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Mercy begins where you are

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Towards the end of last year, my domestic worker, Joyce (not her real name) and her children were evicted from her maternal home by her brother. Joyce had returned there with her six children after being abandoned by her husband with the permission of an older brother who later passed on. Their father had

died much earlier. This time, she had to leave with her children and she could only bring the children to Nairobi with her.

Joyce had only a one-roomed mabati house at a cost of Kshs 3000/= per month, where she rested over the weekends when she was off duty. Back at home the cost of living was lower. Bringing the children to Nairobi meant that she not only had to provide everything, but she also had to enrol them in schools with all that's required to join a new school. Only the eldest child could remain behind with other empathic relatives because he was already too advanced in high school.

I only knew about this because she looked really stressed and was starting to fall ill. Having lived with her for around two years, I had learnt how she reacted to stressful situations and so I asked her what

was going on. She broke down but eventually told me the story. Though she refused my offer to break early for Christmas, she said she would bring her children with her after the Christmas holiday.

Bringing the children to Nairobi was not the hardest task. How would she cater for herself and her children from her earnings of 12,000/- per month? How would she keep her children safe from the ills of the congested Kangemi village? In her previous job, she was earning 5,000/= and she would not be paid on time. Now, she felt confident that she could feed the children but she knew that she couldn't afford the school fees in the private schools around. The public schools in Kangemi were too congested for any learning to occur. So there was no point in taking them there. She needed my help.

This became for me the first project for the year of mercy. Although I had no money to spare, there was some money I had been saving over a long period to raise capital for business. She needed 100,000/= for the whole year for everything. Needless to say, I prayed about it and saw it fit to part with the 80,000/= I had saved. The important and urgent things anyway were first term school fees, uniforms, books and stationary. It was also important to keep the children occupied over the weekend and school holidays. To this end I introduced her and her three daughters to Watani club and the two boys to Hodari boys club. This came with added expenses which Joyce couldn't manage. I took over providing bus fare and the club fees.

At the clubs the children get spiritual, social, academic formation. They are happy and do not have idle time while not in school. They really enjoy

the club and have been very appreciative. The boys have learnt how to play cricket and they enjoy it.

Joyce was not left out. She was invited to the annual retreat but had no money. I also did not have ready cash but I was able to put in a deposit and paid the rest a few weeks later. She was delighted and happy with what she learnt. She said she will not miss an annual retreat ever. She was amazed at how well the priest at the retreat explained things. She is considering becoming a Catholic.

I thought it was important to let my children participate and so we organised a visit to go and see her children after doing a good house shopping. One of her children was sick. Joyce did not want to feel like a burden in all these things and wanted to be in charge of her children. We therefore agreed that the school fees was a loan and she

would pay back what and when she is able. So far out of the 80,000/= she has paid back 16,000/= and to the schools, she has paid the remaining 20,000/=. She feels motivated because she is able to pay back in small amounts.

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