Forty years, and looking forward

Mercy Ships 2018 Annual Report
From the Chairman of the Board

Dear Friends,

Young Don and Deyon Stephens wanted to change the world! They were living in Switzerland when they had a dream of having hospital ships that could provide hope and healing to the forgotten poor. They envisioned a crew of the highest level of doctors, dentists, nurses, cooks, seaman, and engineers — all volunteering to serve at their own expense without regard to race, color, sex, or creed.

Their dream took root in October 1978 when a Swiss bank assisted in a $1 million loan to acquire the recently retired classic Italian liner Victoria for scrap value. Thus started a journey to equip and upgrade the ship to become a floating hospital to care for those who had little expectation of finding critical medical care.

Don and Deyon’s vision and passion for caring became a reality on July 7, 1982 as the m/v Anastasis (meaning “Resurrection”) made its maiden voyage. 2018 marked the 40th anniversary of Mercy Ships! We look back with gratitude for our dedicated volunteers, our faithful donors, and for God’s hand of blessing on our work. For 40 years, Mercy Ships has provided free surgical and medical care to some of the world’s poorest countries.

For its 11th year of service, our current hospital ship, the Africa Mercy, served the people of Cameroon and Guinea. During 2018, we provided over 2,500 life-saving surgeries and 32,000 critical dental procedures. Mentoring was provided to 87 local medical professionals, as well as specific training courses for more than 1,300 local healthcare professionals.

The Lancet Commission on Global Surgery reports that more than 18 million people die every year due to lack of timely surgical care — and a vast number of these people live in sub-Saharan Africa! We want to do more to meet this critical need. To achieve that purpose, a new hospital ship, the m/v Global Mercy is being built and nearing completion. It will be twice the size of the Africa Mercy. Together, these “state-of-the-art” floating hospitals will more than double our impact in Africa — not only with surgical care, but also in training healthcare professionals in the countries we serve. Importantly, host nations can better serve their own people as our ships leave their port.

On behalf of our International Board of Directors, staff and crew, I want to thank you for partnering with us in delivering hope and healing where it is so desperately needed. As we look back with gratitude and forward with anticipation, we value your ongoing support.

Sincerely,
— Myron E. Ullman, III
Chairman of the Board, Mercy Ships International

From the Founder

I like to look to the future. One of the lessons I have learned is that if you keep moving forward and keep persevering you will find a way. However, this is the 40th anniversary year of Mercy Ships and it would be wrong not to reflect on the journey that has made us what we are today. It is a journey that we are still traveling and one that makes us stronger as we go forward.

When I look back, I can’t help but shake my head in wonder. There were a few bumps along the road, but together we have overcome them all. I am so thankful and humbled by what we have achieved. We have seen more than 97,000 life-changing surgeries, over 42,000 local healthcare professionals trained, and over 445,000 dental procedures — and we are so grateful for the countless lives who have been impacted.

However, there is so much more to do. So many people suffer from preventable diseases and lack of safe, surgical care around the globe. We can and will do more to help. We have become more and more effective at what we do. We are currently building the Global Mercy, our first purpose-built hospital ship. I see no reason to stop there.

To everyone who has been part of our journey, who has served so willingly, offering so much to those who have so little, and to those who will be a part of our future, thank you.

— Don Stephens
Founder
From the Chief Executive Officer

Launching a new ship like the Global Mercy is an incredible opportunity for Mercy Ships for many reasons. We can’t just slowly scale up to operate two ships, so senior management has been diligently looking for areas of improvement in our support systems to ensure that we can rapidly scale. The long-term benefit is that we will pursue our program objectives with increased efficiency, quality, and professionalism, resulting in better outcomes and opportunities to partner with our host nations. We believe we will be realizing the ‘wake’ of this new ship for years to come.

It goes without saying that improving our standards is not just about operational and program impact as we look at ourselves; but in the greater context, there is tremendous potential in Africa. This year I was able to travel several times to visit our crew, establish new relationships for future partnerships, and celebrate recent accomplishments. As I look back, I was repeatedly struck by the level of hope that I encountered. There are a lot of positive changes in Africa. The world-class care that we are giving to patients onboard our ships is constantly bringing us to the question: How do we work together to use the momentum we see to grow the capacity of the healthcare systems in the countries in which we work?

