



# 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,

It has been so hot since I arrived back in Musoma (which is not surprising as we are only two degrees south of the equator). I have struggled with the heat and the humidity, and it is particularly difficult at night-time, as it is often more than 30 degrees Celsius in my room. A simple standing fan, working overtime but not particularly effectively, has resulted in sleeplessness or at best sleeping fitfully and not restfully. I investigated getting aircon and established that an aircon unit cost TSH 850,000 (about £250) and I would need three for my home, but could start with one at least in my bedroom.

With that knowledge fresh in my mind, I went to visit my good friend Maria (name changed for privacy reasons) because she hadn't been feeling great and had been to the hospital the previous day. Maria told me the doctor had identified a tumour in her stomach which needed to be removed surgically. She told me that she was in pain, but realistically she would have to wait until they were able to afford the operation. I asked how much the surgery would cost, and the answer was TSH 850,000.

Suddenly everything was crystal clear and my aircon seemed like a frivolous and extravagant extra. This was an undeniably clear message from God. I immediately agreed to pay for her surgery, how could I not?

Post surgery, the Rehema team went to visit Maria as she was convalescing at home. We sang and danced and praised God together, it was a very joyous time.

The biopsy unfortunately revealed that Maria has uterine cancer, her worst fear come true. She has been referred to a specialist cancer hospital more than 1,000km away from home for immediate chemo and radiotherapy treatment. This treatment is extremely expensive, and we thank God that friends and acquaintances have dug deep, and that her husband's employers are running an appeal in the UK to cover the cost of the treatment. Within a few days of receiving her diagnosis Maria travelled by bus to Morogoro and has thus far had 14 sessions of radiotherapy and four of chemotherapy.

**Praise/prayer point:** Please pray for Maria and her family, for strength and hope as she fights this terrible disease.

Some of you will remember that in 2019 Bishop George asked me to take over the running of the Anglican hostel (next door to Rehema), which incorporates a restaurant, accommodation and a hall for rent. By the



Heather pledging support

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



time I had returned to Tanzania post-COVID some 18 months later, the idea had fizzled out somewhat and the diocese decided instead to let the premises out privately. A decision I was not unhappy with as I felt Rehema was enough of a responsibility.

Then in March 2025, the tenants ended their lease with only a few days' notice. Without a plan or budget for this expansion, and with no clear understanding of potential income or costs, at the behest of the bishop we took on this responsibility and unexpectedly became tenants of the Anglican hostel. Though it might seem reckless, it has created additional work and longer shifts for the Rehema women.

The primary issue with the hostel is the lack of maintenance over an extended period. We identified key areas for immediate repair: 1) security in the kitchen 2)

broken sheet metal roofing and water-damaged ceiling boards, 3) door locks, 4) various plumbing issues, and 5) damp in walls.

The hostel is also in dire need of a facelift and our next project is to paint it inside and out.

**Praise/prayer point:** Give thanks for the opportunity of more work for the team. Pray for the big and expensive challenge that faces us.

I really thought that news of the hostel would have been the biggest news of this link letter as the venture has consumed my waking hours since we took over, but this news has been completely eclipsed by something rather more exciting and spectacular.

The diocese recently commissioned us to cook at a special fundraiser they were holding in Bunda (about an hour away from Musoma) to raise funds to rebuild and massively extend St Peter's church. Great excitement – the official guest was to be the former president of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete. Our remit was specifically to cook for this extremely special guest and his entourage, and other senior government/church officials. We had to take all our cooking appliances, utensils, serving dishes, crockery and cutlery to Bunda – it was a massive undertaking.

Former presidents require as much security detail and paraphernalia as a sitting president, and consequently things became a lot more complicated and expensive. The government refused to allow the event to take place in the church as it wasn't big or safe enough, and the plan to cook for the guests at the diocesan girls' school was quickly dismissed. The whole event had to shift to the government teacher training college. We rose to the challenge and cooked a huge variety of different dishes for 130 guests – under the watchful eyes of three security personnel who monitored our every move – and delivered great food on time. We feel so privileged to have been given the honour and huge responsibility of cooking for the former president of Tanzania and his fellow dignitaries. Some of the team got to meet the president face to face and were delighted to hear that he thought the food was excellent and very delicious. We have the JK stamp of approval.

**Praise/prayer point:** Give thanks for the fantastic group of hard-working Rehema women and for this great opportunity to shine.

Mungu akuwabariki.



*Photos from top to bottom: President Kikwete with Bishop George; Rehema ladies ready for service; Rehema ladies with the former president of Tanzania; service with a smile*



## 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 Ukraine, families are being assured they are not alone amid the hardship of war, and my colleagues in Paraguay have seen a young man overcome challenges to learn academically and spiritually. Read more at [churchmissionsociety.org/empower](https://churchmissionsociety.org/empower)

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