

GOD'S TRUST FUND

Denise Carpenter, a licensed social worker from St. Louis, knows the blessings that come from being a good steward of God's gifts.

BY SHELLY REESE

Last summer, while on a spiritual retreat at the Marianist Retreat & Conference Center in Eureka, Mo., Denise Carpenter stumbled upon an issue of *ALIVE* magazine featuring an article about Our Lady of Nazareth Primary School (OLN), a Marianist-sponsored school in Nairobi, Kenya. The article described how supporters of the school, located in one of Nairobi's largest slums, were financing a program to provide students with a cup of porridge or "uji" each morning.

OLN's nearly 2,000 students live in extreme poverty. For most of these children, the breakfast and lunch they receive at school are the only meals they will eat all day.

Moved by the children's need, Denise decided to sponsor an OLN student while she prayerfully considered how to make a larger commitment. Sponsoring a student costs \$125 a year and provides a child with an education and vital nutrition.

"The Marianists use their donations effectively to give the children so much for \$125 a year," says Denise.

Not the real owner

Denise's father died in 2008, leaving her a substantial inheritance. She contributed to a number of organizations, including groups committed to animal welfare and ending the death penalty. In 2012 she began exploring programs to benefit underprivileged children. "I look not only for worthy causes," says Denise, "but for organizations that use donor funds effectively, which is what drew me to the Marianist ministry at OLN."

Denise contacted the Marianist development office to learn more about the school and its needs. She valued OLN's holistic support of the children, providing not only education but food and a loving environment. Even more impressive, she felt, was the school's track



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record: More OLN graduates pursue secondary education or technical training opportunities than do students from government-sponsored schools, underscoring the school's role in breaking the cycle of poverty.

"It's hard for people in the United States to conceive of extreme poverty," she says. "To see the number of OLN students who continue their education — given their poverty and where they're growing up — is incredible."

Recognizing the importance of OLN to the children of Nairobi, Denise made a generous contribution that will enable the school to continue serving poor children in the slums of Nairobi.

Denise doesn't know if she'll ever visit Kenya to witness the difference her gift has made in the lives of the children. Still, she says, there is intrinsic value in being a good financial steward.

"Giving money away reminds me that I am not the real owner," says Denise. "I am holding it in trust for God." ■

Shelly Reese is a freelance writer from Cincinnati.

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