

Central Malagasy Conference

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Central Malagasy Conference is a subsidiary church administrative unit of the Indian Ocean Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The population of the Central Malagasy Conference (CMC) region is 7,068,650,¹ while the church membership is 47,687, congregating in 331 churches, 297 companies, and 148 branch Sabbath Schools. The conference has 42 ordained pastors, 16 authorized pastors, eight trainees, and seven pioneers. Its territory consists of 69,397 square kilometers.² There are 35 schools in this conference, staffed with more than 340 teachers. CMC uses four

FM radio stations to proclaim the gospel. These are located in Soamandrarinny Antananarivo, Faratsiho, Antsirabe, and Tsiroanomandidy. The conference also has a women's training center and a library.³

Origin of the Seventh day-Adventist Work in Madagascar⁴

Interest in evangelizing the island of Madagascar began at the dawn of the twentieth century.⁵ The South African Union Conference Council held in Cape Town from March 19-26, 1903, envisioned establishing four mission stations in Nyasaland (Malawi), Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Upper Nile (South Sudan), and Madagascar. On the other hand, the European Division also registered its interest in entering Madagascar through its leader, Louis R. Conradi, when he attended the General Conference Fall Council in Takoma Park, Maryland, at the end of



André Rasamoelina, Executive Secretary, in 1927.

Photo courtesy of Vonona Rakotondratsimba.

September 1912. He was granted his request for entering the Belgian Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo), Madagascar, and all French colonies in Africa, which they hoped to enter in 1914.⁶

On November 2, 1918, Adventism was introduced in Madagascar when André Rasamoelina, an inspector of Protestant schools, met a young man by the name of Antoine Maurice Tuyau, who had attended several Seventh-day Adventist meetings in Mauritius. Rasamoelina became interested while listening to Tuyau, and he wrote to Paul Badaut, a pioneer Seventh-day Adventist missionary in Mauritius, whose address Tuyau had given him. Badaut sent Rasamoelina's name and address to the General Conference in America. On December 8, 1918, J. L. Shaw wrote to Rasamoelina and sent him a package of *Present Truth*. In 1919 there was a further exchange of letters, and the Home Missionary Department (now Personal Ministries Department) sent him publications, including a copy of Ellen White's book *Steps to Christ*.⁷

Also, in 1919, in the document sent by the South African Union Conference to the General Conference in preparation for the creation of a division in Africa, a recommendation had been voted that the entire field south of the countries bordering the Mediterranean and Red Seas, including Madagascar, be put under its organization.⁸

Meanwhile, during 1920 and 1921, Rasamoelina translated the book *Steps to Christ* into Malagasy during his spare time. In July 1922, Marius Raspal, another Seventh-day Adventist missionary in Mauritius, spent ten days with Rasamoelina, giving him Bible studies. Later, in 1924, Raspal visited him twice. Then they decided to publish Rasamoelina's translated manuscript of *Steps to Christ*. The General Conference donated \$800 toward the publication.⁹ In 1925 a small bookshop was opened on Romaines Desfossés Street in Tananarive (now Antananarivo) to handle the distribution of 5,000 copies that were ready on June 22, 1925. In February 1926, Raspal and his wife went as missionaries from Mauritius to Madagascar. It was necessary to have government authorization to conduct evangelistic meetings, and this could only be obtained by submitting a petition signed by ten people. Because this was impossible, tracts were translated, printed, and sold in the bookshop. As conversations with customers turned into Bible studies, some people agreed to sign the petition for permission for a small group of people to pray together. According to Simone Ralalaharisoa,¹⁰ the granddaughter of Ramartine, the ten people who signed the petition were: Rabe Thomas (delegate of 5th Arrondissement in Manjakaray Antananarivo), Razafindralesa Jean de Dieu, Ratsarefadahy, Ranorovelo, Ramartine, Randrianasolo, Rajaonize, Ramiakabola, Razafitsara, and Rasamoelina André.

