

Student Life



Photo: Joshua Sutherland

by Erika Marksbury

Growing up in Nyeri, on the slopes of snowcapped Mount Kenya, Edward Buri had seen snow from a distance, but nothing like the blanket of white that coated Princeton's campus this winter.

"People kept saying it was coming," he remembers, grinning, "but when it did, I was completely amazed, like, *wow. What is this?* I saw people playing in it but I didn't think it was something to be touched. Honestly, I thought, 'Those people are messing it up; they should just let it be....'"

New-fallen snow, however, may be the only subject about which Buri's philosophy is "let it be."

Now finishing his first year in PTS's M.Div./M.A. program, the president of the International Students Association and member of the Touring Choir admits that in his younger years he "despised Christianity." Viewing it as a moral code, and himself as just as morally upright as Christians he knew, Buri scorned his mother's faithful devotion, even tried to convince her to abandon it. But as a student at the University of Nairobi, he reluctantly resorted to the Bible for advice as he "searched for a steady footing in life."

"As often as I studied the Scriptures," he remembers, "I could not ignore their loud invitation, 'Come.' I finally overcame my indecision and placed my trembling heart in the outstretched hand of the Nazarene. The result was a powerful grip that changed my life."

Called Out of Kenya

Buri no longer mocks his mother's faith, but instead says, "I believe I was born of her prayers."

If that was his birth, though, Buri was forced to grow up fast.

"I never got to sit down in a pew," he laughs. The campus ministry that encouraged Buri to respond to God's invitation also asked him to share his story. "They were always visiting schools and needing someone to give a testimony, so a week after I was converted, I was on stage telling people about Christ. I became a leader in that group—Rays of Hope International—and loved it."

Buri served Rays of Hope seven years, continuing long after he graduated with a marketing degree. He worked as drama director, preached, sang, and organized missions in Kenya and to Zambia and Uganda, his heart growing increasingly for the young people of Kenya.

Those were projects of his spare time, though. Briefly a consultant and then for four years a banker, Buri discovered he found a unique fulfillment during his weekends doing ministry. He had been attending St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Nairobi for three years when he learned they were searching for a youth worker, and he promptly resigned from the bank. Many people he knew asked nervously, "What have you done?!"

What Buri had done was find a church that shared his passion. St. Andrew's, the biggest Presbyterian church in Kenya, is home to a "youth church" for 12- to 35-year-olds. With more than 700 members, the youth church conducts worship services and fosters ministries focused on mission and discipleship among teenagers, young adults, young professionals, and parents.

"I'm here [at PTS]," Buri explains, "because of the church's need to invest in young people. I'm taking a leave of absence now and developing my leadership skills. We have many *willing* youth workers in Kenya, but they're not *trained*. I want to go back and participate in training them."

Dee Cooper, associate pastor at Grace Presbyterian Church in Wichita, Kansas, where PTS alum Keith Koch (Class of 1979) pastors, works with St. Andrew's pastor, Isaiah Muita, on building a relationship of mutual learning and support between their two congregations. Members of the Kansas church visited Nairobi in 2000, and a group from St. Andrew's repaid the visit the following year. The churches worship together, help each other with community projects, and continually encourage one another.

Buri and Cooper became friends on that first trip, and she remembers asking him then to consider seminary. His hopeful prayer, "if God would provide....," was heard. God *has* provided, through encouragement and resources from St. Andrew's, PTS, and Grace Presbyterian Church. Cooper says her congregation is glad to help, knowing Buri is "a man of God who will be used mightily by God."

And that's all Buri wants. When he finishes his degrees, he'll head back to Kenya, to St. Andrew's and the youth there. He's thrilled about the growth, both spiritual and communal, he sees happening in Kenya, and he's eager to rejoin that effort. He also hopes to participate in youth work throughout Africa.

"God is doing a great work," he says. "Kenya is a young nation, and it's exciting seeing young people embrace God. To be used by God to be a person through whom that message of hope comes—that's the greatest thing I could ever ask for." ■