

Stories of Mission

LIVING FAITH





Veronica's Return

PWS&D and Presbyterians Sharing support a number of mission programs within the Livingstonia Synod in Northern Malawi. With the support of PWS&D, Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program supports village education committees that encourage students who have dropped out of school to complete their education.



Veronica, a bright 15-year-old girl who lives in Mangwani Village in Malawi, has always loved going to school. But when she learned she was pregnant, Veronica was scared of what it meant for her future. Worried about becoming a mother and being forced to drop out of school, her hopes of continuing her education were disappearing before her eyes.

Enala, Veronica's mom, was also worried. She felt the eyes of the community on her because of the stigma attached to teen pregnancy and considered throwing her daughter out of the family home. The whole family felt helpless and overwhelmed.

Many young girls around the world are forced to drop out of school if they become pregnant. Due to social and cultural customs, they might be encouraged to marry at an early age or just have to remain home to care for their babies. Without an education, their ability to earn a living, provide for

their families, make healthy decisions and contribute to the overall development of their communities is taken away from them.

Things started to feel more hopeful when Veronica's parents were approached by the local village education committee (VEC). The VEC is central to communicating the importance of education to parents and guardians.

Access to education is already harder for girls than boys. Globally, over 130 million girls are not attending primary or secondary schools. In rural areas, only 39% of girls attend secondary school. PWS&D's local partner, the Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program, supports village education committees that check on students who have dropped out of school and encourage them to return, with the support of their parents and guardians.

With encouragement from the VEC, Veronica was able to continue attending school after giving birth



to her daughter. Her mother was relieved to find support from the community and assisted Veronica's return by looking after her granddaughter.

Veronica knows that her education is opening the door to a better life for her and her daughter. According to the UN, for every additional year of school, girls' eventual wages rise by 10-20%. Veronica's education is helping her gain tools to help break cycles of poverty and contribute to the development of her family and community. While she is still figuring out how to adapt to her new role as a mother and a student, Veronica is excited about the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the inequality already faced by many girls in the developing world. Due to loss of income, lack of access to schooling, bearing the highest costs of domestic labour, and facing increased domestic violence, many girls are being forced into early marriages. These marriages in turn limit both their and their children's future opportunities.

The single biggest factor in reducing mortality rates for children under five is more education for women—a literate woman has a 50% higher chance of her child surviving past the age of five. More education helps women make better decisions about prenatal care, basic hygiene, nutrition and immunizations, contributing to better health for the family.

Read: Jeremiah 29:1-14

Reflect

We can only imagine what it would be like to live under the domination of an enemy, or be forced to go and live in a foreign land. That was the situation of Jeremiah's people. They were in dire straits, and it is to a desperate situation which Jeremiah speaks. He utters a word of hope, however, proclaiming that God has a plan for God's people, even when the present seems uncertain and dangerous. The best news of all is that God is present, and will bring the people back from captivity. God intends good things.

Many of us in North America take our schooling for granted. School is where we met up with friends, excelled at our favourite subjects and learned new things. It's where we gained life skills, developed our passions and built our confidence. For many students in developing countries, going to school and getting an education are key to breaking out of cycles of poverty.

When Veronica found out she was pregnant, she was heartbroken at the thought that she might not return to school. But God had other plans. With the encouragement of her village's education committee, Veronica's hopeless situation turned bright and now she is improving future prospects for herself and her daughter. God plans for abundant life for God's people. No matter how bleak the current circumstances, God is working to bring good.

Discuss

- 1) What are some other reasons students in Malawi or in other countries might not attend school? What are the implications of not attending school?
- 2) How does Veronica's experience of teen pregnancy parallel the experience of a teen in Canada? How does it differ?
- 3) In the scripture passage, Jeremiah states that God has a plan for our future. How will you discern what God is planning for your future? How can we as a community begin to discern what God has planned for us?

Sing

574 – With the Lord as my guide

462 – All my hope on God is founded

726 – May the God of hope go with us every day

Pray

Wonderful God,

Before we were formed, you knew us. You knew all the plans you had for us — plans to prosper and not to harm us. We pray that though obstacles may cross our paths, we will continue to put our faith and trust in you, and that your presence will bring us peace. We ask your special blessing on Veronica and other girls who struggle to get access to education.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

Help children stay in school through Gifts of Change:
presbyterian.ca/village-education



Mission Around the World

Through Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is sharing Christ's love in 25 countries.

Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing provide grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany our mission partners in areas such as Bible translation, leadership development, evangelism, outreach and Christian service.

PWS&D supports development work and provides relief in times of emergency. Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world.

