

First Missions – Madagascar

First Missions – Pioneering Workers – Madagascar

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Revised April 23, 2024

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When did the workers first arrive? 1964-65 Ken Paginton from England.

Who were the first brother workers?

Who were the first sister workers?

Who was the first to profess? A high school teacher, around 1971

Who was the first native to go in the work?

When & Where was the first meeting?

When & Where was the first baptism?

When & Where was the first convention? 1970?

Where have subsequent conventions been held?

Where is the convention currently held? Antananarivo and Fianarantsoa (in 2022).

Who have the Overseers been? **Ken Paginton** entered the work in 1946 in England; Spent 27 years in Madagascar; returned to England 1992 when Norman Henderson died; died January 12, 1997, aged 73

Succeeded by **John Oliver**

Notes from Ken Paginton's Testimony

Pukekohe #2 Convention, New Zealand, 1981

When thinking about this meeting, several portions of scripture came to my mind, but I did not feel moved to speak on them, so I will give you my testimony. Our testimony is the work of God in our own life. "Just as I am," a struggling soul for life and liberty. Salvation is not something that we inherit or that is handed down by our parents.

I have to go back quite a long way—back to my grandparents. The gospel came to us when I was a boy, and I decided when I was nearly 15 years old. In my early years, I used to be plagued with the thought that I did not have a testimony at all, as I used to hear older ones speaking of being brought out of a false religion, the world, etc. Theirs seemed a dramatic experience, and I could not talk like that. I was brought up in the Truth and the devil used to sit on my shoulder and tell me I had no real testimony because I was not the same as the older ones. That is not true. Everyone has a different testimony. We build up our testimony through the years. Young people might not have a dramatic start, but as they have some real experiences later, their testimony becomes very real and living.

I was born in England into a very religious family. My family were all great people in the Methodist Church. Father was a businessman, and he also had very big mission band of 80. We had all kinds of religious people come into our home. At that time there were two branches of the Methodist Church, the Wesleyan and the Primitive. My father was a great advocate of unity, but if you tied two cats together by the tail, you would have union, but not unity. My father told someone once, "I am a Wesleyan, and I married a Primitive Methodist, so that makes our two children little United Methodists." Shortly after they were married, my parents were having a little argument, and Father said, "I'm the head of this house and this family. " "Yes dear," Mother said, said, "You can be the head, so long as I can be the neck and turn you around whichever way I like."

55 years ago two stranger ladies came into the district where my grandparents were living. **Annie Hughes, sister of Willie Hughes**, was one of them. They attended their meetings and later said, "If these two ladies are right, then we must be wrong." They both made their choice. Some time went by and my father saw the difference in the lives of his parents. A changed life is the 1 oudest sermon anyone can preach. On a visit to my grandparents' home, my father met **Jack Forbes** there. He asked my father if he could have meetings in his home. Father knew what my mothers attitude was at that time, so he told Jack it wasn't convenient now, but he would talk it over with my mother and let him know. When he returned home, he asked my mother, and she replied, "No, they will never come here." After a short while, she said to my father, "It is not fair to judge those preachers before hearing them." So she consented to let Jack Forbes and companion have gospel meetings for two weeks only. Well, I can tell you it was a very long two weeks—it is not over yet. It was the first time we had preachers in our home. We recognised that Jack Forbes was such a different humble man to all

the other great religious people we had known. My father invited his neighbours and his own mission band and the workers had a meeting every night in the dining room. In the first meeting, Jack spoke from John 4 about the woman at the well of Samaria, and that was the beginning of living waters in our home. That well springing up in that home still satisfies abundantly to this day. My father used to talk with the preachers till all hours of the night.

Father decided before two weeks were up and came right out of the Church, but not mother. She decided later on, as she saw the change in father's life. He was now home more with the family. When mother professed, it was very humbling for her. It was hard for her to give up her place in the social circle and even going to the hairdresser. When they passed that place, mother said to father "I have finished going there now," and she let her hair grow. There was much change in my parents, inwardly and outwardly. There was no more going to Sunday school or Church any more, but going miles to a little country village to a humble cottage for the meetings.

