



Thanks be to God for the Shepherds!

"...I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:36).

Thanks be to God for the Shepherds, a group of specially consecrated Christian lay men and women who visit Tsiafahy Prison every Tuesday. This maximum-security prison is located in an isolated area, about an hour's drive from Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city. I accompanied the Shepherds on their visit the Tuesday after Christmas Day.



Patricia Bentsen (left) and the Shepherds, outside Tsiafahy Prison.

The Shepherds are steeped in prayer. They pray before, during and after each visit to the prison. The Shepherds conduct worship from behind a protective wall while armed guards stand overhead, alert and watching.

On this visit the Shepherds prepared a meal of rice, beans and beef for the 500 prisoners. Usually, the prisoners' one meal each day consists only of manioc (cassava), a root-vegetable similar to a potato. It's likely that the Shepherds prepared the most nutritious meal the prisoners ate in a year.

As a special treat, each prisoner also received a packet of cookies. When it was discovered that we were one packet short, one of the prisoners—a Christian leader—immediately handed over his packet to be given to someone else. I will always remember his witness of generosity.

As we dished the food into cracked and chipped bowls—and even plastic bags—we determined that one of our mission projects would be to purchase bowls for the prisoners.

Thanks be to God for the Shepherds who visit Tsiafahy and other prisons, bringing the word of God in spirit and in truth. We covet your prayers for this prison ministry.

ELCA missionary Patricia Bentsen, a nurse serving in Madagascar, works with the Lutheran nursing school (SEFAM), the rural health clinic program, the prison ministry, and the Lutheran Health Department (SALFA).

Commitments of prayer, communication, and financial support help ELCA missionaries teach, preach, heal, nurture, build and grow alongside companions in almost 50 countries. Learn more about ELCA missionary sponsorship at www.elca.org/missionarysponsorship. Contact Global Mission Support at 800-638-3522, ext. 2756, or e-mail globalmissionsupport@elca.org.



Rice in cauldrons.



Dishing out rice outside Tsiafahy Prison.