It is both an exciting time in Mercy Ships, and to be serving in Africa. On behalf of all of our patients, host nations, staff, and crew, we want to express our deepest thanks. The pages of this annual report reflect the cumulative effort for which no one entity can take credit for, and so we hope you feel a part of this year’s theme as we celebrate together, “Forty Years and Looking Forward!”

— Donovan Palmer
Chief Executive Officer

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Mercy Ships — Bringing Hope and Healing

A faith-based international development organization, Mercy Ships deploys hospital ships to some of the poorest countries in the world, delivering free, vital healthcare to people in desperate need.

In addition to completing thousands of urgent operations onboard its floating hospital, the Africa Mercy, Mercy Ships works closely with host nations to improve the way healthcare is delivered across the country — by training and mentoring local medical staff, and renovating hospitals and clinics.

Founded in 1978 by Don and Deyon Stephens, Mercy Ships has worked in more than 56 countries, providing services valued at more than $1 billion. Mercy Ships delivers a customized five-year partnership model with every country it is invited to support with the aim to tackle the root causes of the problems rather than just the consequences.

Mercy Ships follows the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus by bringing hope and healing to the forgotten poor, helping people of all faiths.

Mission
Mercy Ships follows the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus, bringing hope and healing to the world’s forgotten poor.

Vision
Mercy Ships uses hospital ships to transform individuals and serve nations one at a time.

Values
Following the model of Jesus, we seek to:
• Love God.
• Love and serve others.
• Be people of integrity.
• Aim for excellence in all we say and do.

IMAGES: Above: Isatu, before surgery onboard the Africa Mercy. Far right: Isatu smiles brightly after her tumor was removed.
The year in review: 2018

Mercy Ships — changing the lives of thousands through the promise of hope, the restoration of healing, and the power of heart.

22,146
Potential patients screened for surgery

2,522
Life-changing surgical procedures provided

32,017
Dental procedures provided

8,998
Unique dental patients

1,369
Healthcare professionals trained through courses

87
Healthcare professionals mentored

56
Nations represented by crew

1,299
Unique volunteer crew

Our volunteer crew are the hands of mercy for thousands of people every year. Our surgical specialties are tailored to meet the needs of the people we serve — people who most likely would never have access to, or be able to afford reliable, healthcare or surgery.

In addition to providing life-transforming surgeries and medical care, our professional medical volunteers provide training and mentoring programs to local medical professionals. These educational programs aim to teach and improve existing skills in ways that are practical, relevant, and sustainable.
The volunteer model

In 2018, over 1,200 volunteer crew, from 56 different nations, served onboard the Africa Mercy—a truly international team working and living alongside one another—with up to 400 individual volunteers at work on the ship at any one time.

Volunteers serving with Mercy Ships contribute monthly crew fees and raise their own finances to live and work onboard. This means that funding received is complimented by contributed services and gift-in-kind, enabling Mercy Ships to deliver medical and development services at a fraction of the cost.

From medical professionals, to galley staff, housekeepers, to IT experts, maritime officers, to security, and vehicle maintenance—each crew member is an integral part of bringing hope and healing.

Along with the many volunteers serving onboard the Africa Mercy, our work would not be possible without the help of DayCrew (African nationals) who serve with us. Over 500 individual DayCrew served onboard in 2018. From working in the maritime department, to acting as translators for our surgeons and patients, the DayCrew serve throughout the ship filling many vital roles, all while gaining professional experience.

DayCrew members learn to work in a multicultural environment and receive additional vocational training while onboard. Our goal is to provide a tangible expression of the partnership Mercy Ships has with the African nations in which we serve by helping prepare our crew to find lasting jobs long after we’ve left port.

DayCrew Spotlight

When Marie Dieng was 16, her father fell ill, suffering from a tumor that was developing on his neck. While looking for a solution, the family heard the news that Mercy Ships was on its way to their country. Unfortunately, Marie’s father passed away before the ship was able to help him. Despite her overwhelming loss, young Marie knew the ship was a place of hope and healing.

“Told myself maybe one day, if the ship ever returns, I might have the opportunity to somehow help people that are suffering so they don’t have to die like my father did,” she said.

