Our Mad Life 87

**Abroad thoughts from home**

There is an increasing wave of panic in the diocese of Mahajanga as people realise that their source of funding will soon be coming to an end. Hall wants to ensure that all church land and buildings are legally signed and sealed. There is an universal tendency for those living on the edge of church property to encroach little by little on to the land so boundary markers need to be in place and regularly checked. Even perimeter fencing is pushed inwards in these land grabs.

This weekend Hall is down the coast at Mitsinjo. You may recall his previous visit which involved crossing the estuary in the ferry and finding the way along an unmarked road. This time he is back with a car load of 16 people including the newly formed diocesan evangelism group, and the prospect of 9 baptisms and confirmations. While there he is hoping to buy a piece of land to build a church.

With the departure of the previous Venerable to the northern diocese and with limited numbers of clergy at his disposal, Hall has appointed Rev. Constant as the new Archdeacon. He lives a day’s journey away in Port Berge and is parish priest there and headmaster of the school. He manages to overcome the geographical distance by phoning Hall 3 or 4 times a day.

At the other extreme is Rev. Gaston who is the new Dean of the Cathedral and who will be Vicar-General in charge of the diocese when Hall leaves. One never quite knows where he is. His priority is completing his PhD in the capital. The church in Madagascar is not immune from the trend of overqualifying its clergy. When Gaston is in town he and various members of his family reside with Hall. This is encouraging Hall to move as quickly as possible with providing a deanery.

Up until now Hall has not interfered with Cathedral affairs but he is now attempting to work with the Cathedral committee. His first discovery was that the Cathedral account had been blocked for 3 years which raises probably never to be satisfactorily answered questions about the role of the bank and the whereabouts of the Cathedral income for the last 3 years. It appears to have been spent. In a prevailing culture of hierarchical power, accountability simply does not feature.

In the spirit of co-operation and mutual responsibility which Hall is trying to foster he met with the committee to discuss accommodation for the new Dean. He was assured that the present deanery is uninhabitable but several members of the committee could personally recommend various builders to build a new one. The tenders came in at massive cost whereupon Hall decided to investigate the situation for himself. He found the present deanery to be indescribably dirty but salvageable with a new roof at a fraction of the price of a new house.

Due to the Cathedral having gradually sold off the generous area of land which was originally bought, there is now a gap of no more than 5’ between one side of the Cathedral and the Adventist school next door. Both organisations have excellent views of one another’s activities through their windows. It is proposed to move the toilets from the front courtyard to a more discreet position beyond the west door, taking up some of this space. Already living there are the guard and his dog.

While Hall was at Evening Prayer one evening, without electricity and in the dark, the devotions were interrupted by a lot of coming and going in what was left of this space. Hall was irate to discover that despite all his attempts to bring transparency, the committee, behind his back, and probably also irate at being deprived of their profiteering re the deanery, had agreed for the Catechist and his family to move into this unsavoury space.

The lack of electricity remains a major difficulty and exhausting factor. There are frequent power cuts of varying lengths at all times of the day and night. The Wifi and computer connections all have to be reset every time. It is hard for Hall to reply to emails and indeed write a newsletter. When the power comes on he is more likely to dash for a shower since it is so hot. The new Dean has brought forward the time of Morning Prayer from 6 to 5.30 a.m. which everyone is finding difficult as it is still dark. The Dean himself has yet to attend. In the absence of electricity services are conducted by the light of mobile phone torches.

Excitement is mounting at the prospect of the national MU Jamboree at the end of August. The last one was in 2019 when I made my public debut at the head of the members from our diocese in a Malagasy version of the conga. Bitter is the disappointment that there are not enough funds to give everyone half their fare like last time.

There are, however, VIPs from the UK attending and Hall is organising internal flights for them and providing his indispensable vehicle to transport luggage. The visitors will include the MU Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, and Bishop Rose of Dover, both of whom will have no qualms taking to the dance floor.

Sarah Speers

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