

especially touched when she said she was very thankful because she was able to stay in school, without being sent home for lack of fees. Imagine what it must be like for little kids and teenagers to have to drop out of school because they can't afford even a few dollars to cover costs! I strongly believe a girl without an education is a woman without a future.

Anne Gacheri, an eighth grader, reports her father died of AIDS and her mother is poor and in bad health. She likewise sent me a note saying she was grateful she didn't get sent home from school because of poverty. Further, she thanked us for getting her some new clothes and helping to fix the roof of her kitchen. "When it was raining, our food was ruined. But now we are comfortable." She closed her little thank you letter by saying "After my education, I know God will bless me to assist others as you are assisting me."

Post-Secondary Possibilities

Providing post-secondary educational opportunities are a challenge, as that requires funding beyond the \$52,000 required to support the 260 children in the first twelve grades. The Center for Health and Hope currently supports eight Kenya students at about \$1,000 each per year. This includes **Eric Muthuri** who is excelling in his second year of medical school. My wife and I support **Susan Wakeli** in college, as a gift we give to our five grandchildren. Our grandchildren have so much in life, so we want them to know about others who struggle to get an education. Thanks to the Ann Fort Fund, two students are being helped. For example, **Kelvin Kiathurima**, who once was living on the streets and garbage pits, is now studying automotive mechanics.

Creating New Life and New Beginnings

One AIDS orphan helped was **Glorie Gitonga**. Her story in many ways epitomizes the mission of the Center for Health and Hope. Glorie's father died of AIDS while serving in the Kenya army. She was only five years old. Her mother died when she was eight. Glorie and her younger sister moved in with their grandmother, but two years later her grandmother died. Then she and her sister were separated; her aunt took her sister into her home, but Glorie stayed with her grandfather. He died three years later, when she was thirteen. Glorie says, "I was now left under the mercy of nobody. I would come from school, cook for myself, wash my school uniform, and be alone. But then the late program manager of the Gift of H.O.P.E., Florence Murugu, came to my rescue. She was so sweet and a dear mother to me. (She died suddenly in 2012.) May her soul rest in peace."

Such a tragic story of pain, suffering and death, but Glorie did not give up. Thanks to this program she not only finished her high school, but a donor paid for her to study social work in college. Thanks to an annual gift from the Long's Peak United Methodist Church, Glorie has now been hired to monitor and care for the 260 AIDS orphans being helped by the Center. Now daily she reaches out to the children and the families that are impacted by the AIDS pandemic.

Glorie got married a couple of years ago to Jeremy, who also is an orphan. Tragically, their first baby boy died at birth. But Glorie does not despair. She says "My life has been tough indeed but I believe it's God time to wipe away all the pain I have gone through." In late April 2019 she gave birth to a healthy baby girl! A new life and a new beginning for Glorie and her husband!

In essence, this is what the Center for Health and Hope is seeking to do through the Gift of H.O.P.E. and all of its programs: to create new life and new beginnings for people who have been marginalized and stigmatized.

NOT EVEN A TOOTHBRUSH: CARING FOR AIDS ORPHANS IN KENYA



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In 2006, I traveled to rural Kenya to see how I could best mobilize help to deal with the AIDS pandemic devastating sub-Saharan Africa. At that point, no anti-retroviral medicines were available and people in Kenya were dying at an outrageous rate. In a small support group of impoverished women, I remember an HIV-positive mother saying, “my husband died from AIDS and my daughter has a learning disability. She needs help, but I’m too poor to even buy her a toothbrush.”

Later that evening, I met with the former presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of Kenya, Lawi Imathieu, and Bishop William Muruki. At one point, Bishop William asked, “And what are we going to do about that child whose mother is too poor even to buy her a toothbrush?”

His question prompted our exploration of what could be done to help vulnerable African children, whose parents were suffering from HIV or who had already died of AIDS. Bishop Imathieu cautioned against the cost of starting and maintaining an orphanage, noting they often end up alienating children from the community. We envisioned a community-based program that would engage loving grandparents, relatives, and guardians in caring for vulnerable children. But since these people generally also are impoverished, we realized extra financial assistance would be needed to care for very needy children.

A Gift of H.O.P.E.

Thus a community-based program for AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children was inaugurated. Called “A Gift of H.O.P.E.,” the initials for H.O.P.E. meant “Helping Orchans by Providing Essentials.” Led by a dynamic and caring Kenyan woman, Florence Murugu, it

engaged the Kenya Methodist Church (Kaaga Synod) and the Center for Health and Hope in a partnership to care for vulnerable children and AIDS orphans.

Florence, working with community volunteers, soon identified by name 1300 children who desperately needed help. Each church would have both a male and female volunteer community health worker, who with the pastor and the limited funds available, would determine what children they could assist. The program began, small but visionary, with hopes others would join in addressing the challenge of the 15 million children orphaned by the AIDS pandemic in the world.

Thirteen years later, it’s time to share an assessment of where we have been and where we hope to go. Let me share a few statistics, but mostly focus on stories since names, not numbers, most capture our minds and hearts.

Some Statistics and Sponsors

This program began because of one mother’s plea, but now the church in Kenya serves about 700 vulnerable children—AIDS orphans and young people living in the streets and garbage heaps. People in Texas along with the Center for Health and Hope provide supplemental funds so each child can be ensured of a safe home, nutrition, education, and loving care. The program is supervised by Bishop Catherine Mutua in Meru, Kenya, with assistance by the AIDS Director, Jennifer Murithi.

Today the Center for Health and Hope supports 260 AIDS orphans every year. It costs \$200 a year to assist a child. This means every year raising \$52,000. The challenge is to find friends who care deeply and want to be involved in ensuring these children have life and love.

This money doesn’t come from one source or some big foundation, but by people who share and sacrifice. Many individuals support one or more children per year. One young pastor from the time he left seminary has sent \$200 per month, despite low pastoral salaries and college debts that face

seminarians. A couple in a retirement home have supported five children a year for the past decade. The children of Park Hill United Methodist Church have collected pennies and other coins every year—helping ten to twelve children a year to survive. The congregation of Northglenn United Methodist Church has raised \$7,000 a year to sponsor 35 children.

Right after returning from Kenya all those years ago, we started a brunch called “Spring Is a Time for H.O.P.E.” for the purpose of raising funds for these often forgotten children of the world. Every year a wonderful couple, Marla Petrini & Kelly Triplett, has paid for all the food and expenses, so every dime of the \$100 people pay per plate supports the children. About half of the \$52,000 is raised with this event.

Stories, Not Statistics

But who are the recipients of this program? Here are three stories that have come to my attention recently.

Emmanuel Mutugi wrote a thank you letter, telling me he was going to be in Class Three next year. He reported “I did well in school and God granted me good health. I thank you a lot for continued support to pay for my school fees and other things.” He prayed that “The Mighty God have mercy on you so you may live long to help other people like me who need your help.” After saying other nice words of appreciation, he concluded with this sentence that broke my heart: “This year by bad luck my mother, grandmother and cousin passed away and I am now left with my sister and brothers. Now my aunt is taking care of us.”

Purity Kathure Kirimi wrote to express her thanksgiving. She promised to get good grades in high school and to ensure us that our “support would not be in vain.” I was