

News from the Greggs

Serving with the MV Africa Mercy in Newcastle.

NEWSLETTER NO. 24

13TH MAR 2006

So nearly there ...

Hello again from the cold Northeast and the Africa Mercy project.

Unfortunately, with further shipyard delays, we are still more than 3 months from completion of the shipyard phase of the Africa Mercy conversion. There's a lot to do but certainly things are taking shape and progress is visible every day. It even looks like a hospital ship now with deck 4 almost finished. There are 3 wards, 6 operating theatres, 5 bed ICU, a lab, pharmacy, an outpatient room, CT scanner and X-Ray, laundry and even piped oxygen to each bed space. One thing that marks it as being a little bit different is the 'long drop' toilet holes in the bathrooms. We have learned from experience on the Anastasis that those unfamiliar with western style toilets tend to squat rather precariously with their feet on the toilet seats, or worse, bath their babies and wash their hair in them. (It makes sense really, in a climate where clean water is so precious, why would you want to pee on it?)

The cabins are coming together too. Ours is on deck 5 port side. It is bigger than the one we had on the Anastasis with fitted furniture, big windows rather than a little porthole and a real bed rather than a futon.

One thing that is currently behind schedule is the galley. It still needs to be completely overhauled and fully equipped before we leave. On that note, if anyone has any ideas where we can get catering quality crockery and cutlery for 500 people or if anyone wants to take it on as a fundraiser, please let us know.

We do have some concerns that the ship may not be quite prepared enough for families with small children before our departure date. For example, we want to be sure that the school is ready and that there is ade-

quate shade for the children on deck so that they don't have to be cooped up inside in Africa. We are all preparing to 'rough it' a bit' at the beginning but it is a different matter altogether to sacrifice the comfort and happiness of children. We hope that these things will be addressed but we're facing a potentially difficult decision as the time for us to sail draws nearer.

We will be here in Hebburn until at least July so please get in touch if you would like to visit us and have a tour of the Africa Mercy. The aim is for the Africa Mercy to be operational in West Africa as soon as is possible and to stay there for 3-5 years so there will not be any chance to see the ship for a long time afterwards. We have a spare room here and love to provide hospitality. Stefan and Rebekah also love visitors.

With love as usual and hoping you have a great time at Easter,

Vicki Chris Stefan and Rebekah xx



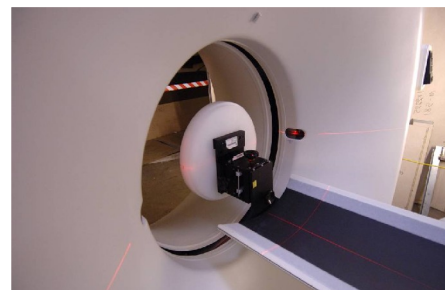
An Africa Mercy family cabin - almost complete

How is life up north?



Installing the satellite system

Life continues as normal for us up here. Chris leaves for work in the shipyard at 6.50am each day (recently in the snow!). He is loving the work at the moment because everything in his department is full-steam ahead and he is very busy. The technical side of things is really stimulating and he enjoys the interface with the yard workers and contractors. This week he is working with the team installing the satellite system for the communications on board. Luckily he has plenty of experience with this as he was involved with the original satellite installation on the Anastasis.



CT Scanner

Stefan goes 4 mornings a week now to a state nursery, which he loves. He has lots of energy and enthusiasm for everything they do. Vicki takes every opportunity to meet local Mums. She helps run the crèche at our Church and has recently started a Bible correspon-

dence course with a group of 8 others and another course called healthy cooking on a budget which seems to involve a lot of lentils! We do have a lot of friends here now and are getting more involved in the local community because we have been so frustrated with the ship delays and feel the need to settle somewhat rather than let opportunities pass us by...

The Current Plan for the Africa Mercy

It is REALLY difficult to make plans at the moment as the departure date from here seems so fluid.

The problem as we see it, is that the shipyard have not kept to their original time frame but are unwilling to lose face by giving us a more realistic finishing date. Mercy Ships is not in a good negotiating position as we are so desperate to get the ship completed at almost any cost, in order to begin the ministry in West Africa.

Once the ship is finished, she will be officially be handed over to Mercy Ships and the crew will be able to board and set up the ship community. Following this, there is likely to be a short and intense visit to Rotterdam for loading of vital ship and medical supplies and bunkering for fuel.

Then follows the maiden voyage to Africa. This sail will take about

2 weeks and will be a very busy time for all as we get used to the ship and community life and prepare for the first outreach.

When we reach Africa we will meet up with the Anastasis for a celebration of the commissioning of the Africa Mercy and decommissioning of the Anastasis. This is bound to be an emotional time for all who have served on the Anastasis and in particular for those who are leaving the ministry after years of serving on board. There will also be quite a radical stripping of the Anastasis to finish equipping the AFM, hopefully we won't inherit the cockroaches along with all the cargo to be shifted!

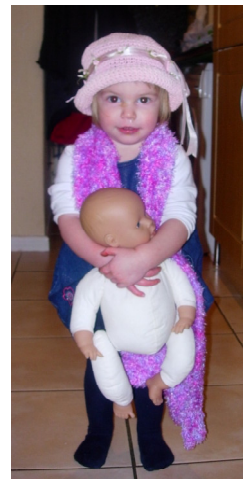
The first assignment is in Ghana. At present there are 2 port visits planned for 5 months each. It is hoped that the hospital will be in action to full capacity immediately and that the off ship teams will



also be ready to go out straight away. A team is now in Tema and Takoradi Ghana, making all the preliminary arrangements so no time will be wasted.

Following a short time of debriefing and restocking from container supplies we will then sail to Monrovia, Liberia and continue the work of the Anastasis in that war-torn nation.

That's all we know right now and as usual ... the detail is subject to change!



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