

Advertorial

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Inaction was not an option for Father John Fortune. Six short months after assuming leadership of the newly formed Ewuaso oo'Nkidongi Parish, Fr. Fortune was approached by a remarkable group of parishioners. This small collection of visionary parents wanted to use the parish social hall to conduct a school they had begun. The story of their bold initiative spoke volumes of their deep faith. And Fr. Fortune was moved.

Determined to make Catholic education a priority equal for boys and girls, these parents took upon themselves the risk and responsibility to start a school. This was not just a step in Christian education; it was a stand against elements of their culture and community—emphasis on farm labor instead of education, female genital mutilation and marriage of pre-teen girls to older men. To these parents, education was a necessity, the solution to the perpetual problems of their society. They believed education was integral to a better life for their children.

The school began in a small rented room in the town's trading center. Built upon faith, strong community support and a wish for a better future, the school quickly outgrew the room. The founding families were pleased with the success of their modest project, but concerned about space. They prayed that God would offer them a solution. In 2004, their prayers were answered in the form of the Ewuaso oo'Nkidongi Parish. When they asked Fr. Fortune if they could use the church's social hall as a schoolhouse, he quickly agreed. How could he not? He had obviously inherited a constituency full of faith, initiative and a passion for Catholic education. It was his duty to nurture these qualities.

Two years and 40 students later, the Ewuaso Kedong School had expanded to the point where the parents could no longer manage it by themselves. They came to Fr. Fortune once again. This time they wanted the parish to take over management of the school. And again, Fr. John felt impressed. Recalling the experience, he says, "To say no was to crush the dreams of the faithful. This school deserved every chance to become as big as the vision of its founders. At that point, the school had become more than just a place of learning. It was a safe haven for the children. Little girls who would have otherwise been relegated to the fields or the kitchen or been married off were receiving a quality education in a safe environment. There were too many souls at stake to let the project fade away."

The parish now runs the school, but there are still concerns that need to be addressed: The social hall is too small to accommodate 40 children aged 3-6. The teachers are overworked and underpaid. And many children are unable to bring lunch to school. Yet, despite these difficulties, the Ewuaso Kedong School continues to operate. Fueled by the faith and optimism of the parishioners, it grows bigger and bigger every day, touching the community and changing lives. Are there needs? Of course. But are the people of Ewuaso oo'Nkidongi Parish worried? Not at all. Their prayers have been answered before. And they believe, through the grace of God, they will be answered again.