

The Greggs Aboard - Abroad



Dear Friends,

We are writing this in the middle of the ocean on the way to West Africa. It's exciting to be preparing for the African part of the ship's ministry and so far, it has been quite a calm sailing, which is a relief! This newsletter will tell you a bit about what ship life has been like for us in Europe and changing focus, some information about Benin and the plans for our 7 month outreach there. With our love as always,

Chris Vicki xx

A day on board the Anastasis in Europe.

Our day starts early with breakfast served in the galley between 6.30-7.30am. This is followed by a prayer time in our work departments and twice a week with the whole crew. Then it's work time – Chris and I have been working normal hours of 8-5pm with an hour for lunch, although Chris often has 'after hours' computer problems to deal with. He is now head of the computer department, which means extra responsibility and a pay rise (ha ha!) In the medical department I will soon be going back to 9 hour shifts five or six days a week which will be a shock to the system!

So what do we do in the evenings and at weekends?

On Thursday evenings we have a 'community meeting' which is sort of our equivalent to a church meeting. Local church on Sundays, and meetings with friends in a 'cabin group' twice a week. There are many other things too, such as youth nights, receptions, coffee evenings, medical presentations to help with, plus babysitting for the families, cabin renovations and volunteer jobs like cleaning the engine room.

In our spare time we have plenty of other things to do too – writing home, video nights, Scottish and ballroom dancing lessons, parties, card games and bike rides. There are people from all over the world to get to know too. It's been great to visit different countries in Europe, taking our home with us and friends too. We even had a short break in Tenerife (the ship stops there to refuel and 'rewater') and we hired a car with 2 American friends - Shannon and Zach, to tour the island and camp on a volcano!

Apologies

If you have sent us post to the address in Switzerland and haven't received an acknowledgement, then there is a good chance that we haven't received it. Unfortunately, the address we were given before we joined the ship was incomplete and we know of 5 parcels that have been lost or returned to sender. PLEASE don't let this deter you from sending us post though (we love news from home!)

Please use the following addresses instead:

Chris and Vicki Gregg
MV Anastasis - Mercy Ships
PO Box 2020
Garden Valley
TX 75771- 2020
USA

**This is our telephone
number in Benin!**
00 229 317 760

Schools up

Vicki has had her last day as a kindergarten teacher this week. It has been a great experience, with the kids having almost as much fun as Vicki!

The children's prayers were a constant source of inspiration and amusement – here's a few of the classics:

'I pray that God would have a good day up in heaven'

'I pray that our ship won't sink to the bottom of the ocean because then we would see sharks'

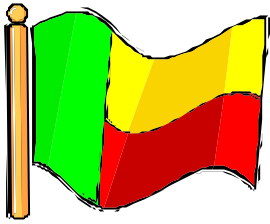
'I pray that everyone would have enough food to eat – the people, the animals and even the cockroaches'

Vicki hopes to organise some sort of children's group with puppets, music and dancing (!) for the 5,6 and 7 year olds with a Norwegian girl – Monica, so that she doesn't miss the children too much now she is no longer teaching.



Friendly cockroaches – a common sight!

7 Months in Benin



Benin in brief...

Benin is next to Nigeria in West Africa. Once called 'Dahomey' – the land of snakes, it is the birthplace of voodoo with over 50% of the population still practicing weird voodoo rituals. Many of the practices are kept secret, but in general, there is a belief that many objects embody spirits and that these can 'possess' people and affect their power and fortune. There is also a fascination with the spirits of ancestors and death – the port Cotonou roughly translates as 'on the banks of the river death'.

Benin also has an unpleasant past as being the major place from which black slaves were sent to South America and the Caribbean.

Despite this background, Benin is a relatively stable country enjoying peace and slow economic growth. As in most West African countries, the people have a real commitment to family and community, they are warm and hospitable, and full of joy and patience in seemingly unbearable situations. We are excited about the challenges ahead in Benin, but also rather intimidated at what we might face!



Why Benin?

3 years ago the Anastasis went to Benin for 5 months. This was the hardest outreach the crew can remember. The temperature and humidity were unbearable; sickness and exhaustion overwhelmed many of the crewmembers; direct opposition and corruption frustrated the ministry and the atmosphere was very oppressive. It seemed almost unbelievable that the Anastasis was to go back there and for the longest single outreach in the history of Mercy Ships. Many people have asked 'Why Benin?' and the answer is simple – God loves the people in Benin just as much as anywhere else in the world and there are great needs there, which Mercy Ships can begin to address.

The ship's work in Benin

The Anastasis hopes to complete about 1000 'life-changing' surgeries and provide dental treatments for about 3000 people in Benin. There will be a health clinic established in an area where there is no access to medical care and a community health education programme and training of local people to be health educators. The relief and development teams will construct a grain store, clinic and maternity unit. Others will work on latrine and well projects and a further group from the ship will teach vocational skills like carpentry, furniture making and metal work. Music, drama and evangelism teams from the ship will work with the local church and seminars for church leaders will be held on board the ship, in an attempt to encourage the local church in Benin. In addition, there are various 'Mercy ministry teams' made up of crew members who have other jobs on the ship but volunteer some of their spare time to help in orphanages, hospitals or with practical things like painting buildings. These jobs require no training or money and are set up in partnership with local churches so that the work can continue when the ship leaves. There will also be an outreach to the local motorbike taxi drivers - the 'Pit Stop' will have people to fix and service motorbikes with parts donated in Europe.

Lore

For the last 3 months there has been an 'advance team' in Benin – Anastasis crew preparing for our work there. They sent us news of a young girl – Lore, who was suffering from a large tumour on her jaw and hoping to have an operation when the Anastasis arrived. These tumours are common in West Africa and cause a huge amount of suffering. Lore was the sort of person our surgical team can help. Sadly, she died last week – the tumour had caused her to starve to death. It was a reminder to us of the great need that many people face in Benin and we are glad that we are soon going to be able to bring hope to people in such terrible circumstances.