It was even strange for us children too. I remember the coconut matting on the floor, and we had to kneel on it at prayer time, and there could be dents on our knees when we got up. I got the idea of putting my hymn book under one knee and my bible under the other. Later on, the lady of the home put down a mat for us to kneel on. She had a great love for us. Some of the friends would put their heads down into the cushion to pray, and as my father was deaf, he asked my sister and myself to sit on each side of him, and when we kneeled, each of us took turns to hold his hand. When someone stopped praying, we let his hand go, and in this way my father knew when they had finished praying. One Sunday when we got home, I heard my mother being asked by dad, "Who prayed extra long this morning?" I felt real guilty as I remembered I had forgotten to let go his hand. Lots of things are problems to little children, and it is good to remember them, and don't pray and speak too long in the meetings.

My sister professed first. I remember the time I knelt down by my bed and said "It is Christ for me from now on." I don't pretend to say I have done well, but I made a full heart surrender. I wrote a letter to those brother workers, and I was so worked up about it, I forgot to put a stamp on the envelope. But I'm sure they didn't mind paying the cost of that stamp, because a sinner needed salvation. It was a full surrender, an unreserved surrender. I was often a coward and would like to slide out of some things at school. We have to balance things for the children. When the other children went to a film or listened to the radio, my parents would take us to the zoo or for a picnic. I got through school and professional studies fairly easily, and then went to work in Dad's office, and I got along there fairly easily too. You don't say too much to the boss's son.

Then war broke out, and I did 4-1/2 years non-combatant service in the Army. There were several other professing boys in the same barracks as I was, and we managed to have a meeting together when we could. The time came when I felt the need to separate from them and face things alone. So I had two years without the others, amongst soldiers, moving from barrack to barrack. I found I had to make a new stand each time. Among regular soldiers, swearing and using God's name in vain is common place. I remember when it came to bedtime the first night, I stood for a long time getting courage to kneel by my bed and pray, but I'm glad to say I got the victory. They soon respected me and would keep quiet while I prayed. Then at meal time when I bowed my head to give thanks, they would tap me on the shoulder and say, "Aren't you well?" When I told them I was giving thanks for my food, they exclaimed "What, giving thanks for an Army meal?" Then they would snatch away my plate, and I had to hold on to it when bowing my head. It was a matter of "watching and praying." But after a while, they gave me every respect.

I can thank God every day for different experiences. It does you good, you know. It puts something into you. You girls that are nursing or in an office, you have no need to feel ashamed. Be true to your convictions, and it will be a source of strength to you. Never be ashamed to confess Christ. Jesus was the best man in the world to stand for God. He was the bravest man who ever lived. The bravest boy or girl today is the one who stands up for Christ; even in the way you dress, you can confess Christ. I know of one girl at school who was the only one not wearing jeans. That takes courage, and it puts character into you. It also gets the approval of God. I am sorry to this day for the times I failed to confess Christ before others.

Then I found God laying something else on my heart. It is one thing to have some vague kind of thought in the back of our minds about the ministry, but it is very different to have a Godly conviction to go into the harvest field. I think most young people do think about it. I don't think parents should push their children into the work, but pray for them. Pray them into it. **It is the only hope of mankind**. If no one ever went forth, we would not be here. We know the need is great, and the labourers are few. It was very real when God laid claim to my life. One night I crept out of the barracks after the lights were out. I knew I shouldn't have been out. I knelt in a field under a tree with bombers and search lights around me. There I vowed that if God wanted my life, it was His. It is the highest and most satisfying calling to make choices in the interest of God's Kingdom.

