

MOUNTAIN MISSION  
**CHALLENGER**

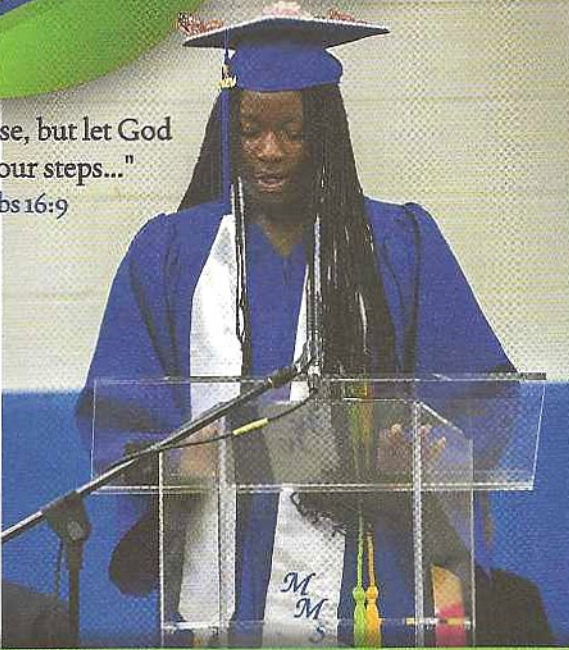
The Newsletter of  
Mountain Mission School

Summer 2024



*Congratulations!*  
**Class of  
2024**

"Plot your course, but let God  
determine your steps..."  
—Proverbs 16:9





# MMS Graduates Sixteen

**S**ixteen seniors in the Class of 2024 at Mountain Mission School earned their diplomas May 17 during commencement exercises in the high school gym.

Dr. Larry Taylor, president of the Association of Christian Schools International, was the commencement speaker. Baccalaureate services were held May 12 at the MMS Worship Center with Samuel Guy, pastor of the Village Church in Johnson City, TN, serving as the speaker.

**Anna Mayer**, daughter of MMS staff members Dave and Julie Mayer, is the class valedictorian. **Consolatte Mbiya** is the class salutatorian. She spent eight years at MMS and is the daughter of Raphael Mbiya Baseka and Clementine Mukanya Mbiya.

### *Rounding out the top ten are:*

- **Maria Charles**, who plans to attend Johnson University to major in nursing, third;
- **Millicah Vicent**, who plans to attend the University of Virginia's College at Wise to major in nursing, fourth;
- **Kaab Dawit**, who plans to attend Quinnipiac University to major in computer science, fifth;
- **Neema Chacha**, who plans to attend Wingate University who had not yet decided on a major, sixth;

- **Sarah Chacha**, who plans to attend Emory & Henry to major in nursing, seventh;
- **Bethlehem Zenebe**, who plans to attend Grand Canyon University to major in forensic psychology, eighth;
- **Haimanot Mekonen**, who plans to attend Salisbury University, ninth;

*and*

- **Henok Wondimu**, who plans to attend Quinnipiac University to major in mechanical engineering and to minor in music, tenth.

Mayer, the class valedictorian, attended all 12 years at MMS and plans to attend Milligan University to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering.

While at MMS, Mayer was a middle school girls' basketball manager for three years and a middle school girls' volleyball manager for one year. She participated in Chick-fil-A Leader Academy; helped with Feeding America food pantry locally; sang in the MMS Choir; and ran track in her freshman year. In her sophomore year, she volunteered in school building clean up after school. She participated in MSG (Missionary Study Group) for the last of its two years in her freshman and sophomore years and played Girls Varsity Basketball her junior year. She also volunteered as a junior church helper.

**LEFT:** Members of the Mountain Mission School Class of 2024 are, from left, (front) Anna Mayer, Hilina Simon, Maria Charles, Sarah Chacha, Millicah Vicent, Haimanot Mekonen, Hermela Assefa, Bethlehem Zenebe; and (back) Neema Chacha, Imani Chacha, Mikiyas Wolde, Henok Wondimu, Kaab Dawit, Consolatte Mbiya, Abel Mesfin and Raphael Rwema.

“During my high school years, two lessons have stuck with me the most,” Mayer said in her valedictory address. “First, God does not put us through anything we cannot handle. The Lord has a plan for us and knows what we need, where we need to be strong. Therefore, do not let fear hold you back, whether it’s fear of the unknown, fear of challenges, or fear of failure. Let us push forward with courage and strength knowing that God is on our side and is preparing us for the future.

