

# A call to serve across cultures

By Nicolas Razafindratsima

*Madagascan-born Nicolas Razafindratsima tells his story of Anglican roots leading to a calling to ministry in Paris – via Norwich!*

**A**lthough Madagascar was a French colony, the Anglican Church has been in existence there for more than 140 years. I was baptised, confirmed and grew up in this denomination, worshipping at the cathedral Saint Laurent in Antananarivo.

At 18, I left Madagascar for university in Paris to study maths, statistics and demography. I attended St George's, a Church of England's chaplaincy of the Diocese of Europe. This church had – alongside the main Anglophone congregation – a small Malagasy-speaking community which, thanks to the presence of a Malagasy-speaking French priest, could regularly worship in this language.

After a period back in Madagascar for PhD fieldwork, I returned to France and worked in the public research sector. The Malagasy priest at St George's was leaving and asked me if I would agree to become the 'catechist' of the community. In Madagascar, 'catechists' are those lay persons who lead the services in the absence of an ordained minister. I accepted and took on this role for 10 years. My tasks included helping our English chaplain to prepare and lead the monthly Malagasy service (in French and Malagasy languages), along with

some pastoral activities and occasional preaching.

While I was a catechist, several people said to me "Why don't you think about being an ordained minister, or a lay reader?" I was not sure but, finally, after a decisive encounter with a priest who encouraged me, I offered myself for ordination. The discernment process confirmed my sense of calling. In 2013, I started my training on the Eastern Region Ministry Course which provides distance learning for the priesthood over a three-year period. This made it possible for me to continue to work part-time as a statistician and demographer.

This Spring, I had the opportunity to take my church placement in the Diocese of Norwich. I did it at the Cathedral and at Saint Catherine's, Mile Cross, while staying at St Luke's vicarage. Attending these very different churches helped me discover a wide range of services, in very different traditions. It was a very useful and valuable experience for me and my family, who have never lived in England.

The Church of England gave me the opportunity to discern and move forward in my vocation. And yet, I am not an



Members of the congregation at St George's

Englishman but of another cultural background, and do not have English as my first language.

Now ordained, I will remain at St George's Paris, working with both the Anglophone and the Malagasy congregations. I feel that my vocation is to serve in this intercultural context, drawing bridges between communities.

Maybe you like to serve people, to help them, to encourage them as Jesus did? If so, perhaps ordination is a thing to be reflected upon. Indeed, it is a way to serve God and his people in a particular way. Listen to your inspiration, and listen to other people around you: maybe it is through them that God calls you to this ministry. And of course, pray!