



A Christmas Story

FROM RIIMENZE, SOUTH SUDAN

2025



Where Little Seeds of Hope Are Growing

In the quiet village of **Riimenze**, as dawn breaks over the trees, the schoolyard at **St. Dominic Savio Nursery School** (Kindergarten), slowly comes alive. By 8:00 a.m., small footsteps patter across the compound—some bare, some in worn sandals—as the children line up for their morning activities and the daily raising of the South Sudanese flag. They sing the national anthem with pride, many knowing it by heart—tiny voices rising toward the sky.

For the 340 children who attend regularly, these mornings are more than routine. They are moments of safety, belonging, nourishment, and hope. Here, children learn until 1:00 p.m., with short breaks for play and a simple lunch shared together—meals made possible through World Vision's food support and the generosity of parents who occasionally bring maize or groundnuts from their harvest.

Though the buildings are humble and the classrooms temporary, the heart of the school is strong. Rooted in Gospel values and inspired by the gentle leadership of St. Dominic Savio, the school holds a **Vision**: to lead the way in early childhood education, fostering a community grounded in care, compassion, and the dignity of every child.

Its **Mission** is lived out daily: providing a safe and engaging environment where children can explore, grow, and prepare for the next stage of their learning journey.

Daily Life at the School

Across the six classes—four Pre Primary 1 and two Pre Primary 2—children gather to learn letters, numbers, songs, and stories. The older ones in PP2, some between 7 and 13 years old, are catching up on the education they once lost to conflict and displacement.

Teachers begin each day not only with lessons, but with prayer, discipline, and kindness. A seminarian and four teachers trained by Solidarity with South Sudan (with support from Friends in Solidarity), guide them with patience. On Fridays, cultural activities fill the compound with dancing, drumming, and laughter—reminders of joy despite the hardship's families face.



Moments of Growth and Grace

This year, the school has seen small miracles:



- 150 children are ready to enter Primary 1, eager and prepared.
- 19 displaced children (IDPs) have been fully integrated, and 10 of them are ready for Primary 1.
- Teachers, cooks, cleaners, and watchmen work faithfully with pride.
- Parents—slowly but surely—are beginning to take more responsibility, buying pencils, checking

attendance, and encouraging their children.

- Weekly teachers' meetings help staff reflect, plan, and grow—building leadership skills and deepening their love for teaching
- Tree planting around the compound has become a cherished routine, helping children appreciate creation and care for the environment.



- During October, the month of the Rosary, children recited the rosary—giving birth to a new group lovingly called Mama Mary's Kids (MMK), where young leaders emerged.
- A new pit latrine and bathroom for the teachers were completed—small but meaningful steps toward dignity and better learning conditions.

But the Story Also Holds Hard Truths

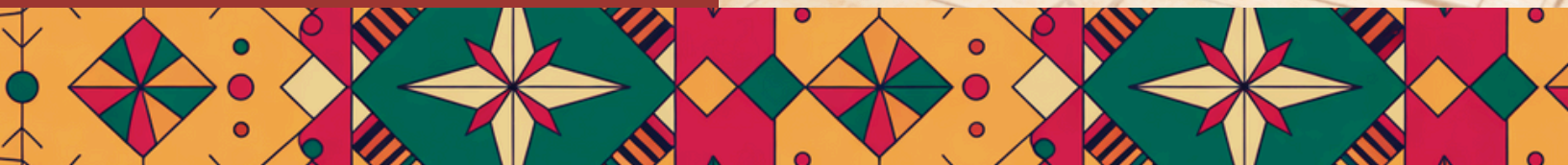
Not every chapter this year was easy. During the hottest months, classrooms became unbearably warm; when the rains arrived, the temporary structures flooded. Two of the school's dedicated female teachers will be leaving, and four new qualified teachers will be needed next year to continue serving all six classes. Books remain scarce. Absenteeism—especially on Fridays—still reflects the struggle many families face in placing education above daily survival. And on some days, insecurity forced classes to close early, or not open at all. Yet even with these challenges, the community remains steady. Teachers, parents, and children continue showing up with resilience in their hearts—refusing to let hardship overshadow hope.

