

What Would Happen If God Called Us to Africa?

Can you imagine treating patients as a successful orthopedist in suburban Dallas and then leaving the practice, selling your house and relocating over 8,000 miles away to a third-world country? Dr. Robert Mendonsa and his wife, Julie, didn't just imagine it—they did it.

The Mendonsas and their children, Will and Emily, annually embarked on medical mission trips to Kijabe, Kenya, from 2003–2008. As Dr. Mendonsa treated patients at the AIC Kijabe Mission Hospital, he and his family quickly noticed widespread poverty, inadequate medical care and multitudes of orphaned children.

In 2008, Dr. Mendonsa experienced a strong calling to move to Kenya. The following year, he and his family broke ground on a children's home in Maaui Mahiu, which sits about an hour away from Nairobi, and in January 2011, the newly established Naomi's Village (NV) opened its doors, providing care and shelter for 14 children initially. The home now houses 54 children, with a plan of caring for 100 children eventually.

"The orphanage name relates to the biblical story of Naomi, who felt God had forgotten her," says Rachel Lewis, who spent a year in Kenya at Naomi's Village and now serves stateside with the organization. "As Ruth's loyalty to her restored Naomi's hope in God, we try to restore the hope of these children and let them know God hasn't forgotten them."

An estimated 2.4 million orphans roam the streets and rural areas of Kenya. Their future is bleak, as Lewis says approximately 60 percent of orphaned girls turn to prostitution and 70 percent of orphaned boys turn to crime.

"Most of the orphans NV admits are extreme cases of abuse or

neglect,” Lewis says. Case in point is the orphanage’s first child, Joshua. As a 3-year-old boy, he witnessed his father murder his entire family, then commit suicide. Yet the care and treatment provided to him at Naomi’s Village fueled his rise above such tragic circumstances. “It’s just amazing what can transform when you see a child with a horrific past come to understand home can be a safe, secure place,” Lewis says. “All they need is love and family.”

The children visit daily with a nurse and receive spiritual care and counseling if they’ve experienced trauma or abuse. They are well taught about nutrition and hygiene and are well-clothed—all things that most other children take for granted. The staff is selectively chosen and in many cases develops into the children’s de facto family.

“We’re trying to instill the knowledge that they can be part of the solution, not a statistic,” Lewis says. “We’re teaching them how they can change their country and educate them to lead that transformation.”

That plan will flourish at the envisaged Cornerstone Preparatory Academy, which Lewis says will give the orphans of Naomi’s Village and children from the surrounding communities a first-world education. Lewis states the organization hopes to raise the remaining \$500,000 for Cornerstone campus construction by year’s end and will break ground on the academy soon.

To that end, Robert and Julie have continued to communicate the needs of these potential future leaders to churches, businesses, individual donors and other ministries willing to help. They have built a guesthouse at Naomi’s Village to accommodate an ever-growing number of visitors streaming in from the U.S. annually to visit sponsored children and get involved in the ongoing work. The joy of watching others see with their hearts what they have come to know as the vision God gave them in 2005 has helped them to carry the load.

“Everybody has their own village,” Lewis says. “And that’s one of the ways we raise funds—by getting people to imagine how they would help if these needs were present in their community.”

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