



Team Heart

# TEAM HEART HIGHLIGHTS

*in a heartbeat*

DECEMBER 2025

## INNOCENT - DEFYING THE ODDS

During our recent trip to Rwanda this fall, we had the opportunity to meet with several patients, but one young man stands out as an example of why we do what we do. Innocent was just 16 years old when he underwent an aortic valve replacement in 2018. He had been living with distant family members near Kigali, as his immediate family could not manage his deteriorating healthcare from their remote village, due to rheumatic heart disease.



Surgery Resident  
Georges Gasana, 2020

We always look forward to seeing Innocent each year, and he has been actively sharing his story with others, focusing on the importance of preventing rheumatic heart disease and giving back to his community. After graduating from high school, he was fortunate enough to receive culinary training. Our cardiac anesthesiologist, Martin Zammert, who provided anesthesia for him during surgery, provided a strong reference that helped Innocent secure an internship at one of our favorite restaurants in Kigali, Heaven!

Following his internship, Innocent was hired by the newly opened 5-star hotel, Pinnacle, in Kigali, where he joined the cooking staff. Recently, the hotel manager encouraged him to apply to university to pursue his dream of earning a degree in hospitality. When we saw him in October, he was busy cooking at night and attending classes during the day.

In spite of the significant challenges he faced in 2018, Innocent now has a bright and promising future. Every day, he is inspired to share his story to help others realize that a hopeful future is possible for many of Rwanda's young people if the fight against rheumatic heart disease continues. Join Innocent in this effort. Share his story. Share his dream.



Innocent at Pinnacle  
2025

BE A PART OF THE DREAM :



## SHARING THE TEAM HEART MODEL

### A NEW FUTURE FOR CARDIAC SURGERY IN LIBERIA



The Team Heart model developed in Rwanda is being used to build a cardiac surgical program in Liberia under the direction of Team Heart members who have extensive experience in Rwanda. Connections have been made through colleagues of Board Member Amy Fiedler on the West Coast and Board Member Jabaris Swain on the East Coast. A preliminary site visit was conducted to meet with high-level government officials, who pledged their support for the program.

Liberia, a small country on the East Coast of Africa near Ghana, has a population of fewer than 6 million people. It currently has one trained cardiac surgeon and two cardiologists—one specializing in adult cardiology and the other in pediatrics. Dr. Fiedler and Dr. Zammert anticipate that cardiac surgery will begin within a year. Meanwhile, Dr. Jonathan Hart is performing non-cardiac thoracic surgeries, with interim visits from Dr. Carolyn Moore, a Liberian residing in the United States.

## TEAM HEART HAPPENINGS

- Please join Team Heart for monthly research calls. Projects in progress will be discussed, as well as potential projects and funding opportunities. If you wish to be engaged to follow or help in the process, or to keep abreast of what we are doing—this is for YOU! Reach out to [Info@teamheart.org](mailto:Info@teamheart.org). The virtual meeting will be the last Thursday of every month at 8 am CST, beginning January 29, 2026.
- Rwanda National Ethics Committee is the US equivalent of the Institutional Review Board of IBB for Research and over the past two months, we have presented FIVE proposals, with 3 research projects approved and underway and 2 requesting minor revisions in objectives. Two projects have been recently completed and are currently reviewed for publication.
- The final Rwanda Nurses Saving Lives session in Nyagatare District provided nurse education first to the core education NCD nursing team based at the District Hospital level. The nurses in turn, taught nurses at the health center level for prevention, awareness and early treatment for strep throat, rheumatic fever and early intervention. Led by TH Nurse Educator, Faustin Mugemanyi, and supported by Rotary International, more than 500 Rwandan nurses have completed the course.

## TEAM HEART WELCOMES BORA DESANGE TO THE TEAM

Team Heart welcomes Bora Desange, RN to a new position to follow up cardiac surgical patients. In a collaborative role with King Faisal Hospital, The Rwanda Biomedical Center, and Team Heart, the role is the missing link to improving care. *Thank you to Team Heart donors for making this position possible!* Focusing on pre-op to discharge patient education and nursing support in the community, patients will receive continuity following discharge back to the community. Bora will work hand in hand with Dr. Musoni who leads the cardiac surgical program at King Faisal. Before accepting this position, Bora worked in the cardiac surgical ICU at King Faisal.



Bora Desange, RN