

Healing on the High Seas

Don and Deyon Stephens know how to dream big. In 1978 they  imagined launching a ship that would provide medical care to the poor in undeveloped nations. Thirty-three years later, Mercy Ships, the ministry the couple founded, has expanded that vision to include the world's largest charity hospital ship.

"Jesus clearly, in the New Testament, gave us the great commandment and the Great Commission, so those are the bookends of Mercy Ships," Don says. "Those are the two compass points that have helped me develop Mercy Ships."

Africa Mercy, the lone Mercy Ship today, is a 16,500-ton vessel that sails around the world, though mostly along the coast of Africa, where 50 percent of the residents don't have access to medical care.

As the fourth Mercy Ship in the ministry's history, *Africa Mercy* has six operating theaters, a 78-bed ward and an all-volunteer staff of 450, including medical specialists who address everything from cataracts to dental hygiene to tumors.

Mercy Ships' 1,200 volunteers each year have performed more than 56,000 operations and provide ongoing medical training to local health-care workers. To date, the ministry has impacted an astounding 2.9 million people, free of charge. The ship operates from donations, and volunteers pay stipends to serve on the ship.

"The vast majority of the people that are with us are here because they believe this is part of their mission in life and it's a means for them to follow Jesus," Don explains.

Why you Should Care:

- » Across the globe billions of people live in fear and desperation because of impure water, inadequate food and little or no access to health care.
- » More than 1.2 billion people survive on less than \$1 each day.
- » More than 6 million children die each year from completely preventable causes such as malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia. –