“Even if we do not know where we are going, or what is the next step in our lives, have courage and peace of mind, because God has a plan for us,” Mayer continued. “And like Mr. Hood always reminds us from Proverbs 16:9, ‘Plot your course, but let God determine your steps.’ When doubts arise, look back at your life and see how far God has already brought you. Whatever happens and wherever you land, whether you go to college, trade school, or right into working, hold on to the truth and trust His plan.

“Live life being a part of God’s people for the Life of the World, like we learned in Bible class,” she added. “For we can do amazing things when God is on our side. Remember what Isaiah 8:13 says, ‘Do not fear anything except the LORD God Almighty. He alone is the Holy One. If you fear Him, you need fear nothing else. He will keep you safe.’”

Mbiya, the class salutatorian spent eight years at MMS. She plans to attend UVA Wise to pursue a degree in nursing.

While at MMS, Mbiya sang in the MMS choir two years; volunteered on the school building crew one year; played varsity basketball two years; worked as camp staff one year; and volunteered in the dining hall four years.

“Today marks the end of one journey and the beginning of another,” Mbiya said in her salutatory speech. “To MMS, on behalf of the class of 2024, I would like to thank you for being a home and a family to us. Thank you for giving us a safe haven whether we recognized it then or not, we will forever be grateful for all you’ve done for us.

“As we prepare to step into the unknown territory of the future, it’s natural to feel a mix of excitement and apprehension,” she continued. “The path ahead may be uncertain, filled with obstacles and uncertainties. But let us embrace these uncertainties with courage and optimism. I encourage you not to let fear of the future steal your joy today. Take the time to enjoy the journey and not just anticipate the reward.”

Members of the Mountain Mission School Class of 2024 include Anna Mayer, Consolatte Mbiya, Maria Charles, Millicah Vicent, Kaab Dawit, Neema Chacha, Sarah Chacha, Bethlehem Zenebe, Haimanot Mekonen, Henok Wondimu, Hilina Simon, Hermela Assefa, Imani Chacha, Mikiyas Wolde, Abel Mesfin and Raphael Rwema.



1 ANNA MAYER



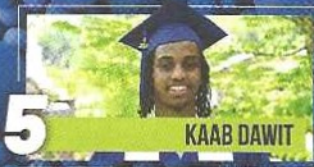
2 CONSOLATTE MBIYA



3 MARIA CHARLES



4 MILLICAH VICENT



5 KAAB DAWIT



6 NEEMA CHACHA



7 SARAH CHACHA



8 BETHLEHEM ZENEBE



9 HAIMANOT MEKONEN



10 HENOK WONDIMU

MMS PROVIDES

# Safe Haven

FOR UKRANIAN FAMILY



**MMS** has long been known as a safe haven for children and families in need. Alona Matlashevskaya found that out firsthand earlier this year as she and her seven children escaped war-torn Ukraine and found their new home at Mountain Mission.

As the war began in 2022, Alona says she first thought everything would be okay, but within two days, that changed as fighter jets flew over her home and began dropping bombs in the neighborhood in which she and her family lived in Mykil'ske in the Kherson region of the Ukraine where they worked as herb farmers.

As the bombs began dropping, Alona gathered the children and hurried down to the basement of their home where they hid for several days, hoping to wait out the worst of it until soldiers could arrive to defend the town. They took food and warm clothing with them and stayed dressed and ready to flee as minutes turned into hours and hours into days. On that first night of the bombing, she tried to calm her own fears and those of her children.

"A lot of people died that day and as we listened to the bombs fall, it would take your breath and leave you with fear," Alona recalls, speaking in broken English and with the assistance of a translation app on her phone. "Still, I told the children I believed God would keep us safe."

A few days passed and they received word the Russians would allow families to leave the region and that they were opening up a "green corridor." Alona heard the news and believed it was time to leave. She remained thankful she had listened to a message she says she received from God before the first bomb was ever dropped, where she says she heard him telling her to fill up the car with gas and to buy groceries.

She had heeded those words and as she loaded up the family, leaving her home behind, they got in line with the traffic heading closer to exiting the city. But as they got closer, she says, it was evident families were not being allowed to leave and instead, they were being shot and killed. Alona found a different way out of the city and traveling along the road to Vinnista, she said she saw the bombed out gas stations and understood better the message she said she received from God at the start. Had she not heeded it, she would not have been able to refuel the vehicle.

Arriving in Vinnista, the family headed to a church where they hid for six days. As sirens sounded in that town, she knew it was no longer safe and that it was time to leave there. They headed toward the border with Romania where she said there was a big traffic jam as others, like her, were fleeing the country. They made it to Romania safely and Alona is quick to credit God for that.

"God guided us everywhere," she says. "His hand was in it all. As we made it to Romania, my heart was overflowing with gratitude to God, but still I remember sitting in the car crying because I understood what I had left behind."

