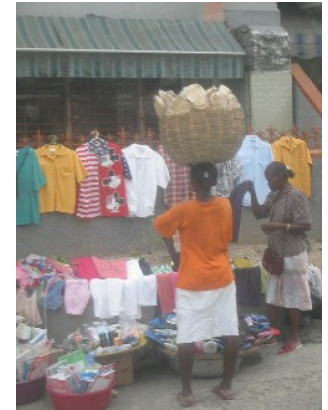


After three separate countries, twelve days at sea, one quasi-marooning, four engine repairs, one stowaway, two hurricanes, and one pistol-waving immigration official, the Caribbean Mercy is back in the States. I know this mainly because of how cold it is. Most of us are still figuring out which port we're in while we catch up with the culture shock. Our first pier here in Baltimore was two hundred meters from a Starbucks. In Honduras it was more like two thousand miles. Often it seemed farther—not from Starbucks, necessarily, but from the entire rest of the world.

We are indeed back in the land of wealth and plenty. In Haiti, I felt like I was back in West Africa. The Haitians I met didn't talk much about the violence that has savaged their nation, most recently about ten years ago in the coup that toppled Aristide and required thirty thousand U.S. Marines to halt the bloodshed. The concrete buildings [right] are crumbling and pockmarked, and I glimpsed some scars on people's bodies—whether from machetes, cigarettes, or other instruments I couldn't identify. I'm certain the marks on their hearts are deeper still. And yet the translator who spent a day with us spoke fervently not of the past but of the future. Evangelical Christians in Haiti, a tiny minority, are praying especially about



the year 2004 as a time of new beginnings. The year will mark not only the bicentennial of the country but also the de facto anniversary of its official contract with Satan. The nation was ritually consecrated to vodou spirits by its revolutionary leaders over two hundred years ago—this is historical fact, not Hollywood—but the local Christians I met are praying hard and purposefully against that, full of a fiery hope and the growing belief that God is going to move in their land very soon.



The Dominican Republic, on the other side of the island, seemed more like the other side of the world, with touristy ports populated by sun-baked Europeans. Inland, though, it was the same sad story as much of the rest of Latin America.

The small amount of newfound income may be "trickling down," but it's not trickling very fast. We were there for a state visit this time, not an outreach, but apparently God felt it was time to fine-tune our itinerary a bit, as he does from time to time. A few days after we'd docked, two relays in the engine room failed at once, leaving the ship dead with no water or power. The entire crew had to evacuate via flatbed truck [right] to a small Catholic retreat center run by an expat Christian veterinarian-and-artist couple. The hastily arranged exodus actually turned out to be four wonderful days of much-needed rest for the crew, most of whom were a little worn down after the intensity of an outreach. The engineers couldn't leave, but the cook who stayed dug deep in the (defrosting) freezers and fed them steak and ice cream. Best of all, the center's owners quietly decided to use our room and board money to pay for eye operations at a local hospital for seven people they knew who were going blind. The ship wasn't even there for an outreach on this visit, but God had his own plans.



Hopefully, the ship will return to the D.R. in mid-January to begin a full outreach. In the meantime, while we conduct our public-relations (read: "gas money") visits in U.S. ports through New Year's, the long-awaited next



Discipleship Training School, or DTS, has already arrived. My role as DTS staff has now gone from full-time to 24/7, with sixteen students from seven nations on board for the sole purpose of "knowing God better and making him known." They'll be going through some tough times along the way, as well as some mountaintop experiences—all the things that make a DTS the most incredible five months many people have ever had. We on staff were praying with high hopes for a group with a lot of potential to work together, and it looks like we've got one.

We're seeing some answers to prayer as a ship, too—for the first time in a while, we have nearly a full complement of crew, including several more engineers! Thank you for remembering us as you pray, and for helping with the financial support that makes this all possible. God bless you as your friendship has been blessing me.

Jeremy