The first worship service was held in the home of Raspal, at Betania Villa, on October 2, 1926. The Marius Raspal family, M. Mason, Miss Haran, Labelle, André Rasamoelina, and Rajaonah attended the service. Madam Mason and her daughter also joined the group.¹¹

Persecution of the Adventist Pioneers in Madagascar

Pioneers experienced several challenges. Ralalaharisoa Simone (known as Mama Lala), the granddaughter of Granny Razanabelo Ramartine, tells what really happened at that time:

In 1926, Rasamoelina André and Ramiakabola Clément were detained at the police station in Antananarivo. As a woman, Razanabelo Ramartine was being taken into custody guard in her home. Why? They were accused of making trouble in trying to convince people to sign the petition. In this period, Madagascar was under France colonization. So, these three Malagasy Adventist pioneers were arrested for three days. Fortunately, Marius RASPAL and Antoine Tuyau came to the police station and convinced them that they are not agitators. Finally, the three defendants were released.¹²

Manjakaray, the First Adventist Church in Madagascar

After the arrest incident, the believers moved to the theater of Ramiakabola, in Bemitsinjo Manjakaray, near the current church. The theater became a worship place until 1927. At that time, artists: Ramiakabola, Razanamanga, Razafindrafara, and Ramartine, were members of the theater. They believed the gospel and became Adventist church members.

On Sabbath, August 6, 1927, the first church service at the Manjakaray church was held. On Tuesday August 23, 1927, Joseph Bureaud and his wife arrived in Antananarivo. The congregation was no longer able to pray in the theater, so they asked Ranorovelo, a midwife, who was the mother-in-law of Razanamanga, to give a piece of land to the church. The eldest son of Ranorovelo respond to their request and donated the land. The construction of the Manjakaray Adventist Church began. The first Seventh-day Adventist church building was inaugurated on Sabbath August 27, 1927, by Pastor Joseph Bureaud. The ceremony and the evangelistic meeting were attended by 400 people.

At the same time, the authorization for a small group to meet in Tsararay was granted on Sabbath August 26, 1927.¹³ On October 9, 1927, Marius Raspal baptized the first four Adventist converts in Madagascar. These were Madam Louisa Mason, Miss Mary Mason, André Rasamoelina (teacher), and Clément Ramiakabola (artist).¹⁴ History says the baptism took place in the Sisaony River. The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Manjakaray was organized on June 10, 1928. The executive committee was composed of Rajaonize, Rafaralahidimy, Sister Bureaud (elected as treasurer), Ramartine and Raveloarivaly (instructors), and Ramanantsialonina, who was elected as secretary.¹⁵ The Anosibe church followed that of Manjakaray, then Tsararay, and Ambohijafy-Itaosy. These are located in Antananarivo.¹⁶

Development of Adventism in Madagascar

At the end of October 1927, Marius Raspal went back to France and Pastor Joseph Bureaud from France was sent to lead the work in Madagascar. He was the first Adventist church president in Madagascar, André

Rasamoelina was the general secretary, and Ramiakabola Clément was treasurer. They were assisted by Albert Long of Italy and by active national lay workers. On April 15, 1928, 18 people were baptized in Ambatomena. In the spring of 1928, J. C. Raft, field secretary of the European Division, visited this mission and held a workers' meeting from May 7 to 9, 1928, which Rasamoelina and C. M. Ramiakabola attended as national workers.¹⁷ The meeting was held in Toamasina, at the house of Ralibera.

Later a man called Julien Ramamonjisoa, who was studying and searching for the truth, decided to be baptized in Ambohijatovo on December 7, 1929, and he resigned from his work in order to keep the Sabbath. He became the second Adventist church pastor in Madagascar. He was baptized by Rabarijoel Jérôme. By the end of 1929, there were 102 church members in Madagascar.

André Rasamoelina continued to be in touch with Antoine Tuyau and on May 17, 1931, Mr. and Mrs. Tuyau were baptized at the Manjakaray church. Unfortunately, Antoine Tuyau was killed in his house in Anjiro and a funeral service was held at Manjakaray church. It is believed that his blood served as a fertilizer to grow the seeds of the truth in Madagascar.

