

# Mission Connections

Volume #69

Summer, 2022



*Lord, you are justice and love  
Watch over us as we fight for justice in the World around us  
Guide us as we love the people we encounter in our daily lives  
Wrap your loving arms around those outside our reach  
And help us to follow you in seeing everyone as our neighbor  
Amen*

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From Whom and Where in the World do our stories come from?

# Mama Hellen's School

In 2013, Hellen Lotara founded the Mama Hellen Lotara Nursery and Primary school in Abara, a remote, rural village in South Sudan with little access to education. The mission of Mama Hellen Lotara Nursery and Primary School is to prepare children and youth to become responsible citizens by providing them with quality education and promoting values that can bring about positive change in South Sudan and the world. Hellen is passionate about making education accessible to all students, especially girls, students with limited financial resources, and those who have been traumatized by war and conflict. The motto of Mama Hellen's School is: Enter to learn...Depart to serve."

**Looking Back...** Hellen Lotara was born in 1958 in the village of Abara in South Sudan. When she was very young, her parents moved the family to Uganda for safety. They sent Hellen's younger brother to school, but did not see education as a priority for Hellen because she was a girl. An uncle of Hellen's advocated for her and persuaded her parents to send her to school in Uganda when she was 10 years old. Hellen embraced education and worked very hard to advance.

In 1985, Hellen earned a degree in Public Administration and Management from the University of Juba in South Sudan. In 1994 she completed studies in Business Administration from the Kenya Institute of Management. She served as the Under-Secretary of Labor of South Sudan, overseeing employment and industrial relations. She helped establish a legal framework in South Sudan to identify and address hazardous work conditions and to end child labor abuse. Hellen is a founding member of the Justice and Peace Committee in the city of Juba. For many years, Hellen has dedicated herself to community development. Her life experiences inspire her to make a difference in the lives of children through education.

**Looking Ahead...** Hellen hopes the establishment of her school will address many challenges faced by the children and families who live in Abara. Decades of conflict, war and violence in South Sudan have torn families apart as they sought refuge in resettlement camps; the village of Abara is difficult to get to because of damaged roads and lack of infrastructure -- access to education is extremely limited for the people who live there; many families in Abara have little or no financial resources. Hellen's vision is that her school will be a place of learning,



Students celebrate Kindergarten graduation at Mama Hellen's School.



Hellen Lotara is the founder of the Mama Hellen School in South Sudan. She now lives in St. Cloud, MN and is an active member of Holy Spirit and Christ Church Newman Center. She is also a member of St. Anthony's Christian Women.

empowerment, and community building for the students, teachers, and their families. Other than a few outside grants, Hellen was the sole supporter of her school for a number of years. She realized that to sustain her school, she would need to widen her base of support.

**A Local Connection...** In 2016, Hellen came to the United States to join members of her family who had left refugee camps and resettled in Central Minnesota to escape violence in South Sudan. Hellen immediately immersed herself in learning about her new home. She attended numerous meetings focused on building a stronger community and creating bridges that promote cross-cultural understanding.

Through connections with the St. Cloud Mission Office, the Central MN Community Foundation, the League of Women's Voters, and members of the South Sudanese community, Hellen built relationships with a group of volunteers and activists who came together to form "Mama Hellen's Team." The Team works with Hellen and with teachers and administrators at the school in South Sudan to raise awareness and financial support for Mama Hellen's School. The team includes two attorneys from Lathrop GPM who serve on a pro bono basis. The attorneys established a legal agreement with the St. Cloud Mission

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Donations for any of the missionaries or mission connections mentioned here may be made in care of the Mission Office.

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# Mama Hellen's School Cont.

Office, enabling the Mission Office to serve as the fiscal sponsor of Mama Hellen's School. Through this connection, supporters of Mama Hellen's School can make tax-deductible gifts to the Mission Office and designate these gifts for the school. The Mission Office also played a key role in helping host a visit to St. Cloud by Msgr. Thomas Oliha from the Diocese of Torit where the school is located. The Diocese of Torit has a long relationship with the St. Cloud Mission Office and is very supportive of Mama Hellen's School.

