

I thought Cocal Gracias was a strange name for a town. When I got there yesterday afternoon, I wasn't sure what to think. The community – about ten minutes from the Caribbean Mercy's dock – is built around a dump, and residents scavenge the garbage for a living. Most of the houses are built out of trash. The ship's crew physician, PA, and nurse all had a free afternoon



yesterday, so they threw a few supplies into cardboard boxes and headed out there for one last chance to help some people before we leave. I was able to ride along to lend a hand.

Once word got out that the gringo médicos had come, the line began to form.

Most were young mothers towing endless numbers of small children with intestinal worms and fevers and ear infections and other problems that otherwise would have gone untreated. We practiced our Spanish playing with lots of sick little kids, and I can now add "pharmacist" to the list of random things I've been for a day with Mercy Ships.



The ship's evangelism team, Esperanza ("hope"), also had good news a few weeks ago. When the ship was here last year, there was no Christian presence in the local prison at all. Prisons in developing nations are exceedingly unpleasant in the best of times. I've seen worse than this one, but it is not a nice place. Esperanza was able to start a Bible study there last summer, hoping it would last when the ship left. This summer, on their return, they were



overjoyed to discover that it had grown into a vibrant and expanding Christian community among the inmates, and last month five men at once asked to be baptized. Local pastors did the honors in a lively service around the prison yard's open water cistern. Ten or twelve more have since expressed their desire to be baptized as well. The ship is sailing soon, but God's presence won't be leaving that prison.

Another milestone for the month was a free concert we organized at the local soccer stadium, inviting the entire city. For people who may follow events in Christian music, I'm told Israel Houghton is a well-known name. He and his very tight multiethnic band from Integrity Music flew down to put on a high-energy Latin-flavored worship event with us. I was impressed with the quality of the musicianship, but more significantly, by the end of the evening many of the thousands of people in attendance had given their lives to God. Honduran Christians were there to eagerly invite the new believers into church fellowships in town.



This Honduras outreach will end on Monday morning, 16 September, when we cast off the lines and set course for Haiti and the Dominican Republic. But the work goes on. The Caribbean Mercy is due into Baltimore on 2 October to begin a procurement phase that will also (tentatively, as always) include stops in Wilmington, NC, Savannah, GA, and Gulfport, MS this time. If you're near any of these ports between now and New Year's, make sure you seek us out to visit. It'll be well worth the trip. But be warned – as they say, you may be ruined for the ordinary. I've seen faces among recent short-term crew volunteers that I first saw in tour groups last fall. All it takes is a two weeks and a plane ticket. ☺

Thanks for investing in God's purposes in Central America.

Jeremy