

Rich Tarro, Kenya - Advent 2022

Education can make all the difference



Naomi in her kitchen today.

The Lutheran theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis after being accused of involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler, wrote the following in a reflection about Advent: "A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes — and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent."

I am blessed to know where my next meal is coming from, and I do not have to worry about not having a roof over my head.

Tragically, that is not the case with most of the children and families I deal with on a daily basis in my ministry work. However, I believe that "the world in its present form is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31) and so wait in joyful hope for Him who alone can truly set us free.

I draw inspiration from those I encounter, whose faith-filled lives exemplify trust in God's loving providence.

Naomi lost her husband, Neftali, in 2004 due to complications from HIV. Before finally succumbing to the disease, Neftali was bedridden with pneumonia and tuberculosis. Medical costs wiped out most of the family's assets. Naomi and her two small children were left with very little upon Neftali's death.

Naomi managed to get a loan and started a business selling secondhand clothes. The business started off well, but suddenly Naomi fell ill. It turned out that Naomi was also HIV-positive. Her health started deteriorating. Eventually, she was forced to close her business. As Naomi was unable to repay the loan, the bank took away everything in the house. Naomi and her two children were left without beds, chairs or even utensils. Naomi's family did not want to help support her after discovering she was HIV-positive. Yes, there is a stigma associated with HIV even in Africa. Fortunately, Naomi's health improved.

Naomi, together with her two children, Esborn and Lydia, moved to Mombasa in 2006. They lived with a relative for a few months. When the relative asked them to leave, Naomi was given a small room by a friend she had met in church. Naomi started selling peanuts and managed to scrape together enough money to begin sending her children to school. However, selling peanuts did not allow Naomi to make much money and Esborn and Lydia ended up missing school a lot due to unpaid school fees.

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This is when the HOPE Project began supporting their educations.

Not only did the HOPE Project support Esborn and Lydia in high school, but we also supported them in post-secondary school coursework aimed at helping them develop marketable job skills. Esborn successfully completed a course in operating heavy machinery. Lydia just recently completed her studies in Community Health and Development.

In 2018, Esborn secured a job operating heavy equipment in the Seychelles, a tiny island republic off the coast of East Africa.

While working there, he managed to save some money. When he returned home three years later, he gifted his mother a piece of land that he bought using his savings. Esborn also provided the funds for Naomi to start another small business, a food kiosk, which now provides income for the family to live off.

Lydia is currently volunteering at a subcounty hospital as a nurse's aide, while she awaits the results of her certification exams. Hopefully the experience she gains volunteering will help her to land a job once she has passed her exams.

Life has greatly improved for Naomi, Esborn and Lydia since moving to Mombasa. They are grateful to HOPE Project and are always praying for HOPE to continue to help the less fortunate. This family is why the HOPE Project puts such an emphasis on educational support. While we continue to help needy families with food and household necessities to help them survive, education is the only means to lift a family like this out of poverty.

Esborn says that there's light at the end of the tunnel. The Lord's grace is sufficient.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed just a few days before the concentration camp where he was held was liberated. His final recorded words were "This is the end — for me, the beginning of life."

God is good!
Rich (rtarro@mklm.org)



Esborn in the Seychelles

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To donate by MAIL, please return the bottom portion of this letter with your payment in the provided envelope. You can also **donate ONLINE** to our Hope Project fundraiser at tinyurl.com/Hope-Project-Fundraiser.

Please **consider making a special gift to Maryknoll Lay Missioners' "Walk With Us" campaign**, which raises money for the recruitment, training and ongoing support of all of us lay missionaries. We can only "walk with" the people here because you are "walking with" us.

Now and **through Dec. 31**, thanks to matching gifts, **every \$100 given to the campaign in effect becomes \$150**. To donate ONLINE, go to mklm.org/walk-with-us-gift/. Thank you so much for your generosity!

TEAR

Thank you for supporting my HOPE Project ministry with orphans and families who have been affected by HIV/AIDS and/or for supporting the Walk With Us campaign.

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- YES**, I would like \$_____ of my gift to support the sustenance and ministry of Rich Tarro.
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