



Raising a Family on the Mission Field

About Author

James Hargrave

James Hargrave and his wife Daphne are long-term missionaries with the [Orthodox Christian Mission Center \(OCMC\)](#) serving in the [Holy Archdiocese of Mwanza](#) in northwest Tanzania, East Africa. James works for His Eminence, Metropolitan Jeronymos of Mwanza to support youth activities, aid English-language communication, and facilitate short-term Teams from North America and from Finland.



I would love to be a missionary, but now that we have kid's I can't.

I hear this a lot. I don't get it.

I suppose folks who say this think that a missionary is something like a Peace Corps volunteer: a young person who takes two years off to go somewhere exotic before settling down to “real life.” And sure, a married couple with kids can't do that sort of thing very easily.

But, well, that's not what missions is. Christ's command to “make disciples of all nations” is not a command to go do some volunteer work for a year or two. The calling to missions is, well, a calling. It's a lifelong vocation.

Many great missionary saints have been monastics, but this does not mean there is no place for missionary



families. Saint Innocent of Alaska and his wife Katherine raised several children on an extremely remote and difficult mission field. (St Innocent was consecrated a bishop after the repose of his wife, when his children were grown.) So did his co-laborers Saint Jacob and Matushka Anna Netsvetov.





As Daphne and I anticipate the arrival of our firstborn, I'm more and more conscious of the anxieties that parenthood can bring. We want to give our children the very best, and make sure that they are safe and healthy. Raising kids far away from their grandparents, in a place with poor infrastructure, doesn't seem to fit these goals. It's one thing for a young single person to take certain risks. It's another thing for Mom and Dad to take the same risks with their little ones. (And yet another for Grandma and Grandad...)

The risks are real, and I won't try to argue them away. Instead, I want to make a case that the risks are worth it. As a "Missionary Kid" myself, raised in rural Kenya by Protestant missionary parents, I think that I am in a position to make this argument.

Mom and Dad moved to Africa when I was three. My sister Ginny was one, and Mom was pregnant with Becky, who was born in Kenya six months after we arrived. After language school, and after Becky's birth, we all moved to a remote place in the Northern Kenyan desert, where we lived for eight years before relocating to a different part of the country.

Life *was* rough there in Logologo. As a small child I witnessed, first-hand, the famines of the 1980s and early 1990s. People around us died of starvation. There was a real threat of violence from roving bands of outlaws. Sometimes I'd lie awake at night listening to goats screaming as hyenas invaded the village and carried them away. Is this where you'd want to raise your kids?

I hope it is! I loved my childhood, and am grateful for it. My sisters and I had to learn some hard lessons about poverty and suffering at an early age. Christ's reminder that "the poor will always be with you" sunk in quickly. I'm writing this blog post in a beautiful garden by a swimming pool at a lovely hotel



overlooking Lake Victoria- and it's great!- but I'm not able to forget that I share this gorgeous world with neighbors who are truly in pain.

There was great beauty where I grew up, and there were very good people. My sisters and I learned that no matter the intensity of poverty and suffering, we are surrounded by beauty and that all people- no matter how strange they may look- are fundamentally the same as us. We really aren't that different, and we are loved by the same Creator.

I converted to Orthodox Christianity ten years ago, and I do have serious theological issues with my parents' Protestant denomination. Nevertheless, Mom and Dad taught me and my sisters what it looks like to trust God. They were sure of their calling to follow Christ among impoverished people in a difficult place, so they went. Sure, they worried about us. Sure, our grandparents gave them grief. God didn't promise there would never be any trouble. But they had His assurance in Scripture that He is with us always.

And He is. Oh, He is.

The call to follow Christ with all our life is a difficult call. There is real sacrifice involved, and real risk. Whether the calling is to overseas missionary work, or to something very different, if we seek to be in the presence of God we must anticipate discomfort and even danger. We have to remember that it is our



almighty Father who cares for us, and for all His creatures everywhere. He doesn't promise it will be easy. In fact, He warns us to prepare for difficulty. In the Gospel of St John, at the end of the sixteenth chapter, Christ puts it this way:

Indeed, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer,

I have overcome the world.

Source: [The Sounding Orthodox Blog](#)