



Love in Times of Hunger

One family's journey from empty plates to restored hope.

Every morning, the first thing 6-year-old Juan and 9-year-old Carlos do is walk into the kitchen, wondering what their day will be like. This morning, the stove is cold and the air is stale, and these brothers know what they will find. Or rather, what they won't.

Hunger has become part of their routine.

With little energy, Juan and Carlos slowly get ready for school. The hardest part comes later: the walk. On some days, the hunger is so intense that it leaves Carlos dizzy, forcing him to stop along the way to regain strength, or even fainting, which has happened to little Juan.

Juan and Carlos live in the Dominican Republic with their parents, Juan Carlos and Santa, three more siblings, and a young niece. Santa stays home caring for the children, while Juan Carlos leaves each morning without knowing if he will find work. Some days he is hired to carry blocks, help in construction, or work on a farm. On a good day, he earns around US\$20. In a good week, he finds work for three days.

"If I don't work, we don't eat," Juan Carlos says. "To have three proper meals a day, we would need between US\$15-30 dollars. That's impossible for us."

Their food choices are made with one thing in mind: survival. Rice and eggs are often the only affordable options for vulnerable families in the area. Meat, vegetables and fruit are rare. Most days, the family eats just one meal. On a very good day, everyone has bread and coffee for breakfast – even the children.

"One of the hardest things is hearing my children say, 'Mom, I'm hungry,'" Santa shares. "Sometimes their father and I choose not to eat so the children can have at least one good meal."

Physical hunger affects every part of life. Children who don't eat cannot focus on school. They become withdrawn, tired and emotionally overwhelmed. Hunger affects their bodies, energy, health, learning and their ability to simply be children.



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At the local Compassion center, staff have learned to recognize hunger signs immediately, watching carefully for a child who walks in quietly, rests their head on the desk or avoids participating in games and activities.

“When that happens, we take them straight to the kitchen,” explains Rosi, the director of Compassion programming at Carlos and Juan’s church. “We make sure they eat first. Then everything changes.”

Through Compassion and the local church, families receive food baskets and daily meals if needed. Each basket may include rice, eggs, milk, canned sardines, salami, oats, coffee, chocolate, sugar, salt, oil, wheat, cornmeal, bread, cookies, beans, pasta, root vegetables, cornflakes, vegetables, and sometimes chicken or pork chops. These are foods that they would otherwise rarely be able to eat.

For Carlos and Juan’s family, a basket lasts only two or three days, but those days bring relief.

“The first time we received food,” Santa recalls, “we felt the presence of God. We were so happy – we even had milk, chicken and cereal! It was a blessing that came directly from God’s heart.”

At the center, children run in after school, eager to learn but even more excited to eat. Some even say it openly: “I came because I’m hungry.” The center workers smile, understanding the deeper truth behind those words. They know they have an amazing opportunity at the church to serve and preach the love of Jesus through food and hope.

And then, as the children eat, something beautiful happens.

The same children who arrived quiet and withdrawn begin to laugh. They engage, participate and play. They listen. They feel seen, known and loved.

“We’re not just feeding them,” Rosi says. “We’re helping them feel safe, valued and free to be children again.”

This is the difference a meal makes.

Carlos and Juan’s plates are no longer empty. Because of Compassion and the local church, hope is no longer distant, because love now meets them right at the table.