

Rich Tarro, Kenya – December 2021

Computer lab brings new educational opportunities

My HOPE ministry project provides educational assistance to orphans and vulnerable children in Mombasa, Kenya. While my ministry is extremely rewarding, it can at times also be frustrating. It is so often hard to get things done here, and everything takes much longer than it should. These frustrations are probably more a reflection on my own shortcomings in the virtue of patience than anything else. However, all of these things pale in comparison to my biggest frustration — the grades of our students.

The less than stellar academic performance of our students is not really surprising, given the environments in which they live and go to school. They are typically being raised, along with multiple siblings, by a single parent or guardian. Their families live in substandard housing — one-room structures without electricity or running water. They have to do household chores both before and after school, which leaves little time for studying. The schools are overcrowded. It is not unusual to have 70 students in a classroom with one teacher. The students have to share textbooks, and there is little in the way of supplemental learning materials. Even paper and pencils are hard to come by. In Kenya's very difficult job market, an education is the only means most of these children have to break out of the cycle of poverty in which they live.



The HOPE Project's new computer lab



The challenge of addressing the academic deficiencies of our students — so that they can have jobs and careers — often feels overwhelming. As a first step, we have created a library of books for our students to use for studying. The students use the books extensively when they come for tutorial sessions on Saturdays and during school break. We have also improved the quality of our tutorial sessions by incorporating videos and graphics, hands-on experiments and problem sets to reinforce the concepts the students are studying. These efforts are certainly steps in the right direction.

To bring our academic support to an even higher level, we just constructed a computer classroom to give the students access to a wide range of digital learning content. There is so much

great educational material, incl. videos and books, available online, which students in other parts of the world have easy access to. Why can't we make this same content available to our HOPE students?

I've been using videos to teach the students in a classroom style setting for several years now. However, this approach has a major drawback in that everyone has to be studying the same thing, that is, whatever I am teaching. This is a tricky proposition when you have students of different needs and abilities spanning

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four years of high school. The idea of the computer lab is that each student can learn independently (although we continue to also have group learning sessions as this approach has its own benefits). Each student can choose what they want to study and work through the learning material at their own pace. We now have four student computers and will be bringing in more before the end of the year.

The tables for the computers were handmade by a local craftsman. Electricians wired the classroom for power and networking, with each table having power outlets with switches and a network connection for each computer. After installing the networking gear and the server, we started uploading content. We now have close to 1,000 educational videos, a few dozen online textbooks and hundreds of practice exams for the students to use to study and learn. The content is primarily geared toward high school learners, with a focus on math (algebra, geometry and trigonometry), chemistry, biology, physics, and English grammar — the subjects that our students struggle with the most.

Each student logs in with their own user id and password, and we are able to track and manage students' progress individually. An important side benefit is that the students learn how to use and manage their own computer accounts. Most of them had never used a computer, keyboard or mouse. They had never had a computer account or password, run an application, opened a folder, or used a browser.

The students really like learning on the computer platform and find the videos, textbooks, practice problems and mock exams very helpful. This in itself is already a success, as the bigger goal is to get them to want to learn and think for themselves. While none of the students could yet be termed computer-savvy, I am very happy that these students, who had never used a computer before, now know how to use the platform and access the material they would like to study. We are off to a good start.

Peace, Rich

rtarro@mklm.org / HOPEgivesHope.com / facebook.com/rich.tarro



Florah, the HOPE project's assistant director, making sure the new dust covers fit properly

*I am so grateful for your continuing support of my ministry. During this season of giving, I would like to urge you to **consider making a special gift to Maryknoll Lay Missioners' "Walk With Us" campaign.** This new campaign raises money for the recruitment, training and on-going support of all of us lay missionaries. We can only "walk with" the people here because you are "walking with" us.*

*A group of donors has already pledged to match the dollars raised by this campaign 2-to-1. That means that **every \$100 given to the campaign in effect becomes \$150.** This campaign will ensure that Maryknoll Lay Missioners will be able to continue to send and to support missionaries like me in the years to come. Please pray for the success of this campaign and if you are able, please donate to the "Walk With Us" campaign below.*

Read more about HOPE Project at mklm.org/tag/rich-tarro/

***To donate by MAIL,** please return the bottom portion of this letter with your payment in the provided envelope.*

***To donate ONLINE,** please go to mklm.org/RTarro and mklm.org/walk-with-us-gift/*

Thank you so much for your generosity!

----- TEAR -----

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Maryknoll Lay Missioners is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.

- YES,** I would like \$_____ of my gift to go to the **Walk With Us campaign.** This gift will be matched by a group of committed benefactors, \$1 for every \$2 of mine.
- YES,** I would like \$_____ of my gift to support the sustenance and ministry of Rich Tarro.
 - I wish to make this a recurring gift: Monthly Quarterly Annually
 - Enclosed is my check made payable to Maryknoll Lay Missioners, and in the **memo is "Rich Tarro" and/or "Walk With Us."**
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