

## February 2011: Court Security Officer on a Mission

I am very proud of our staff at the Vermilion Municipal Court. Recently, our part time security officer Mike Levelle requested a leave of absence so that he could volunteer for a humanitarian mission to Sierra Leone, Africa. Mike Levelle is also the Minister at Vermilion's First Assembly God. Needless to say we are very proud to have Mike on our staff. The following is his account of his recent mission.

In the course of my life, I have found it valuable to be in service to my fellow human beings. This course has included working in disaster relief, from the terrible destruction brought about by Hurricane Katrina to working with those displaced whose homes had been destroyed by fire in the Southern California Witch Mountain fires. I have also assisted in the aftermath of air tragedies. At all of these times I have seen the greater picture of service to humans in times of their suffering. I would like to think that we have made a difference.

Recently, I was invited to participate in a unique opportunity involving intervention into the lives of those in West Africa, specifically, Sierra Leone. The Human Development Index ranks Sierra Leone in the bottom three countries in the world. The poverty there is devastating, and the need for health care is desperate. Sierra Leone is still recovering from a destructive civil war that started nearly 20 years ago. To better understand what the Mercy Ship means to Sierra Leone, here are a few facts about the country: There are four hospital beds per 10,000 people.

The average life-expectancy is 48 years. There are only 162 physicians for 5.5 million people.

One in five children will not make it to the age of five. One in every eight women will die during childbirth this year. There are 26,000 deaths per year from preventable causes

75% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day.

Before anything else could take place, we needed to get our instrument of service up and running. This tool just happens to be a ship, 500 feet long and seven stories high. This ship contains two fully functional operating rooms, as well as recovery wards. The ship is the Africa

Mercy. She was due for refitting of some critical components, generators and water systems, operating rooms, etc. This meant she was first in dry dock and then placed back in the water for other mechanical up grades.

A special team was assembled to make sure that she would be able to meet time schedules agreed upon with the government of Sierra Leon. This team was known as Team Durban, named after Durban, South Africa, the place where all the refitting was taking place. The Africa Mercy was docked in the ship yard.

We arrived on site the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 2011, and our primary function was to make sure all the internal workings of the ship were put back in place so she could sail from Durban, South Africa to Cape Town, South Africa in order to pick up her medical team en route to Sierra Leone. This involved intense days of cleaning and arranging all that had been dismantled during the refitting process. Since we stayed out in the bush, in a place called Appelsbosch, we had to travel 3 to 4 hours each day in order to work on the ship. The days were long and hard, but we accomplished this assignment with the zeal of knowing we were making a difference and that the medical needs of the suffering would soon be relieved.

This effort was truly international in scope. We worked with people from 25 of the 50 states and 20 different countries. I had wondered how such an international group would communicate, but was surprised to find that everyone was required to speak English while working on board the ship and was even more surprised to find that they all did this quite well.

I would also like to say that on Monday the 17<sup>th</sup>, we had a reception for all the South African National officials as well as local supporters and because of my work with the Vermilion Municipal Court; I was invited to provide security for this event. My role was to ensure that only the invited guests made it on board the ship and that the representatives of the government were secure. Some things that I learned from this trip were: 1) If we are able to intervene in the suffering of people, we should. 2) In all of our lives, there is a greater focus than ourselves.

3) The middle class in America is one of the things that make her unique and strong; most nations do not have this luxury. 4) Of the 20 nations that I lived among for several weeks, I realized that we are more alike than we are different. We all have hopes and dreams that are often interfered with by humans with corrupt intentions.

I would like to thank Judge Dolyk and the staff at the Vermilion Municipal Court for supporting me in this journey.