

There's news, and then there's news. Same thing for the daily morning gatherings on the Caribbean Mercy where news is passed along—there are meetings, and then there are *meetings*. And when a special one is called on a Saturday morning, you know the news will be big.



As I write this, the Caribbean Mercy was supposed to be halfway through its next field assignment in the Dominican Republic. Instead, an ever-expanding litany of needed repairs has kept us in the Mobile, AL area while we try to get a handle on what we have to do. As the surveyor's "Fix This Or You Can't Sail" list has grown and grown, we have also uncovered more and more serious problems with the ship's fifty-four-year-old steel decking. Add to this the fact that Mercy Ships, like many global charities post-9/11, has been working harder and harder to raise the funds it needs, and we knew that something had to give. And so it was, in that rainy-Saturday meeting, that we heard the news: After much prayer and agonizing deliberation, Mercy Ships has reached the decision to temporarily remove the Caribbean Mercy from service.

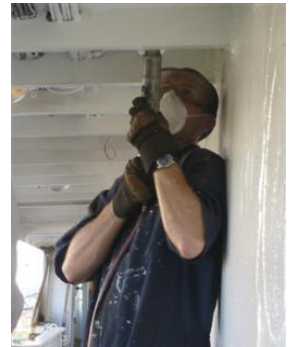


What does this mean? Well, for starters, no more Dominican Republic outreach. Our longsuffering advance team has had to communicate to the First Lady of the country the painful news that the ship will no longer be able to come. And for most of the crew—some of whom have been here ten, twelve, fifteen years—it means having to leave their home as well as their ministry. The Anastasis and the Africa Mercy are gratefully welcoming transfers, as is the International Operations Center in Texas, but the big family that is the Caribbean Mercy will soon be disbanded.

In light of this, the ship has been towed up the river to a small inlet at the city of Chickasaw where it can be laid up for six to twelve months while the IOC examines possibilities for the future. In the meantime, nine people—including us—will remain onboard to stand watches, do what maintenance we can, and generally keep things in working order. To keep the cost to an absolute minimum, most of the systems on most decks will be shut down (galley, air, lights, sewage, etc.), and no one else will be able to stay.



As you might imagine, this has been a pretty tough thing for the crew. Through all of the setbacks and tremendous changes over the last six months, they have kept their eyes fixed firmly on the goal of getting this old ship back in shape to serve the poorest of Central America's poor through medical relief. Now the Caribbean Mercy's next field assignment is postponed indefinitely, and even the ship's future is in question. Yet even in this there is good. Funds will be freed up to complete the Africa Mercy's renovation for its planned first sail in spring 2006. Many of our medical relief and development supplies will be trucked back to the IOC for use on the Anastasis in West Africa, where they are so badly needed. And there will be time, now, to plan the Caribbean Mercy's next moves, to develop a new vision for bringing desperately needed hope and healing around the world for years to come.



So that's the news from the ship. For us personally, well, it's part of the adventure. We'll still leave in late July when our commitment is up, and we're still thinking and praying about our next steps. In the meantime, there will be plenty to do—there's never, ever any shortage of work on a Mercy Ship. Keep checking the website at www.mercyships.org, too, for updates on the rest of the ministry. Everywhere you look in the world, God's work goes on. Thanks for being a part of it.



The Caribbean Mercy's final crew—for now.

Katie and Jeremy