

# SOUL STIRRINGS

Edited by Marcia Dixon



## MERCY SHIP FLOATS ON A SEA OF HOPE

Marcia Dixon spent a week on the Africa Mercy, a floating hospital providing medical care for the world's poor, and found her own spirit strengthened

**IF YOU** feel your faith waning and are disillusioned with the western brand of Christianity, a trip to the developing world to observe a Christian charity in action will help to put back the spiritual pep in your walk.

That's what happened to me when, at the invitation of friend Marcia McPherson, I joined her on a visit to Liberia to see the work of the Africa Mercy, a ship which provides free medical care to the world's poor.

Africa Mercy is run by Mercy Ships, a charity founded by American Don Stephens in 1978. The first Mercy Ship, the Anastasia, started operating in 1982, Africa Mercy launched last year.

President Elaine Johnson-Sirleaf invited Africa Mercy to the country to help care for the sick.

Buildings in Liberia are in a state of disrepair, and the country, home to 3.8 million people, has no national electric grid, running water or sewage system – all because of the civil wars they've endured since the '70s.

Before stepping aboard Africa Mercy, moored in Liberia's ravaged capital, Monrovia, I and six others visited the Alfred and Agnes Memorial orphanage, north of the city.

Despite the fact that they have lost their parents, the orphans have joy and hope. Marcia and myself brought gifts, which the children gratefully received. They gave us all a warm welcome, the biggest of which was reserved



*FUTURE: Marcia with children at St Gabriel's school*

for Dr Keith Thompson, who is a Mercy Ships volunteer and supporter of the orphanage.

Our welcome included a performance by a choir comprised of orphans, directed by 17-year-old Abraham Jackson, whose father was killed during the civil war when he was two. His mother went mad following her husband's death.

I experienced worship African-style at the Jamaica Road Evangelical Church based near the ship, where the congregation had little materially but were rich in hospitality, warmth and love. And I got to see the discipline and love for learning of Liberian pupils when I visited St Gabriel's school.

### ADMIRATION

I lived on Africa Mercy for eight days and my admiration for the work it does grew as I learnt more about it. Most of the 370 plus volunteers on the Africa Mercy are Christians who give their time to serving the world's poor, some for short stretches such as two weeks, for others the weeks

stretched into years. They also run dental and eye clinics in the city, and provide training in health, sanitation and mental health issues where needed.

Crew members led training sessions on post traumatic stress for pastors and former combatants. One of the ministers present was Joshua Milton Blayhi – infamously known as General Butt Naked – who, during the civil war of the early '90s, led a battalion famed for fighting in the nude. He was responsible for 20,000 deaths, but is now a Christian and works with rebel soldiers to show them a better way.

The majority of people on the Africa Mercy ship are

Christians and they share their faith and give feedback to fellow crew members at Friday morning gatherings.

One worker said God had used her to heal a boy who was unable to speak from birth. She said after she prayed for him he could not stop talking.

My time on the Africa Mercy demonstrated that faith combined with action transforms lives. I returned to the UK inspired and wanting to raise awareness and funds for Mercy Ships, and collect much-needed items for the orphans we met. I have asked God for his help to raise money to bring the children to the UK, so people can be blessed by their music ministry.

For more information on Mercy Ships visit [www.mercyships.org](http://www.mercyships.org)

### THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

*'Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation, for 'tis better to be alone than in bad company.'*

George Washington



*CARE: Marcia watches as surgeons operate*



*HOPEFUL: Liberians wait to see a doctor*

He recounted the story of four siblings in Mexico, blind from birth because of congenital cataracts, who walked up the gangplank of the now defunct Anastasia holding hands, led by their sighted parents.

The siblings were able to see when they walked off the boat after successful operations.

I toured the ship's medical quarters – which has six theatres, two wards. Some of the patients were babies and toddlers who had cleft repair operations, others had had facial tumours removed. I even viewed several operations – which included eye cataract removals.

Africa Mercy volunteers, which includes doctors, nurses, catering staff, ship crew members and a whole host of other people required to make sure everything runs smoothly, are unpaid. Their presence on the ship is financed by either their church, family, or money they've raised from selling their businesses, homes or fundraising scheme.

I visited Tenegar, a small village where Mercy Ships are building a clinic, after being asked to do so by President Sirleaf-Johnson. There, I met Australian Carl Schmutter, who had sold his business to work for Mercy Ships and now helps build much needed clinics. I also met Briton Paul Waldron, who had sold his house and given up his well-paid job to help build wells so that Liberians can get clean water. The joy they exuded from serving God and the community was inspiring.

Mercy Ships staff visited the local prison to provide basic health care to the inmates, who live in overcrowded and

### NOTICEBOARD

**BLACK FUNDRAISERS MEETING** takes place on November 25 at Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 at 6.30pm. Angela Sarkis, former Chief Executive of the YMCA will be talking on the theme 'Mission Focus and Resilience in Turbulent Times'. Admission is free. Call 07507 859 333 or visit [www.bfn.org.uk](http://www.bfn.org.uk)

**MOMENT OF TRUTH CONCERT** at Ealing Christian Centre, 268 Northfields Avenue, Ealing, London W5 on November 29 at 7pm. Enjoy performances from a wide range of artists. Call 020 3051 1964 for details.

**WOMEN'S CONFERENCE** takes place at Refuge Temple, 39 Sunnyhill Road, Streatham, London SW16, on November 30-31 at 11am – 6.30pm. 'Born to Birth Your Vision' is the theme. Call 07957 628 for details.

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