A Christmas Gratitude

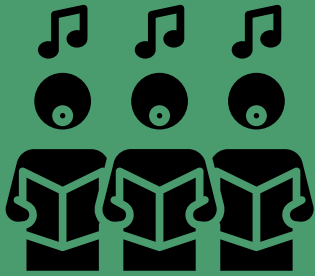
This Christmas, the parents, teachers, parish priest, and the entire Riimenze community want you to know this:

Your generosity is woven into...

Every smile,
Every lesson,
Every meal,
Every prayer in this school.

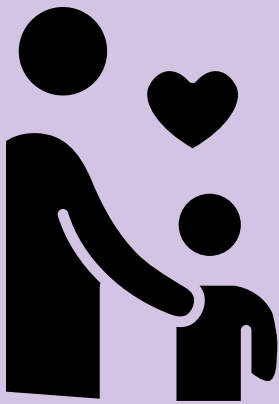


Because of you:



A child who once fled conflict now sings in the choir.

A teacher who once doubted her skills now leads with confidence.



A parent who once thought schooling was impossible now sends her child to class each morning.



A community that once tasted only hardship now celebrates progress—slow, steady, hopeful.

A Final Image to Carry With You

Picture this:

It is a warm December afternoon. Under the mango tree, children gather in a circle—dust rising as they shuffle onto the ground. Their uniforms are worn, but their faces glow. They begin to sing a Christmas song in voices that rise and fall like a prayer carried by wind.

And in that small circle—far from the noise of the world—they sing for you, for those who have never met them but believe in their future. This is the story your kindness is writing.

Merry Christmas from Riimenze, South Sudan.

May God bless you abundantly.



Irene Florence Martin

My name is Irene Florence Martin, and I am a graduate of Solidarity Teachers Training College (STTC) - which is supported by Friends in Solidarity. During my studies at STTC, I learned a great deal, including Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults, the Teacher's Code of Conduct, and various effective teaching strategies.

At St. Dominic Savio Nursery School, I have achieved many things. One of the most important is the spirit of teamwork. We work together collaboratively as teachers, alongside our supervisor, Sr. Agnes. Through our community outreach program—where we visit the families of our students—I have also seen how building strong relationships with parents positively supports the children's learning. Another achievement I am grateful for is the chance to share responsibilities within the school. I was nominated as the School Finance Officer, a role in which I had no prior experience, yet I have learned that I am capable of handling it. I am truly proud to teach in the nursery school because I love children, and I treasure the opportunity to contribute to the foundation of their educational journey.

Being a trained teacher has really improved my life in a way that I have built- up the courage and confidence to stand up and express my feelings in front of people and so many other things that have really transformed my life.

Economically, I am able to provide for my basic needs and help my siblings in terms of medication and school fees. This has increased my stability because I am able to plan and join the Diploma Course in Education next year 2026. Now my parents appreciate the teachers for the effort they put to change the lives of children. In the community, the children have now the habit of praying before meals and after meals. They also challenge their elders in the Primary School in speaking English. I also see changes in some parents. They follow-up the performance of their children at school, meaning some of them are beginning to value Education and take up their responsibility as partners of the school.

Teachings has deepened my relation with God. As I look at the children, I see them as created in the image of God. I have to treat them with love, care and respect. I teach them to be God-fearing people.

I am really happy as a teacher. It has enriched my outlook in life. I experience respect from my children and their parents. I have also become popular person in the community because of the children.

On the day of the exam, one child said to me: "Madame, pray for us so that we can pass our exams" and so I did. And when two children are not having pencils, I gave them my own. I am becoming more concerned person.

I thank God for my profession.