Six years later, the Africa Mercy returned to Guinea and Marie was able to fulfill her dream. She knew serving onboard as a translator would fulfill her desire to help others and also give her experience working with an international crew.

“What Mercy Ships is doing by employing locals, is giving them valuable experience,” she said. “It’s so hard to find work here, especially if you are a woman.”

Marie gained much experience onboard, and her biggest takeaway was found through observation. “I now see that there are truly wonderful people in this world. Nurses here help patients forget about their sickness and give them peace,” she said. “There are so many different cultures here, it made me realize that we are all equal and can treat others well.”

IMAGES: Above: A map showing 2018 national representation by volunteer crew. Upper right: Nurse Meggin Tallman and a patient enjoying some recreation time on Deck 7. Lower right: Guinean translator, Marie, interacting with a child.

“As a PICU nurse, it is rare we get to provide true holistic care to our patients at home in the USA. On the Africa Mercy, I spend eight hours assessing surgical patients based on policies and protocols, but I also sing songs and play ukulele with my patients. We color with crayons and play Old Maid and make friendship bracelets. I watch the look in my patient’s eyes as they see themselves for the first time in years without their tumor. I often leave work in the USA after my 12-hour shift wishing I’d had more time to comfort a scared mom or hold my patient’s hand through their pain. On the Africa Mercy, over and over again I get to be a part of rebuilding broken hearts with love and laughter and the light of Jesus. This is why I volunteer.”

—Meggin Tallman

Crew Spotlight

“...
A Lasting Legacy: Biomedical Equipment Training

In regions of West and Central Africa, biomedical equipment, essential to any hospital, is scarce, and often in poor working condition. Mercy Ships partnered with Medical Aid International to find a creative and sustainable way to address this issue.

Mercy Ships and Medical Aid International conducted two, eight-week courses, training 13 participants from various Cameroonian hospitals to properly maintain and repair medical equipment. The participants were trained to teach others, allowing locals to take ownership of their own healthcare landscape and have a tangible impact in their own nation’s well-being.

State-of-the-art equipment was also donated to local hospitals, including a renovated biomedical workshop to be used by the Ministry of Health. “I’ve really appreciated this training course … it’s very practical,” Salomon Kodna Kwete, a biomedical technician working at a local Cameroonian hospital said. “They [Mercy Ships] make sure you really know what you’re doing and how the tools work. They take time to teach you the basics.”

From January to June, Mercy Ships continued the second half of service in Cameroon. In addition to life-transforming surgeries, Mercy Ships provided training and mentoring to local medical professionals. This increase of knowledge and skills for the local healthcare system will leave a positive, long-term impact long into the future.

Mercy Ships partnered with the Ministry of Public Health in Cameroon to provide a variety of capacity building projects aimed at strengthening the local surgical capacity and improving access to safe, affordable, and timely surgery. One of the projects, Anesthesia Provider Mentoring, was designed by Mercy Ships to bolster Cameroon’s surgical ecosystem and thereby meet the needs of the nation’s overall healthcare system.

This mentoring of anesthesia providers and nurses took place onboard the Africa Mercy for over 37 weeks. When possible, mentoring was held in local hospitals allowing facilitators to observe and offer feedback and suggestions on areas for growth.

Mentoring participants reported a significant increase in knowledge and technical skills, as well as the value of experiencing a different work environment. Many shared about the lack of equipment in local hospitals but they were excited to implement the lessons learned regarding patient care.

At the completion of the mentoring program, anesthesia equipment, including an ultrasound machine, was donated to the local hospital in order to help ensure the continued practice of regional anesthesia and long-term sustainability of this project.

Fadimatou’s New Reason to Smile

Thirteen years of looking different from everyone else had taken a toll on Fadimatou’s confidence. Her place in society, even her sense of belonging among her 14 siblings was questioned because of her cleft lip.

Filled with desperation, her journey with Mercy Ships began when she and her father made the 18-hour trek from their village to the coast of Cameroon. Ahead of them was her once-in-a-lifetime chance at transformation.

Her father had waited 13 long years to find help for his little girl. A surgery that took an hour to complete on the Africa Mercy resulted in a life changed forever.

Fresh out of surgery, her emotional transformation began. Fadimatou, who once could barely keep eye contact, was now hungry for interaction. Each day, her physical scars healed alongside her wounds of shame and embarrassment.