Hellen's guidance, the teachers and administration addressed these issues by making home visits to provide education packets to the younger children. Accommodations were made to house the older students at the school so they could continue their education. This was done with ongoing education about health and safety measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

In December 2020, Hellen made a personal visit to Mama Hellen's School in South Sudan. The trip was arduous, but resulted in a much-appreciated morale boost for the administrators and teachers. While she was there, the school held an event with the Magwi County Director of Education, the Payam Education Supervisor, school teachers, administrators, parents, community members and members of the PTA. The Magwi County Director of Education stated that Mama Hellen's School stands out as one of the best performing schools in South Sudan, particularly in Magwi County. He commended the teamwork of the teachers and administrators and their commitment to maintain high standards. The Payam Education Supervisor noted that Mama Hellen and members of her family serve as leaders and role models for the community.

In May 2021, the South Sudanese government lifted restrictions caused by COVID-19 and re-opened the country's schools. Administrators at Mama Hellen's School reported that 225 students returned to the school. More students are enrolling every day.

Mama Hellen and the Team were recently informed that all members of the graduating 8th grade class in 2022 not only passed their final exams, but received high marks -- all above the average score.

Hellen is working with the Team and School administrators to develop a culture of EMPOWERMENT at Mama Hellen's School and to view the school as a COMMUNITY ASSET. Parents and community members are encouraged to donate time and expertise to support the school by volunteering at the school and in the gardens. Students are being encouraged to "grow in the mindset" that they will support Mama Hellen's School with financial contributions when they are financially able to.



Students achieve academic success through hard work and teachers dedicated to providing a quality education.

**Supporting Mama Hellen's School:** During the past six years, Mama Hellen's Team has raised funds for Mama Hellen's School. New toilets have been constructed to provide healthier conditions for the students and teachers. New living quarters for teachers are nearly complete and will provide a safe and secure place for teachers to stay.

Most importantly, supporters of Mama Hellen's School are helping address 4 key priorities to build and strengthen Mama Hellen's School:

1. Increase and maintain salaries to retain the best teachers
2. Provide need-based sponsorships for students to cover tuition, school supplies and uniforms
3. Improve energy and power supplies
4. Improve access to technology for teachers and older students

Hellen continues to work with school administrators to provide ongoing training for the teachers. Teachers are learning to encourage debate and critical thinking among their students -- and to help students find their own voice in describing the future they want to create for themselves, for their country, and for the world.

**Success Stories:** In 2019, students at Mama Hellen's School scored the highest of any others at their level in standardized tests, making Mama Hellen's School the top school in South Sudan. In 2020, schools in South Sudan closed because of COVID-19. The local government used radio to provide education for children while the schools were closed. This was very challenging because most families did not have access to radios and many remote areas had no reception. With Mama



Students dance in a celebration to mark the successful completion of the school term.

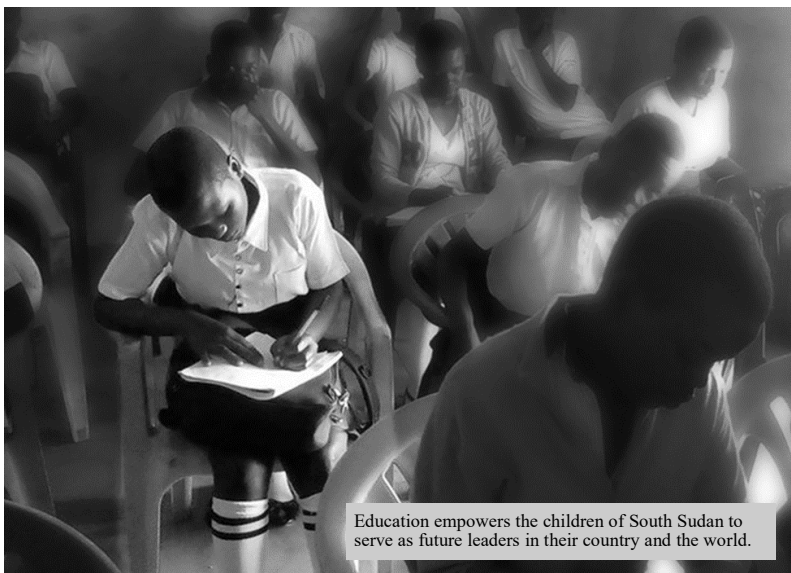
## Mama Hellen's School Cont.