In 1933 a house in Ambohijatovo was bought and was transformed into a church and the first headquarters of the Adventist work. For a year and half, Pastor Rabarijoel held conferences in the surrounding area of Ambohijatovo; he preached especially of "the bright future." Many accepted the message, so it was necessary to find another place to build a church. To receive the new members, the Mandrosoa church was constructed on 50 Andriandahifotsy Road in 1933.¹⁸

Opening, Growth, and Contribution of Adventist Education in Madagascar

Educational work has played an important role in Madagascar. The first Adventist primary school was established on June 1, 1932, in Andina,¹⁹ in the south of Madagascar. The school was under the direction of André Rasamoelina. His wife, Louise Rasoanantenaina, taught sewing to students for free. Friday, June 17, 1932, the authorization to open the school in Andina was received. Next Rasamoelina was called upon to take charge of the first primary school in Antananarivo, with the help of Berthe Ranorohanta. On April 14, 1933, a request to open a second school in Ankadifotsy was made. This school opened in 1934, and was later called Maranatha.

One year later there were more than 100 students in Maranatha School. According to counsel from the writings of Ellen G. White (1872), an Adventist school should be built in a remote area. In 1937 the division led by Pastor Olson decided to grant an appropriation for the purchase of land in Soamanandrarinny on which to build a school. The amount of 270.000 Francs were granted. The Indian Ocean Union Training School was established in 1938,²⁰ and 44 hectares were bought. On it they built the Soamanandrarinny Secondary School. They trained teacher-evangelists in this place. It was also called Bethsaida Bible School and students from Mauritius and

Africa came to attend the course.

The missionary Jean Zurcher arrived in 1946. He constructed many of the houses and offices found at the headquarters in Soamanandrarinny. He started with the *Château* in Ambatomaro. In 1947, Zurcher, as director of the secondary school, started broadcasting the message in the French language through Radio Tananarive located in Antaninarenina.²¹ He produced 146 presentations in which he talked about education with Maurice Tieche and his talks were based on the Holy Bible. In 1949, Pastors Rabarijoel and Rajoelison succeeded him by broadcasting the Voice of Prophecy. The construction of a printing house called Ny Fitarikandro started in 1949, and a little later they received a printing machine from the United States. They printed books about health and education that helped to spread the message in Madagascar. Pastor Julien Ramamonjisoa was one of the first authors.²²

Other schools followed: The Adventist School of Ankazambo, on the west coast of the island, in 1951; the Ivoamba School, near Fianarantsoa, for the Malagasy South Mission, in 1970; the Ambatoharanana School, near Toamasina, on the east coast of Madagascar, in 1954; and a primary school near Fort Dauphin, in 1965²³

Organizational History of the Central Malagasy Mission

The island of Madagascar is located in the Indian Ocean, far from both the headquarters of the African division in Cape Town, South Africa, and from the European divisions. As membership grew, it became necessary to organize a mission in Madagascar. The Madagascar Mission was organized in 1927. The first administrators were M. Joseph Bureaud,²⁴ Andre Rasamoelina, and Ramiakabola. Later that year, Pastor Rasamoelina was sent to Ambositra, Andina, and Toamasina in order to open new missions.

On January 1, 1936, the Indian Ocean Union Mission was organized, and Joseph Bureaud was nominated as the first president, as well as being responsible for the Madagascar Mission. The headquarters was located in Antananarivo. At the same time, Elisée Bénézech²⁵ arrived in Antananarivo and succeed Joseph Bureaud as president from 1936-1946. The first ordination service for pastors in the Madagascar Mission was held in 1946, and the following pastors were ordained: Pastors Rajaonize, and Bernard and Andre Rasameolina.

In 1949 the country was divided into three districts, and in 1960 into seven local missions: Antananarivo, Toamasina, Fianarantsoa, Toliara, Antsiranana, Antsirabe, and Fort-Dauphin. The names of presidents who served at the mission headquarters from 1960 to 1971, who were all from Madagascar are: Pastors Ramamonjisoa, Rajoelison, Minason Rakotonirainy, Rakotovao, Rostra Marnoe Andrianasolo, Bernard, Jonah Randrianasolo, Rakotoarison, and Félix Ramanantsialonina.

