

# Negotiating Church Space

## The Relations between Pastors and Shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church

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### ABSTRACT

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The main question of this article is how the negotiations on church space enable us to better understand the relationship between pastors and shepherds, two groups of church workers in the Malagasy Lutheran Church and the so-called awakening movement (*fifohazana*). This is investigated through three characteristics of place: the historical development, the relationship between the two groups and their identity focusing on ritual and gender. The author challenges the hierarchical thinking which seems to be inherent in the relationship between the two groups, and calls into attention how women are disempowered in the church space related to pastoral ministry while, at the same time, being empowered as shepherds.

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### Introduction

This article focuses on two groups of church workers in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC): Pastors and shepherds. They are both initiated into their ministry. Pastors go through ordination (*ordinasiona*), while shepherds are consecrated (*fanokanana*). The two initiation-rituals are similar but not identical. Pastors and shepherd-elders assist at the consecration of shepherds but only pastors assist at ordination. Pastors have a profound theological education, while shepherds have a two-year part-time instruction. Foreign missionaries started the education of pastors; shepherd is a specific Malagasy title, denoting persons who are part of an indigenous movement originating in 1894 (*fifohazana*, meaning awakening). The MLC does not ordain women, therefore all pastors are men; the shepherds are both men and women. The former missionary and Malagasy researcher, Cynthia Holder Rich, asserts that over 80 % of the shepherds are women.<sup>1</sup> Pastors are

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1 Cynthia Holder Rich, "Women's Power and Authority in Madagascar," in *The Fifohazana. Madagascar's Indigenous Christian Movement*, edited by Cynthia Holder Rich (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 144. My own estimation from observation of healing services is not far from this. I found that 75 % of the working shepherds were women. See Hans Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons: A Study of Exorcism as Practised and Understood by Shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 247, footnote 1056.