



Heather Johnstone

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Location: Tanzania



What I do: Helping to empower the most disadvantaged women and children in Mara through the Rehema Project.



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life to release their God-given potential

Dear friends,

I am pleased to report that my home assignment in the UK at the end of the year was both encouraging and productive. During this period, I visited nine churches over seven weeks, reconnecting with old friends and meeting new ones.

I was lucky enough to have a two week break in South Africa at the beginning of the year and got back to Musoma on 21 January.

I resumed work immediately and have been trying to catch up ever since.

We are fortunate to have a team of eight gap year students from the UK supporting Rehema Cafe four times a week.

A significant milestone was achieved towards the end of last year, when the bishop reversed his long-standing decision and allowed us to sell local food to local people. This nutritious food is sold at a very low price, which, although the work is demanding and yielding a small return, enables more women to be employed for longer hours – definitely a change worth celebrating.

Praise/Prayer Point: Give thanks for the gap year team's time in Musoma and pray for them as they undertake various projects in local villages and communities. May they be blessed as they encourage others. Additionally, give thanks for the expansion of our food and service offerings.

It is with deep sorrow that I share the news of Amy Vink's passing on 28 January at the age of 54, after a prolonged battle with cancer. Amy, the Australian missionary who founded the Rehema Project, dedicated her life to Christ, serving him with unwavering commitment.

Amy and her family returned to Australia in 2016 due to health concerns. During her service in the Diocese of Mara, she exemplified the fruits of the spirit as described in Galatians 5:22–23. Her inspirational leadership and compassion profoundly impacted many lives in the Mara region through employment, training and assistance programmes, and she loved every single one of the Rehema women as if they were her own children.

The funeral service was held in Australia on 4 February 2025, with a memorial service in Musoma on the same day. The service in the cathedral was well attended and included tributes from various people, including the retired Bishop of Mara and his wife, Martha.



The Rehema Team on the day of the memorial service for Amy Vink.

Support Heather Johnstone:
churchmissionsociety.org/johnstone

**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



Praise/Prayer Point: Give thanks for Amy's life and ministry. Please pray for her family as they grieve their loss and for the many friends and colleagues who mourn with them.

In honour of Amy, the Rehema staff contributed 20,000 shillings each (a significant amount for them) and provided food for over 100 people. The remaining funds, coupled with a special collection during the service, went to support "good deeds" in Amy's memory, specifically aiding a project under Father Pendo, whom I have written about previously (link letters 21 and 23). His mission, which cares for mentally

disabled people and the very poor, is not well-funded, so any contributions are greatly beneficial. We visited Father Pendo on Sunday, bringing gifts of maize flour, beans, sugar, soap, cooking oil and Rehema toy lions and giraffes for the children. The Rehema women sang joyfully for Father Pendo and his charges, and we shared a soda and prayed together. Unfortunately, Father Pendo will retire at the end of this month due to ill health – he is suffering from advance Parkinson's disease.

Praise/Prayer Point: Give thanks for Father Pendo's life of service and ministry. Please pray for him in his retirement and for his deteriorating health. Pray also for the appointment of a compassionate successor to continue his good work and ministry.

During our time of grief, we remembered many wonderful stories about Amy, and in closing I would like to share how the Rehema logo came to be: depicting the silhouette of a woman carrying a baby on her back and a basket on her head.

The project was in its infancy and Amy had a small group of women making cards at her home. An extremely impoverished young woman, Bhoke, came to Amy's home carrying her baby on her back, hoping to sell the tomatoes in her basket. The baby, John, was just three weeks old and had the glassy stare of malnutrition. Amy invited her in because it was "chai time" and she was worried about her and the baby. Amy offered her chai, food and comfort. Despite Bhoke's embarrassment over her tattered kanga (a Tanzanian cloth, like a sarong) Amy reassured her and asked her to share her story. As Bhoke was talking, Amy sketched a simple picture of her, and hence the Rehema logo was born.

Bhoke is a Rehema woman to this day. Her life and that of her family improved greatly due to the compassion and love of Amy.

Tumshukuru Mungu,
Heather



Photos from top to bottom: Amy's leaving do at Rehema 2016; me, Lainya and Bhoke after the memorial; singing for Father Pendo – note the logo on the shirts; Flora with some of Father Pendo's wards.



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life

I've been encouraged to hear recent mission stories from around my wider area of work. In South Sudan, communities have taken steps towards peace as pastors from different tribal groups reconciled, and my colleague Joan has shared a growing vision of a new tribe of peacemakers. Read more at churchmissionsociety.org/empower