Some years ago I went alone to Madagascar. There were no friends there. I was the first worker to go there, then I sent for a companion. Six years later, there were 80 friends at a Convention, and this year there were 150 gathered. In many other countries, the Lord's work is going on. Last year, a young Madagascan man went forth in this work, and last week a sister went forth. The call is still the same. "Just as I am, not what I'm thought to be." I hope some young lives here will be touched; there is such a great need in the world, there are countries crying out for labourers. Let us live for Christ. and. set a right standard and be a right example to others. The Kingdom of God is the only Kingdom that is going to last, and it is well worthwhile putting our very best into that Kingdom now. Never mind the other fellow in the office who goes around like a shaggy animal.

In England, two botanists found a rare plant down a steep cliff overlooking the sea. They spoke to a young lad about it, and offered him a reward if he would help them get it. He agreed. First they put a harness on him and with a man holding the rope, they went to the edge of the cliff, but when the lad looked down, he said to the men, "I won't go down unless my father is holding the rope." Beware who is holding the rope; be careful. When you are tempted to go in for anything, it is good to ask, "Is my heavenly Father

holding the rope?" If He is not, you could quite easily go over the cliff. If God is holding the rope, we can safely trust Him and put our lives in His hands.

One of the best memories I have of my mother is when I was leaving for Madagascar, she said "If you hear I am sick or anything has happened to me, don't come back, stay in your field." It just worked out some years later, when I was back in England from Madagascar, I was home while mother was very sick. Sitting beside her bed, I asked her, "Will I go to convention or stay with you?" She said "You go to convention." I went to the convention, and when it was over, I returned home again and was with her when she passed away.

One day we are all going to go, like the old man Simeon, who said "Lord now lettest thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast, prepared before the face of all people." We also know that God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. We can depart in peace if we have received salvation. All the difficulties shall fade away, there shall be no more fears and no more tears. Even the youngest here need not fear to put their lives in His hands. All that will matter one day, is whether we received Christ's salvation or not.

Robin Amos told us some interesting things about Madagascar: I'm going to share a few notes I took, with you.

The natives of Madagascar are a race related to the mountain people in Formosa. **The first workers went there in 1964.** The first two years they spent learning the language, and then some were sick and the work was hindered; but it has gone well the last years. When I arrived six years ago, there were only 3 friends and this continued for years. So, for 3 years more. Now there are 35, two-thirds of them under 30 years of age—some are 16. There are several young couples with families. In October we hope to have our first convention there.

The first person who decided is a high school teacher. She met the truth through correcting papers for Ken Paginton when he was learning the language. He wrote about the parables and other portions of scripture. This explanation of the Bible was new to her and aroused her interest. She was a pastor's daughter and a Sunday school teacher, but left the church and was the first in the land to have fellowship with the workers.

Another woman, 60 years old, had left the church some time before and had established a little fellowship group; several people had joined, and she became its president. But she was never really satisfied. A worker visited their services one day. They were surprised that a white person would come, and when she learned that he was a missionary, she asked him to visit her. After two years she left this fellowship and professed. Her family are very much opposed.

In another family, four brothers have decided. We had a little Bible study in English for students; one of them came and then brought his brothers. Now all four are very hearty—the youngest is 16. Their father is a doctor and also preaches, and he couldn't understand why his sons no longer came with him. They were usually away to school, so it didn't make so much difference, but one Sunday they were all at home on vacation. He had thought they would accompany him to church, but as he entered their room, he found them all on their knees—the fellowship meeting was too far away, so they had their own meeting. That was a shock to him, but after that he invited workers to have meetings in his village and seems very much interested. A good number are attending this mission.

Madagascar is a large island, as large as several European countries together. The main religion is ancestor worship. They sometimes take the corpse of some ancestor out of the family tomb—he may have been dead many years—and make a feast for him. They hold the remains on their laps, stroke them and tell him how glad they are that he is with them. Young women take parts of the decayed grave clothes and save them—this is supposed to bring the blessing of this ancestor upon them. Then they wrap the corpse up in fresh cloth and the young men carry it around on their shoulders, dance and are merry, so he'll enjoy himself. Before sundown he is returned to the grave, but first they carry him around it seven times, so that his spirit won't find its way out again. This religion has a good deal of influence on people. None of our friends were in it, but one or two come from families who are still of this belief.

