

An invitation to ministry in South Africa by Helena Champion

South Africa Rural Education raises funds for Philangethemba and other education programs in impoverished rural areas of Southern Africa. Philangethemba, a Zulu word meaning living through hope, is a collaborative project between St Agnes Anglican Church in Kloof, KwaZulu Natal, and people in the neighboring town of Molweni. The purpose is to promote education, provide youth programs, and AIDS prevention education. There is a campus adjacent to the high school in Molweni. Now there is a need to support an early childhood development program to provide preschool care and training, as well as a youth development program.

<http://www.philangethemba.co.za>

Helena's story and call about why this matters

Many Epiphany parishioners supported and volunteered for *Books for South Africa*, either as adults or middle and high school students from 2000 to 2014. They helped to create many rural libraries, including one created in Molweni in 2008 by St Agnes Outreach and Philangethemba. Epiphany parishioners also raised funds for Ekuvukeni AIDS clinic in KwaMashu, KZN.

Supporting education in Africa matters to me because I grew up in South Africa and believe education and literacy are important in helping people overcome poverty and achieve democracy. Many poor and unprivileged people in Africa respect and want education and are willing to walk miles to school every day, if a school is available, even if the school is under-resourced. I feel called to help these people.

Decades ago, I graduated from the University of Natal with a science degree, worked in SA for three years, then immigrated to Canada and then to the United States. I had a rewarding career here but stayed in contact with friends who are active in education in Africa. When visiting my hometown in 2000, local newspapers reported that many schools in rural and poor areas nearby had no books for students to read. My friends confirmed that many areas were still very under-resourced. That situation continues to this day, except where community groups, often churches, have focused on helping schools and youth.

In 2000 I found people here in Winchester who shared a vision to send books to Southern Africa. The Parish of Epiphany and other people donated used children's' books and volunteers sorted them. At first, we mailed them and later we sent them in 40-foot containers, thousands of books in each shipment. This was the beginning of *Books for South Africa*, Inc., which sent over 300,000 donated children's books to schools and communities.

For years, various churches and organizations in South Africa distributed the books and worked with St Agnes Church and Philangethemba to create rural libraries. In 2015, *Books for South Africa* was succeeded by the African Story Book project, which provides e-books in about a hundred African languages.

In 2017 I visited Philangethemba again and saw firsthand how much they have expanded, since I last visited them in 2007, continuing their vision to empower the Molweni community to collaborate on child care and youth education at all levels. They need funds to do this and they asked me to help. I founded *South Africa Rural Education* Inc., a non-profit, volunteer-run U.S. charity, to raise funds for Philangethemba NPC (an education Non-Profit Company in SA).

The library built by St Agnes Church and Philangethemba in Molweni 2008



Inside the library built in Molweni 2008



Please join Helena after worship on Sunday, 15 July in the Suter Room for a conversation to hear more about South Africa Rural Education Inc. and Philangethemba. Feel free to email me at helenachampion@gmail.com or telephone me on 781.724.6812 to learn more.