

# How do Shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church Describe their Way into Ministry?

Hans Austnaberg

---

## ABSTRACT

---

Shepherds are lay, consecrated “preacher-healers” in the Malagasy Lutheran Church. The main question of the article is to investigate how the shepherds describe their way to ministry and what lived theology can be traced in their stories. In analysing and discussing the empirical material, the author uses memory theory and lived theology. Main themes in the shepherds’ stories are a calling experience, encouragement by others, among them the revival leader Nenilava, excuses, difficult experiences in life and involvement of evil spirits. A master narrative in telling the stories emerges, giving them authority within the movement, and normative voices of theology are in play, especially related to the bible and the founding fathers and mothers.

---

## Introduction

I was raised in the Christian faith. My parents baptised me as a child and I was confirmed. I lived as a Christian and I realised the love of Jesus in my life. Prayer was a regular part of my day, in the morning and the evening, and before and after meals. Both my grandparents were shepherds in the church, and I understood that Jesus was at work in the healing services. I sang in a youth choir and, after I married, in an adult choir related to the revival movement. Later I was elected secretary of the revival movement on the congregational level and people there encouraged me, saying: “Jesus needs you to become a shepherd”. I declined saying that I was unworthy to go into this kind of work. Time went on and other shepherds continued to encourage me. One of them said: “Are you going to wait for blood-shed, death, or punishment before you say yes to the calling of Jesus?” I was not able to decide what to do, however.

Then my child was lost. She was 11 years old and one afternoon she disappeared. Someone had taken her, and we were unable to find her. At four o’clock that afternoon I came to myself and remembered the saying: “Do you wait for blood-shed or punishment before you will follow the calling?” Then I prayed, saying: “I will do your work, Jesus.” After having prayed, I felt happy and calm, although my child still was missing. While