The regional Malagasy Mission was organized in 1971. In 1972 Madagascar was again reorganized into three missions. One of these three missions was the Central Malagasy Mission. This mission unified the east and west provinces of Madagascar. Pastor Bernard was the first president (1972-1984). After that, the following pastors

led: Gilbert Razafinjato (1984-1991), Fred Rasoanidrainy (1991-1992), Paul Ratsarasaoatra (1992-1993), and Samuel Ravoniarivelo (1993-1994), the last president of the Central Malagasy Mission.

At that time evangelization was difficult and there were few churches or companies in Antananarivo. When the mission organized a Sabbath meeting, they used the church of Soamanandrany which was attended by all the Adventist members residing in Antananarivo. Administrators and the executive committee urged pastors and lay members to pray and work hard.²⁶ Churches used small groups to pray and they organized many gospel meetings. As a result, the number of church members increased. The mission began its television program called *Fainambaovao* to broadcast through the national television (TVM). Youth ministry played an important role in evangelization. Young people's Missionary Volunteers (MV) were sent into new regions to plant churches. In addition, the book *Steps to Christ* and other Spirit of Prophecy books promoted the expansion of the church. Many canvassers did pioneering work in remote areas.²⁷

The Organization of Central Malagasy Conference

During the constituency meeting held January 18-22, 1994,²⁸ the Central Malagasy Conference was organized, which included the following provinces: Toamasina, Antananarivo, and a part of Toliara, Fianarantsoa, and Mahajanga. During the same constituency meeting, the members agreed to adopt the name of the Central Malagasy Conference (in Malagasy language it is called *Federasiona Madagasikara Afovoany*). Pastor Samuel Ravonjariavelo was elected the first conference president, while Pastor Herimanana Rakotoarisoa was elected the first executive secretary, and Brother Jacques Rollanf Razafindraby became the treasurer.²⁹

Central Malagasy Conference serves the following regions: Analamanga, Analanjiofo, Atsinanana, Vakinankaratra, Bongolava, Alaotra Mangoro, and Itasy. The conference owns 57 schools, served by more than 600 teachers, and has a total enrollment of 4,266 students. It also operates six FM Radio stations in Antananarivo, Ambatondrazaka, Antsirabe, Faratsiho, Toamasina, and Tsiroanomandidy. In addition, the conference has a women's training center. Finally, it has a library that works closely with the Adventist Book Center of the Indian Ocean Union Conference. In 2016 this library sold 11,132 books.

Realignment of the Central Malagasy Conference

The membership of the conference continued to grow over the years; around 4,000 newly baptized members are added every year. This is largely due to the active participation of the ministers and the lay members in public and personal evangelism. The financial growth is keeping pace with the above numerical growth.³⁰

On December 20, 2017, during the constituency meeting, delegates from all the conference churches voted for the realignment of the territory. It was divided into two conferences which are the Central Malagasy Conference and the East Malagasy Conference. The leaders of the two conferences have taken the evangelism and

stewardship programs as key factors for the growth of the church in the two new conferences. The Central Malagasy Conference executive committee was convinced that the division of the Central Malagasy Conference into two will bring better results, both administratively and financially as well as spiritually since the territory to be supervised will be reduced.³¹ Each conference has its own radio station, and these radio stations, together with the schools, are doing a great work in the preaching of the gospel.

Future Outlook

The global mission program is growing and requires the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work. Almost all members are actively involved in church ministries today. Since January 9, 2017, Maranatha International and Central Malagasy Conference worked together in planting “One-day Churches.” The first church was built in the Ambatolampy area, in the Ambohidroa district. Pastor Fanera Andriamparatiana and the Adventist Mission director, Pastor Nirina Harifidy Raherinjatovo, facilitated the construction. It was a memorable day for the church. Pastor Heriniaina Randriamanantena, the Adventist Mission director from the Indian Ocean Union Conference, continues to work with Maranatha International.

In 2019 the conference is organizing a major evangelization campaign. This activity is part of the “Hope for Antananarivo” project and the “Total Member Involvement” project. Many activities have been organized such as “Healthy Antananarivo,” seminars, and evangelistic campaigns. Pastor Paul Ratsara, the Indian Ocean Union Conference, and the Central Malagasy Conference committee are raising the awareness of pastors and lay people about the preaching of the gospel. Several training courses are being organized in different districts.³²

Changes of Organization Names:

Malagasy Mission (1927-1972); Central Malagasy Mission (1972-1994); Central Malagasy Conference (1994-present).