While once doing everything possible to go unnoticed, Fadimatou now has a reason to hold her head high — a new reason to smile. Filled with pride and hope for the future, she shines with a confidence she’s never had before.
The surgery to straighten her twisted legs was only the beginning of a long recovery process. She spent weeks in casts. Sitting still was a challenge, but she patiently spent her time collecting stickers and brushing up on her drawing skills. Finally, her casts were off, and her physical therapy could begin.

Hours spent in rehabilitation brought Justine closer to her goal of walking crutch-free on her newly straightened legs. Before long, she was striding like a champion — smiling widely, ready to grab the attention of anyone near her. “Watch me!” her sparkling eyes seemed to shout. She was proud of her ever-increasing mobility.

“It leaves me speechless to see her walking around like this,” her grandfather said. “It’s a miracle.”

The recovery process wasn’t simple. Complications meant that, although she was the first patient up the gangway, she was also one of the last orthopedic patients discharged. But in only five months, Justine’s legs were straight, and her bold spirit was undeterred.

This courageous girl might conquer the world someday. But, for now, it’s the little things that she can’t wait to accomplish … fetching water, helping wash clothes and clean house, and going to school … things that were once impossible for her.

Justine now has more than just straight legs — she faces a future that’s full of potential for a brave and confident girl, saying, “There’s nothing I can’t do!”

If anyone tells Justine she can’t do something, she’ll find a way to prove them wrong. This 11-year-old has the heart of a lioness — fearless and fiery. “Can’t” doesn’t seem to be in her vocabulary.

Her strength sparked pride in her grandfather’s heart … but also great concern. Justine was born with bowed legs, a congenital condition that causes the bones in the legs to twist so that the knees are farther apart than the ankles. As time progressed, instead of getting better as her family hoped, Justine’s condition worsened. Eventually, her feet were bent backwards entirely, making it difficult for her to walk or stand for long periods of time.

But spunky Justine seemed unaware of the severity of her condition. Undeterred, she dreamed of one day running, jumping rope, and climbing guava trees with her friends.

“She never seemed to understand that her legs didn’t work like the other children’s,” her grandfather said. “I was afraid for her when she would try to climb trees or play. I would think, ‘If her legs get broken for good, what is she going to do?’”

Going to school was a challenge. Her grandfather had to arrange transportation for her since she couldn’t walk the two and a half miles to school each day with her older siblings. On days when transportation fell through, she would spend hours painstakingly making her way to school, stopping frequently for breaks. Life seemed like an unending uphill battle for this girl with a brave spirit and boundless potential …

… Until the day they heard about Mercy Ships. They made their way to the Africa Mercy, and when they arrived, it only seemed fitting that Justine was the first patient up the gangway of the hospital ship on opening day. She had to be carried up the steps, but her smile revealed a confidence that one day soon, she would be able to walk down them by herself.

IMAGES: Left: Justine before her surgery onboard the Africa Mercy. Right: Standing tall, Justine proudly shows off her straightened legs. Front cover: Justine is carried up the gangway to receive her surgery.
For Samory, he never imagined that neglecting a toothache would result in a facial tumor that threatened to take away his dreams and his life.

Samory knew that there was not much hope. He was from a rural village and was unable to get medical aid. His mother tried to treat his tumor with traditional remedies, but to no avail. "The worst part was knowing that it was only going to get worse because there was nothing we could do," Samory said.

With every passing day, the pain grew; it got so bad that Samory decided to make the journey to the capital to seek help, even though he knew he could not afford it. But when he reached Conakry, he heard the good news he so desperately needed — a ship that would perform free surgeries had arrived in his home country!

Thanks to his courage, ambition, and the gift of safe, free surgery onboard the Africa Mercy, Samory’s dreams were rekindled! "I am looking forward to picking up my studies again so I can become a mathematics teacher, just like I wanted to be before the pain began,” Samory said. "Life is good once again!"
On her first day as a mentee in the Africa Mercy ophthalmic Operating Room, Dr. Patricia Eyoup Sen was shaking in her medical scrubs. “I was so nervous… this was such a new experience,” she said. While she’d received years of classroom education in both Mali and Cameroon, the Mercy Ships O.R. was her first time participating in an actual surgery.

