



## *Healing Bodies to Help Save Souls*

*By Fr. Nestor Mtwewe*

Dear Friend,

My name is Fr. Nestor Mtwewe, a Roman Catholic Priest of the Diocese of Njombe – Tanzania. After my four hectic years of undergraduate and graduate school at Benedictine University, I came back to my diocese and was assigned to work as managing director of the INUKA rehabilitation hospital. While I am managing the



hospital, I am still a priest and my mission to bring Christ to the people in my region is still my priority. However, when people lack the essentials of life, including adequate food, shelter and health care, they are not as receptive to the gospel. Thus, I have asked Hope for Tanzania (“HFT”) to aid in Healing Bodies to Help Save Souls.

The day I received the appointment to work in the rehabilitation hospital, I couldn’t help but remember an event I witnessed when I was a parochial vicar in one of the parishes here in the diocese. We had a neighbor who was a teacher and although he wasn’t Catholic, we knew him and his family well as village teachers are the most educated of all the people in the village. One day, we were told that one of his sons had died, but we were confused as we thought that he had only one son. There are no funeral homes in rural villages and burial is a community event. Neighbors participate in preparing the tomb and burial along with cooking and cleaning for the family, so we went there to help. To our surprise the son we knew about was very much alive, but we sadly learned that it was his brother who had died. He was fourteen years old and was disabled. Although he was our neighbor, we never saw him around or even outside their house. Was he living with a relative or in a special school? No, he was locked away in the family house for his entire life.

This experience explains how people in rural communities treat people with disabilities. They consider children with disabilities as a burden, a disgrace, and a curse which is why the teacher hid the child in his house for fourteen years. It is important to also highlight that the house didn’t have indoor plumbing with a toilet like developed countries do. In the villages, bathrooms are always outside a couple of meters from the house. The fourteen years must have been very difficult for this young boy who was unable to even go outside to the bathroom. Unfortunately, the belief that children with disabilities are a disgrace or curse has led some families in rural communities to kill children born with a disability at birth.

In 2010, the late Bishop Alfred Maluma started the INUKA rehabilitation center to provide a place where children with disabilities could be treated with dignity and respect and their God-given rights guaranteed. It is a hope-filled place where parents and neighbors can be counseled and taught that children with disabilities are a blessed child of God just like we are. Although it was just a building, the center offered new hope for children with disabilities and their parents. My assignment here at the center, now hospital, is to build on this legacy of hope. Our mission is to provide essential rehabilitation services to people with disabilities, while educating their families and neighbors that their children can receive treatments that will help them lead a joy filled life. Our hope is to reduce and eventually eliminate the occurrences of families killing the babies with disabilities or locking them in the house for long periods of time.



There are many success stories that give us the strength to continue our mission. While we work to bring them to Christ, we are also bringing smiles to children and families. Aggrey, Lupiana and Gloria are part of the team at the hospital, and they work in the income generating activities department. Several years ago, they were the first children to benefit from the rehabilitation services offered here. They too were always locked in their houses and considered a burden and a curse. When the hospital started, there were home visits to families with special needs children and Aggrey, Lupiana and Gloria were identified and brought to the hospital. They had cognitive issues, rickets (weak bones), and were unable to walk. As young adults, they are now able to function on their own and perform basic and needed tasks at the hospital. Aggrey always smiles and that smile touches my heart as someone with love has encouraged each of them to work and know that they are beloved children of God.



In the process of providing rehabilitation services, it was also discovered that our special needs children also suffer from other diseases like malaria, typhoid fever, urinary tract infections, and many others. Therefore, the rehabilitation center was turned into a hospital so that other medical issues could be addressed at one location. The support we received in 2021 and 2022 from HFT in its Healing Bodies to Help Save Souls campaign was crucial to our ability to improve general medical services. The newly constructed outpatient clinic is located next to the main hospital and it has already improved the health of the children with disabilities. It will also help us attract a medical doctor to work with us onsite. In Tanzania, a medical doctor is required to determine if a child needs therapy or not so the outpatient clinic will help us provide quality rehabilitation services.



With the funds provided by HFT in 2021 and early 2022, we were able to acquire a new ambulance to help us transport patients to our facility who are unable to get there on foot. In addition, we completed a new security wall around the complex to improve the safety and security of our patients and staff. Finally, we purchased a new diesel generator to enhance the reliability of electrical power for the facility. These improvements were made possible by HFT's generous donors.



We are now working with HFT on several new projects at our facility. The first is to construct a new therapy building next to the main rehabilitation hospital and outpatient clinic. It will include a new physiotherapy hall for children, an occupational therapy hall, and treatment rooms for autism and other special needs. There will also be individual treatment rooms to provide privacy for adults and children as required by law. Since the number of adults needing rehab services is increasing, these rooms will increase INUKA's operating revenue too. The project will also provide additional equipment for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and other needs to improve the quality of services. Secondly, electrical power is an ongoing focus as grid outages continue to be a problem for the facility, and the solar backup system originally installed has not functioned properly. Our consultant has recommended some corrections to one additional solar power inverter and the purchase of new battery capacity to ensure the availability of day and night electricity.

As a priest, it is almost impossible to bring people to Christ and save souls without first bringing the hope of healing to these families. The INUKA rehabilitation hospital and outpatient clinic is one of the most important tools to help me save these souls. Therefore, on behalf of Aggrey, Lupiana, Gloria and many other clients, I am asking you to help support this mission and our ongoing projects. The need is real and critical as we never want to see another child killed during birth, locked in their house, or considered to be a curse. We want to reach as many parents as possible and let everybody know that children with disabilities are created in the image and likeness of God. Please give generously because I promise your contribution will indeed make a difference in many lives.



Thank you and God bless.