Madagascar

As told by May Jones

I have been away from Madagascar just a few weeks, and thinking of the friends back there I felt I could say how I love them. Gathering in for conventions your workers will feel like that about you. Whatever happens, victory or failure, whether sickness or sorrow, they love you dearly.

I was thinking especially of one young friend whom I knew from the time I went there in 1976. **The first lady in Madagascar to profess**, and just 5 years professing. A very dear noble lady in the truth today, but it took her a long time to come out and be established in the truth. She was giving us, my companion and I, Madagasy lessons. This girl, Charlene, was working for her.

This story of Charlene began about 3 years before that. The brothers were working in a country district and having meetings in a home some way south of the capital. A couple had made their choice, and this girl was just their maid. The couple didn't continue, but Charlene had been listening to the gospel meetings and taking a lot in, but the brother workers didn't think that she had understood very much. When the couple for whom she worked didn't continue, Charlene knew that she would have to do something because there would be no more gospel meetings for her with her employees.

She was about 16, a girl with a beautiful thick black plait, and beautiful eyes but she has a deformity in her leg, and not so able to walk quickly, a girl with a very basic education. Because she wanted so much to hear the gospel, she made the choice that she must

go and find the workers. The only address she had was 200 kms away in the capital. That was a tremendous step of faith for someone who had never been more than a few kilometers from her village. She went, only have the post box number of the brothers. Anyway, she contacted them.

This lady, Lucy, was looking for someone to help her so she was able to go and work for Lucy. When we were having lessons, Charlene would sometimes just pop in for a few minutes and at that time although the one was so highly educated and the other very little education, it was Charlene that knew where all the workers were. Charlene had more interest in the kingdom, but that is not true today for our dear friend Lucy. The Lord worked quietly and patiently.

Then Charlene was there for 18 years. At one time Lucy was away in France and Charlene was left to care for the home then Lucy's husband saw the worth of this girl. How reliable and how trustworthy. Lucy's husband was director, he saw this girl is different because she has the truth.

After 18 years, Charlene decided she should move up nearer her father who was getting old, so she left Lucy to go back to her father and see if she could get him interested in gospel meetings. It was my privilege to go there with our first Malagasy sister worker. They invited us into their church and after 6 meetings we were told to go. The church elders didn't agree with it, but some of her relatives invited us into their home. Three brothers and their wives and little children came regularly. But as they realised the cost that this couldn't be mixed up with this matter of bringing the dead out of the tomb, and ancestor worship, they withdrew.

But somehow other interest held us in that district for 3 years. Then we felt we just had to move on. At convention a message came from 2 of her brothers saying that if there are any more gospel meetings they want to go. We had decided to withdraw, but I remember asking Uncle Ken, could we not stay until the New Year. We went back with the purpose that if they really make an effort, we'll know they mean it. It was the rainy season, and we were saying to ourselves, "We can't expect them to come tonight; we have seen them in their fields, and seen the rain coming down." But they would be there. Soon these brothers made their choice. They told their father, "Dad we are going to look after you as long as you live." They presented him with blankets for the coming winter. They told him, "When you are dead that the end, we cannot participate in that." Others in the family were still fighting this battle.

Later another brother and his wife professed. There are three houses right here together and now a Sunday morning meeting is there. Another sister and her husband professed, and this year four of their children made a start. Now in that place we have a special meeting there, we put up a tent and about 70 or 80 gather there. Simply because two young men struggled it out in their hearts, that whatever it cost them, we must take this step.

Charlene stayed there to have a room for the Sunday morning meeting for a good while. Later she moved on to seek out other relatives. Now she is in another village, eking out a poor living, but there is one lady there, and she is staying there just to have fellowship with her. That is just a little of one of our faithful friends.

TTT Editor's Note: In the absence of a written account, the above information has been compiled by the TTT Editor from various sources. Corrections or additions are most welcome; as well as other historical accounts for this country [Email TTT](#)