Irene Florence Martin

TEACHER TESTIMONIAL

See
the
Video





TEACHER TESTIMONIAL

Anthony Friday

My name is Anthony Friday. I am a teacher in St. Dominic Savio Nursery School. I finished my schooling in Solidarity Teachers Training College - which is supported by Friends in Solidarity. I am a person with positive outlook on life focused on my work and fluent speaker. I am good at listening to stories and love to learn new things. Moreover, I listen to the advice of elders. I am from Western Equatorial State, Yambio, Ibba community.

When I learned that Solidarity is offering Certificate on Primary Education for Teachers, I excitingly enrolled for I believe education is very important in building the nation. I could share knowledge and skills to my brothers and sisters for the betterment of our country South Sudan.

My experience in the Nursery School made me understand the children and their growing process both physically and mentally, their learning abilities and capacities, their needs such as space and conducive learning environment. I am really happy to see changes in the lives of the children and in the children themselves. They grow, develop their memories. They become role models for the little ones, and they feel a sense of belonging in the school and community they live in.

There are so many challenges I face but the most of all I am really struggling is having 50+ students in a class. It is hard for me to know them all and respond to their needs in terms of learning. This is a reality we face in Riimenze. There are so many children but few qualified teachers and lacking also in classrooms.

My dream is that if the country is going to in total peace the children will learn and become future leaders of this country, change the country with good moral and values.

This teaching profession has improved my ability to support myself and a little my family members for their food, clothing, toiletries, and school fees. It has open opportunities, but I cannot say I am stable. I have a family to support, children to send to school and some more other needs. Yet, it has improved my personality. I learn new things, new ways of solving problems among people, learning how to dress well and becoming role model for others in the community. The community begins to see that it is only through education a person or the community itself learns how to decide well, know how to read and write in one's language and other languages. Through education one gains confidence to express himself in the public and develop good interpersonal communication skills.

Teachings has really changed me. I keep the core values of my profession. I thank God Almighty for the gift of this blessing and many more, the gift of children in my life and the lesson they teach me. For instance, during exam, some children have no pencil..... On the day of exam, five of them had no pencil. It is so touching to see others who brought 2 pencils lending them to those who have none. Slowly, all of us are learning to share.

Anthony Friday





Sr. Agnes, ICM

"...they are my children..."

It was Monday morning. I had just come from the Holy Eucharist celebration and was hurrying to school when I noticed a little boy running after me. His face looked familiar. It was Paul—the boy we visited last week—now studying in Primary One at St. Dominic Savio School.

Paul was born in Tombura in 2016. Tombura is quite far from Riimenze where Paul lives now. His father is unknown, and when he was just one year and six months old, his mother left him in the care of her sister, Ruzeta, before leaving for Juba. Since then, Paul has never known either of his parents, and at times this reality weighs heavily on him. Yet Paul is a wonderful child. Every morning, I see him in the Church, faithfully attending the prayer service before school. He dreams of becoming a teacher someday. Why? Because, he says, teachers guide children from all tribes, and to him, they are humble and trustworthy people.

Paul's aunt, Ruzeta, and his step-uncle, Natale—who have been married for 35 years without children of their own—love him deeply. Beyond caring for Paul, they also look after other children from their extended family. Natale is a dedicated farmer. Meeting him felt like God's timing for me, as I had been searching for a responsible person to help in the garden of Nursery School to plant more trees. I invited him to work as a casual worker, and he gladly accepted. "This will help me earn a little more for my family. Thank you, Sister," he said humbly.

When Madame Madeleine asked Natale why he chooses to care for children who are not biologically his, he replied with joy, "They are God's gifts to us. In the Church, we are taught to care for those who cannot care for themselves. I am happy to do so."

In Natale's words, I heard an echo of a quiet, deeper and powerful truth in life: we are responsible for one another, I am my brother's and sister's keeper.

Sr. Agnes, ICM