It was the beginning of a three-month journey with the Mercy Ships Medical Capacity Building program that would change everything.

Dr. Patricia calls ophthalmology her “destiny,” but is acutely aware that, even with the proper education, opportunities to turn her surgical dreams into a reality were extremely rare. When she heard about the ophthalmic mentoring available on the Africa Mercy during the 2018 field service in Cameroon, she was thrilled to participate.

Over the course of three months, Dr. Patricia participated in over 300 surgeries onboard — 150 of which were independent surgeries featuring her as the lead surgeon.

Beyond the value of practicing surgical procedures, Dr. Patricia says many of her biggest takeaways came from conversations with Dr. Glenn Strauss, who was then serving as a volunteer ophthalmic surgeon.

“I learned to be focused on every single patient. When you do so many surgeries right after each other, it can be easy for it to become automatic,” Dr. Patricia said. “Dr. Glenn told me that even though he’s done thousands of these surgeries, he treats each case like they’re different, and he never relaxes. Everything changed after that conversation.”

As her mentoring came to an end, Dr. Patricia was ready to apply everything she had learned by creating a space for renewed eye care and restored vision in Garoua, a remote river city in northern Cameroon.

She decided to partner with the Regional Hospital of Garoua by reviving their eye clinic, which had been inoperative for almost 20 years due to a lack of ophthalmic specialists. Mercy Ships MCB staff came alongside her to help train nurses from the area — three of whom would return to Dr. Patricia’s clinic. The course involved classroom training, mentoring in proper surgical preparation, taking care of surgical equipment, and the opportunity to participate in two daily surgeries.

Now successfully up and running for the first time in two decades, the clinic serves patients with ophthalmic needs such as prescribing and providing glasses and caring for inflammation, glaucoma, and cataracts.

While she says mentoring can be difficult and time-consuming, Dr. Patricia has learned first-hand from staff onboard the Africa Mercy that it’s worth the effort.

Less than a year after Dr. Patricia was mentored onboard, she decided to return to the Africa Mercy, now in Guinea — but this time, as a volunteer surgeon. During her two weeks volunteering, she performed cataract surgeries for 85 patients.

“I came back to serve with Mercy Ships in Guinea because I wanted to improve my practice, and I wanted to serve people who need help for blindness,” she said. “I feel blessed to be able to give sight to people — it’s a great opportunity to help people, and I’m very thankful.”

Images: Left: Dr. Patricia Eyoup Sen being mentored by Dr. Glenn Strauss. Right: Dr. Sen performing surgery onboard.
Increasingly, African governments not only have to adopt plans that ensure holistic and equitable medical systems, they have to have institutions that educate and train doctors, nurses, and medical personnel at all levels. I believe that African governments can meet this challenge if there are models that are developed and financed that factor in the specific needs, resources, cultures and capacity of each country. Additionally, there have to be visionary and compassionate leaders in place who are cognisant of the God-given and inalienable rights of each of their citizens to health.

How do you see the future of Mercy Ships and our role alongside African organizations?

Increasingly Mercy Ships is recognized as committed, long-term partners of the health authorities, practitioners, institutions, and NGOs in the countries where we operate. I see our partnerships in Africa deepening, especially in the training and mentoring arena, as we move forward and as our own capacity grows with the addition of our new ship.

What inspires you in your work?

I am inspired by my faith, by the faith, generosity, love, and energy of our amazing volunteers and supporters, and by the extraordinary grace, courage, and resilience of the people of the continent that calls me. What also inspires me is what Mercy Ships does to save the lives of vulnerable Africans, in particular children. I have seen the difference Mercy Ships has made in correcting serious, debilitating birth defects and crippling injuries and in dealing with the ramifications of people living in unhealthy and dangerous environments.

What do you see for the future of Africa in transforming its health systems?

My dream is that when historians come to tell the story of the 21st Century, Africa’s emergence as a dynamic engine of global growth and prosperity will be one of their major themes. Many interlocking pieces have to fall into place for that dream to be realized. One of those pieces, a critically important one, is health. Mercy Ships is doing more than providing much-needed health treatment and life-saving surgeries, we are providing medical training, establishing health partnerships, catalyzing health infrastructure development — leaving a legacy and a culture of care when we disembark. We understand that the value of a human life is incalculable. We bring that awareness with us everywhere we go.