List of Presidents

Malagasy Mission and Indian Ocean Mission:

Marius Raspal (1926-1927); M. Joseph Bureau (1927-1938); E. Bénézech (1936-1946); Henri Drouault (1946-1948); Henri Pichot (1948-1952); Paul Girard (1953-1963); Pierre Lanares (1963-1966); Hans Salzmänn (1966-1970); Eugène Vervoort (1970-1979); Jean Scippa (interim in 1979); Francis Augsburg (December 1979-1984); Siegfried Mayr (1984-1993); De Paola (1993-1997); Paul Leitao (1997-2005); Samuel Ravonjariavelo (2005-2010); Aniel Barbe (2010-2013); Jasmin Herinirina (2013-present).³³

Central Malagasy Mission:

Pastor Bernard (1972-1984); Gilbert Razafinjatovo (1984-1991); Fred Rasoanindrainy (1991-1992); Paul Ratsarasaotra (1992-1993); Samuel Ravonjariavelo (1993-1994).³⁴

Central Malagasy Conference:

Samuel Ravonjariavelo (1994-1997); Lala James Samoely (1997-2000); Jean André Razafiarison (2000-2006); Heriniaina Randiamanantena (2006-2009); Raymond Félix Rasodison (2009-2011); Lala James Samoely (2011-2014); Fanera Andriamparatiana (2014-2017); Fanera Andriamparatiana (2014-present)

Address:

Fédération des Eglises Adventistes Madagascar Centre, Soamanandriny, Antananarivo Madagascar/Indian Ocean Union Conference/Southern Indian Ocean Division

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Central Malagasy Conference Constituency meeting - 2002, 2014, 2017 Reports, Antananarivo.

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<http://madagascar.opendataforafrica.org/MGPOS2015/population-statistics>.

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7. A. Rasamoelina, *Story of André Rasamoelina*, Madagascar, 1918, 1-3.
8. W. B. White, "Union Conference Committee," *South African Missionary*, August 15, 1919, 2.
9. Heriniaina Randriamanantena, *Brief Summary of the History of the Adventist Church in Madagascar*, November 20, 2018, 2
10. Diary of Ramartine and Ralalaharisoa Simone, Antananarivo, Madagascar, November 2018.
11. Rasamoelina, *Story of André Rasamoelina*, 13.
12. Mamabe Ramartine, *Diary of Ramartine*, Manajakaray, Antananarivo, 1927; and Ralalaharisoa Simone, interview by the author, Antananarivo, Madagascar, November, 2018.
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15. Ibid., 31.
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1938 (c'est maintenant l'Ecole secondaire adventiste de Soamanandrarinny)."

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24. Claude Fivel-Dérmont, Translator. Histoire de l'adventisme à Madagascar, *Archives Adventistes*, November 4, 2007, Accessed May 28, 2019; <https://www.archivesadventistes.org/blog/2007/11/nouveau-histor.html> [At the end of October 1927, Marius Raspail left for Europe and Frenchman Joseph Bureaud was appointed director of the work in Madagascar, assisted by Albert Long, an Italian, and lay Malagasy workers].
25. Claude Fivel-Dérmont, Translator. *Histoire de l'adventisme à Madagascar*, *Archives Adventistes*, November 4, 2007, Accessed May 28, 2019; <https://www.archivesadventistes.org/blog/2007/11/nouveau-histor.html>. The Indian Ocean Union Mission, consisting of Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion, and Seychelles, became operational on January 1, 1936, with its offices located in Antananarivo and Joseph Bureaud as first president. It was at the same time that E. Bénézech, who arrived on the island in 1929, was appointed president of the Mission of Madagascar. The Malagasy Publishing House had been founded in 1930 and a printing house was added to it in 1950.
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[Presidents and Treasurers of the Indian Ocean Union in a study note dated August 2007, Rene Villeneuve lists the presidents and treasurers of the Union of Adventist Churches of the Indian Ocean].

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