgeons who also love Jesus and want to make Him known.

There is now a surgical block with two operating theatres, an administration building, a classroom for training; a Community Health Department, a Maternity Department, ophthalmology, dental and physiotherapy facilities, more staff accommodation, and huts built for the families of patients to stay and look after them while they are bedridden as well as the laboratory, X-ray department, pharmacy and midwifery school.

The vast majority of the hospital staff are Malagasy Christians and the surgeons always pray with the patient before surgery. The hospital places a priority on the spiritual health as well as the physical health of its patients, so it employs a Spiritual Counsellor responsible for the spiritual vision of the Project and the care of its workers, and two other full-time evangelists.

They organise 40 personnel who preach the gospel in 5 waiting areas around the hospital at 7.30am each morning. In addition, they take services within each ward both morning and evening, as well as witnessing to patients and their families during the day. There are many testimonies of people turning to Jesus as they see the love and care given to them.

The work of the Good News Hospital has gone from strength to strength and has been wonderfully used by God. Some of the provisions have been truly miraculous and at all stages **He** has provided the necessary funding.

**The Maternity Unit** staff consists of a doctor, a senior midwife, 13 midwives and 3 assistants. They have 200 antenatal consultations each month, and deliver around 800 babies a year, and this number is growing. For every 1,000 babies born in Madagascar, 24 will not survive – a rate that is 9 times higher than the UK. However the unit urgently needed expanding and earlier this year our Broadstone Baptist Church Mission Council agreed to donate £4,500 towards the task. After only nine months the appeal for £360,000 for construction and equipment has been fulfilled! That's a measure of how God continues to bless this work!

**However the gospel work is not restricted to the hospital!**

**The Good News School** was set up in the town initially for the children of missionaries and staff who had moved from elsewhere in Madagascar. Its aim was to provide high quality Christian education in French, and started with 10 children. Now there are 425 children aged from 3 to 15 in 12 classes and a staff of 30, serving not just hospital staff, but also towns people, many of whom are prominent business and professional families, and including Muslims.

**The Voice of Good News Radio** broadcasts for 15 hours every day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. It has a staff of 5 plus a few volunteers, and has varied programmes giving Bible teaching as well as advice about food and money, etc. Their transmitter has a good range, and has many listeners.

**The Community Health Team** consists of 7 men and women who give talks in the hospital on health education, hygiene and sanitation. In addition, last year alone they visited over 85 villages for vaccinations, health education and to train local health workers, including 25 villages they visited multiple times in the year for evangelism and youth work and to support the local village churches. Visits made were up to 100Km away, in all conditions, on foot, by bicycle, motorbike or Land Rover.

**The Village Church Groups.** Six times a year they go out by helicopter to conduct 5 day missions, joined by the hospital evangelists. They all have a real passion for sharing Jesus, and because of their contacts, over 70 church groups have been planted in and around Mandritsara district. Supporting and training the leaders of these church groups is a priority. One remote village has a pastor who has himself planted a further 5 church groups.

Since that first visit in 1996 Brian has maintained an active interest in the work since their visit, supporting it prayerfully and financially and raising funds. He was a founding member of The Friends of Mandritsara Trust, a charity formed to take care of HVM's interests in the UK, to raise funds for the work, and send out suitable medical staff. He became a Trustee in January 2001, later becoming Company Secretary, and eventually retiring from both positions after 15 years in January 2016.

## Facts About Madagascar

- The World's 4<sup>th</sup> Largest Island
- Population of 30 million (14 million in 1996)
- 40% are under 15 years old
- One of the world's poorest countries

## Poverty in Madagascar

- 70% of population live on under \$2/day
- 25% of population are illiterate
- 41% have no access to clean water
- 15% have an adequate sanitation system
- Very few homes have fridges

## Religion in Madagascar

- 50% said to be nominal "Christians"
- Only 6% are evangelical Christians
- 43% follow witchcraft & ancestor worship
- 11% are unevangelised

## Hospital Statistics in 2024

- Out-patients see 80 patients a day
- 57 beds in 3 wards
- 1,900 operations are performed per year
- 450 cataract operations done each year
- Serves an area the size of Wales
- Population today is 321,000



Brian & Sheila in 1996



The Foundations for the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward



Original operating theatre in 1996



Gospel service to outpatients at HVM



Hospital staff devotions



Schoolchildren in the Good News School



Voice of "Good News" Radio



Community Health & Evangelism A



The hospital from the air in 2022



A women's ward at the hospital



PAACS Surgeon operating



PAACS training surgeons 2024



Critical Care Unit opened in 2022



Caesarean Section in new Maternity Unit