From Romania, the family travelled to South Carolina and then to Seattle, WA, before finding a home at MMS through the assistance of Master Provision's My Home Christian Ministry, who has helped families relocate for decades. Alona had worked with the group some in the Ukraine, helping to take care of orphans and widows and visiting boarding schools in that country.

Oleksandr Hordenko, who had met MMS President Chris Mitchell at a conference previously, reached out to Mountain Mission about Alona and her family. The MMS board convened and after learning more



about the family's situation, offered to assist. They flew Alona to MMS to allow her to see things firsthand. She liked what she saw, returned home and packed up the children to make the cross-country trip from Washington to Mountain Mission School in Grundy, VA.

"Everyone here has been so welcoming," Alona says. "I thank them all for welcoming me and my family. When I came here, the first feeling I had was like I was at home."

Vansant Church of Christ, New Hope Christian Church, TruPoint Bank, the Grundy Kiwanis Club and the Garden United Methodist Women's Group, all provided funds to help the family with furniture and to get settled.

Alona has an ongoing health issue she is dealing with, but has begun to work part-time at MMS in the school nursery and is doing some landscaping and grounds work as well.

"We like that everyone here is like one family," Alona says of Mountain Mission and the way the school operates. "It's a Christian environment and everyone is very hardworking. We thank God for this opportunity to be here."

She says her children Anastasiia, 15; David, 14; Vironika, 13; Dmytro, 11; Victoria, nine; and Angelina, eight, have been adjusting well to their new life at MMS. Her 17-year-old son, Vel, is in South

Carolina, working. Learning English, she says, is tough for them and for her, but she adds, they are making progress.

She thinks back on the life she left behind, but says she doubts she will ever return there.

Her father, Alexey, however, remains there today, continuing to check on those families who were not able to get out of the country and helping to provide for their needs. The scooter he used to get around was demolished, but through the help of New Hope Christian Church in Grundy, the funds needed to replace the scooter were raised and he continues to work with those in need in the Ukraine.

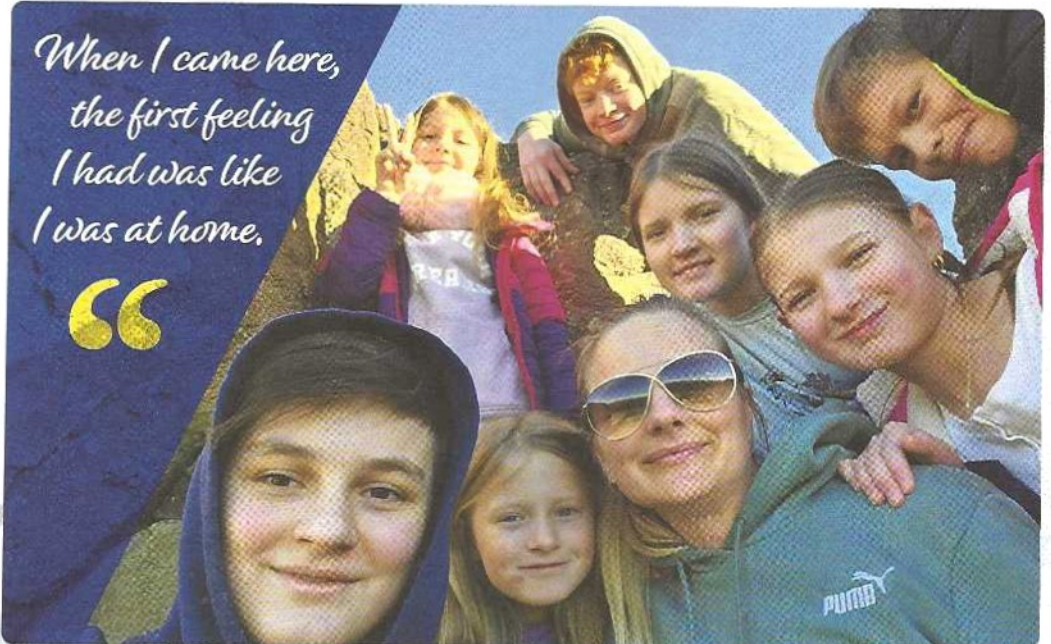
"I get to talk to my Dad every day," Alona says, noting the two communicate mainly by text message and even that, on a limited basis. "He and I agreed to talk every morning and to write, 'I am fine. I am alive.'"

The experience of starting all over again has not been an easy one, but Alona says the many things she and her children have been through in the past two years have made each of them stronger and have helped to make it clear that what really matters the most to her is family.

