

Heather Johnstone

Link Letter no. 21 | April 2022

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The call in action

Dear friends,

In my last link letter, I wrote rather ebulliently and optimistically about the future. About the anticipated approval of my work and residence permits.

Sadly, my permits are not yet approved. This time, however, it's not the government, but instead due to some delays encountered within the diocese which have prevented me from submitting my online application.

Prayer point: Please pray for the removal of all obstacles to making my application for the necessary permissions to live and work in Mara, and for approvals to be swift once application is made.

I did return to Tanzania at the end of January, as I anticipated, but entered on a tourist visa. Technically I am not able to work until my approvals come through, but I organised a thorough clean-up at the cafe and surrounds, and we managed to open on a few occasions as there were some visitors in town, which is not very common these days. My return coincided with visits to the area by some Norwegian friends and colleagues I hadn't seen for some time, and it was a real blessing to connect with old friends and spend some time together. We also hosted a group of 13 Norwegian students last week, which is the largest number of guests we've had since October 2019. The ladies were thrilled to be able to welcome visitors to our little haven in Musoma again.

Moreover, we are delighted that a small team of three from Go Mad are due to arrive on 1 April and stay for 10 weeks, and my Australian friends and ex-neighbours will also be visiting for 10 days over Easter. It will be great to see everyone and slowly we will be able to start operating the cafe on a more regular basis and provide employment for more of the women.

Praise point: Give thanks that the cafe has reopened and for our friends and supporters who are a blessing to us.

With time on my hands, I have had more than one opportunity to visit our nursery school in Nyambeshi, which is always a joy and a great encouragement.

Praise point: Give thanks that so many continue to support this endeavour and we can pay the teacher's wages and provide porridge for the children daily. This is sometimes their only meal of the day.

Recently, I met with Father Robert, the head of development with the Catholic Church in Mara. He had heard about the Rehema Project and the work I do, and we met to discuss the possibility of serving impoverished women collaboratively in the wider Anglican/Catholic dioceses of Mara.



Name: Heather Johnstone

Location: Tanzania

My call: To work with women and children in crisis.

My role: Managing the Rehema Project, which exists to help empower the most disadvantaged women and children in Mara.



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Out and about

In conversation after our meeting, I asked him if he knew of anywhere that served people with intellectual disabilities, as there is no government provision for such people in the region, and I had recently met two families who were struggling to look after their children at home on their own, as they didn't have the knowledge or skills to cope with their care.

And so it happened that we travelled to Ikungu, some 40 minutes southwest of Musoma, along rutted dirt tracks, to meet the humble, kind-hearted, and inspirational Father Godfrey, who is also known as Father Pendo (Father Love).

He told me that at the start of his ministry 40 years ago, he felt called to action by Matthew 25:40 which says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me". He said the least of the brothers and sisters of Jesus are those persons who are vulnerable. They are the socially, psychologically, or economically disadvantaged, such as the sick, the poor, people who are mentally and physically disabled.

For the last 38 years, Father Pendo has run a large, somewhat neglected and ramshackle safe house, in a very remote area, for the extremely poor and for intellectually disabled people.

He "recruits" new members of his community by keeping a watchful eye out for people living on the streets, and through a network of contacts at medical facilities, for people with intellectual disabilities who have been abandoned at hospitals by their families because they can no longer cope with them.

Father Pendo is a father figure to 71 children and adults ranging from three years old to 90-something, and it was clear as we walked around the compound and met one and all, that he has a special rapport with every single person, and they LOVE him dearly. He told me that although the church wanted him to retire soon, it was his heartfelt desire that he would be able to continue to serve there until God called him "home" and that his remains could be buried in the grounds of this project he was called to serve with love.

As is always the case in Tanzania, visitors are made to feel extremely welcome – hospitality knowing no bounds – and although it was the last thing I was expecting, a celebratory meal was prepared, and excitement levels were high, because the arrival of guests means a free soda for everyone. What a fun and heart-warming day meeting a true servant of God and his beloved family.

Praise point: Give thanks for Father Pendo and his amazing ministry.

Prayer point: Please pray for the health and welfare of all residents of the safe house.

In closing, please remember my colleagues, CMS people in mission in Ukraine; Anya, Valery and Alison who have been sharing the love of Jesus in tense and fearful times.

Mungu akuwabariki.



Photos from top to bottom: Rehema lunch with Norwegian friends; back to school; teaching assistant, Priska, helping the children; L to R: Father Robert, Heather, Father Pendo

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Pioneer Mission Leadership Training at CMS, designed by pioneers for pioneers, equips students for transformational mission in a dynamic and supportive learning community. Find out more at pioneer.churchmissionsociety.org

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