Developing this spirit of empowerment will help sustain and grow Mama Hellen's School into the future.

South Sudan is the world's newest country and is struggling to make order from the chaos of the past 60 years of civil war and violence. Much of the country's infrastructure is devastated. The violence caused a mass exodus of South Sudanese people

fleeing for their lives, who are just beginning to return to their country now. It is Hellen's vision that her school will serve not only as a beacon of hope, but as a model that inspires others in South Sudan to make quality education accessible to all its children.

*This article was graciously provided by Mama Hellen's Team.*



Education empowers the children of South Sudan to serve as future leaders in their country and the world.

### Links and Donations:

Mama Hellen's School:

<https://mamahellenschool.com>

To make a donation to Mama Hellen's School, mail a check to "St. Cloud Mission Office." Write "Mama Hellen's School" in the Memo.

*St. Cloud Mission Office  
11 - 8th Avenue South  
St. Cloud, MN 56301*

To make a donation online, go to:

<https://www.stcloudmissionoffice.com>

Click on the "Let's Go" Button on the Donate section  
Click on the link to VANCO  
Click on Mama Hellen School "Donate"

## World Mission Rosary

The World Mission Rosary was envisioned by Archbishop Fulton John Sheen, then the national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, in 1951. He made the request on a radio show that his listeners "Embrace the world in prayer." To do so he introduced this Rosary.

Its uniqueness is in the five colors represented in each of the decades. Color symbolism in a rosary is a gentle reminder on which to focus our prayers.

This rosary honors the work of mission, our call to be missionaries, and world unity and peace through its special emphasis on each of the Earth's regions, where prayers are needed and our brothers and sisters in Christ live and play and pray just like each of us! Each region is represented by a different color; it is not only a beautiful rosary, but rich in symbolism.

**World Mission Rosary Day is the first Friday of October but can be prayed anytime, anywhere!**



### Do you have your World Mission Rosaries?

If you would like rosaries for your school, class, or church, or more info about World Mission Rosaries, please email [missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com](mailto:missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com) or find the request forms on our website: [www.stcloudmissionoffice.com](http://www.stcloudmissionoffice.com)



## Summer Visitors to the Mission Office

During the summer we often have missionaries who come home for a short time or stop in after a Missionary Appeal. This summer we were blessed with many friendly faces from near and far and we've included some pictures of some of these missionaries and our time together.



**Deacon Jose and Celida Penate, currently serving in Honduras with InnerCHANGE**— Jose and Celida are more recent friends of the Mission Office, as Elizabeth and Teresa first met Jose this past March while in El Salvador and have since stayed connected.

**Pictures from left to right:** Jose and Celida visit St. Michael's Church in St. Cloud with Teresa and her parents, Deacon Jim and Betsy Trout; Elizabeth and her husband Travis pause for a selfie with our friends; Elizabeth and Teresa welcome the Penates to the Mission Office and show them around.



**Fr. Bob McCahill MM is currently serving in Bangladesh**— Fr. Bob has been a long time friend of the Mission Office and always tries to stop in when he has a chance. This time he was able to do Mission Appeals as well as visit with Mission Office staff and their families.

**Pictures from left to right:** Fr. Bob stops for a picture with Carolina, her husband Jonathan, and their kids; Fr. Bob presents about his work to parishioners in Paynesville.



**Br. Loren Beaudry MM, currently serving in Mwanza, Tanzania**— Br. Loren is working in Mwanza with people struggling with mental health and teaches schools about how to work with students that have learning disabilities. It was so good to visit with him!

**Pictured:** Br. Loren stopped at the Mission Office and posed for a picture with Fr. Bill Vos.

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## Online Auction During October

Once again, we are having an online auction during the month of October! In celebration of Mission Month, from Monday, October 3rd at 12pm to Monday, October 31st at 12pm, our online auction will be open for bidding!

This auction will feature items such as quilts made by our local mission groups, fair trade items, and more!

The link for the auction can be found on our website, social media pages, and below:

<https://scmo.betterworld.org/auctions/mission-month-auction>

If you have any questions about the auction feel free to call or email Teresa:

[missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com](mailto:missionofficeeducator@cloudnet.com)

320-251-1100

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