"The whole experience has taught me to look at life in a different way," Alona says. "I try not to let the little things bother me. Having gone through something like this really puts things into perspective."

*When I came here,  
the first feeling  
I had was like  
I was at home.*

“



# Mesky MeKonnen

## CREDITS MMS FOR BLESSINGS IN HER LIFE



### ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Mesky MeKonnen was 13 when she arrived on the campus of Mountain Mission School in the summer of 1997. She was a little uncertain at first, but that uncertainty was soon wiped away as she settled into the eighth grade at her new school and home. With her was her younger sister, Amina, a second grader.

The day Mesky, her sister and her mother arrived from Arlington, VA, to check out the school, the girls had not come prepared to stay, but after the interview and their acceptance, they did not leave. It was a hard decision made by their mother, but she told her girls that while they might not have understood it that day, one day they would understand.

“I had forgotten what my mother said initially, but on the day I graduated, I went and thanked her for the decision she made that day to place us at Mountain Mission School,” Mesky recalled. “God had a different purpose in mind. It was hard for her, but because of it, we are the better for it and we were blessed by it.”

Within five to six months of arriving at the school, three of her cousins also came to Mountain Mission School . . . and then there were five. Then years later, three more were added. Spaced in age, they each in turn graduated from Mountain Mission. She graduated in 2002. The last of her cousins graduated just this past May 2024.

“We’ve been holding down the fort at MMS since 1997,” she quipped, adding she came back to MMS in May for her cousin’s graduation.

She recalled getting involved in activities at MMS from the start.



“Whatever they offered, I wanted to try it,” Mesky said. “Choir, track and field, basketball, cheerleading ... I have a lot of great memories at Mountain Mission School.”

She remembers well the lifelong relationships and friendships she formed with classmates and with teachers. To this day, some of her closest friends went to MMS.

“As an adult, I realize the sacrifices they made for us,” Mesky said of Mountain Mission School faculty and staff. “I am appreciative of what they provided for us.”

One of the most lasting things, she said, was providing her with the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with Christ.

“I went to church before I came to Mountain Mission, so I knew about God, but it was on October 11, 2001 at MMS that I gave my life to Christ at a revival service,” she added.

After graduating from MMS, Mesky went to George Mason University where she studied business management, specializing in human resources. She graduated in 2008 with her degree and began searching for a job. The recession was in full swing and she was not sure what her next steps would be. She received a text from a friend about an open house job fair at the old Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., and she went—only to find that the four-hour event was well attended and she was unable to find a parking space. She circled the lots for two hours, praying she would find somewhere to park.

“I was stressed and finally told myself that if it was meant for me, it would happen,” Mesky recalled.

She finally found a spot, went in and signed

in and as luck would have it, there were three interviewers, conducting interviews in rotation, her friend being one of them. Her friend drew her name and the interview went well. That friend also was an MMS graduate.

She got a job as a medical services assistant administrator and learned quickly there had been a lot of turnovers in the position, as her predecessors had difficulty meeting the demands and expectations of the military nurse they were working for at the hospital.

Mesky completed her assigned tasks and over time, they became friends.

“I outlasted her and five other leaders,” Mesky said. She transferred to Ft. Belvoir in Alexandria, VA, in 2011 to take a human resources position in the Wounded Warriors Program, where she worked until 2020. In 2021, she took a position with the Internal Revenue Service for eight months as a project manager; and in 2021, she began working in a telework position in the Project Management Office for the Defense Health Agency, a position she continues to hold today.

“I can’t thank God, the teachers, all the supporters and donors to Mountain Mission School enough,” Mesky said. “Because of them, Mountain Mission School has been able to take care of so many.”

Today, as she looks back on her time at MMS, she said, the school and the people at it gave her so much.

“They gave me family and they gave me Christ, and I take that with me everywhere I go today,” Mesky said. “It’s been an amazing gift and it keeps on giving. I am beyond grateful.”



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[mmsKids.org](http://mmsKids.org)

Summer 2024

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# CNX DONATES \$21,000 FOR MMS FOOD NEEDS

CNX Resources, through its CNX Foundation, recently donated \$21,000 to go toward school food supply needs at Mountain Mission School.

Helping to address the food needs of our region, as well as children's health and wellness are some of the primary goals of the CNX Foundation. With this donation, we are pleased to provide the funds to contribute toward food supply needs at Mountain Mission School.

—Brian Green, CNX Resources vice president of Virginia operations

*Pictured with a group of students at the school are, (back) Jessica Hertzog, MMS director of education; Chris Mitchell, MMS president; Brian Green, CNX Resources vice president, Virginia operations; and Del. Israel O'Quinn, who also serves as the chief development officer at Mountain Mission School.*