How do you see the fate of the most vulnerable among us, Mercy Ships remains true to its Christian calling to serve the poor and downtrodden. At a time when some have grown complacent or uncaring suffering and in addressing the plight of the those most in need, unfettered by dire circumstances and statistics, inspires not only me, but countless other people.

What are the biggest challenges Mercy Ships should tackle that we are not yet tackling?

Mercy Ships never leaves a port without all of us wishing we could have done more, reached more patients, and changed more lives. The challenge is to leave behind the knowledge, skills, inspiration and tools that enable our partners to keep doing the “more” that we wished we had done. Sustainability and reach are big challenges. We are tackling them but they are multifaceted, requiring constant attention and imagination. There’s still a lot of tackling still to do and always will be.

You have talked about “smart aid” in the past. How do you rate Mercy Ships impact on the ground?

Smart aid is aid that respects recipients, listens to and understands them and consciously seeks to make itself unnecessary. It is the opposite of aid that is designed, as is too often the case, for the benefit of the donor. I am deeply proud of the selflessness of the Mercy Ships model and of the compassion, humility, dedication and empathy our volunteers bring to their mission. The fact that Mercy Ships keeps moving forward with its mission and continues to take positive action in alleviating suffering and in addressing the plight of the those most in need, unfettered by dire circumstances and statistics, inspires not only me, but countless other people.

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I would go so far as to say that Mercy Ships is the best possible example of “smart aid.” One needs only to review our history and achievements on page 21. Often times, those of us who are an integral part of Mercy Ships forget the enormous contributions that have been made thus far. And, we have done all this using a model unusual in the philanthropic world. With a few minor exceptions, everyone aboard our ship — and soon to be ships — from surgeons to cooks and other support staff has not only volunteered their time but are paying the full cost of being onboard with their own funds or funds they have raised themselves. This maximizes the bang our donors, and partners get for their euros, dollars and other investments.

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40 Years of Mercy and Looking Forward

Mercy Ships has provided services and materials in developing nations valued at more than $1 billion.

The Mercy Ships story is continually evolving. Beginning as nothing more than our Founders’ combination of dreams, prayers, and aspirations, it has steadily evolved into the organization that is seen today. For the past 40 years, our dedicated volunteers and partners have provided excellent, free surgical care to thousands of people living in the developing nations we serve. As we turn the page on this incredible story, we look forward to the next chapter that will see us launch a new vessel that will bring hope and healing to countless more people — helping to change and rewrite their stories for an even better future.

The new ship

A new ship, Global Mercy, is currently being built by Mercy Ships in China that will more than double the ability of the organization to deliver direct medical care, while also increasing the potential for medical capacity building projects. The 12-deck, hospital ship will contain six operating rooms, more than 190 beds, and accommodation for more than 640 crew.
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Martin Multifinance Partners, LP
Kigoma, Tanzania

Erling Natvig*
Founder, Chief Executive Officer
Babysitter
Kristiansand, Norway

David Overton*
Partner
Opus Faves Innovation
Austin, TX, USA

Daniel O. Shelley*
Texas State Senator, (Retired)
Austin, TX, USA

Devin Stephens
Co-Founder
Navy Ships
Garden Valley, TX, USA

Juliette M. Tuakli, MD*
Executive Director
Child & Associates
Accra, Ghana

Richard Wankmüller
Chair, Mercy Ships Austria
Calwodonia, IZQ, Australia

Rev. Jonathan Weaver*
Senior Pastor
Greater NH, Nabo A.M.E. Church
Bow, ME, USA

Mary Beth West*
Chief Growth Officer
Hershey Company
Hershey, PA, USA

Randall Zindler
Chair, Mercy Ships Switzerland
Lausanne, Switzerland

Emeritus Directors:
William S. Kanaga
Chair, (Retired)
Arts Young
Orkans, MA, USA

Gustaf van Beers
Professor of Economics (Retired)
Kingston, ON Canada

Mercy Ships International Support Center
PO Box 2020
Garden Valley, TX 77511-2020

Mercy Ships Global Association
Chemin de la Fauvette 98
1012 Lausanne
Switzerland

Mercy Ships Australia
PO Box 1095
Caloundra, Queensland 4551
Australia

Mercy Ships Global
www.mercyshipsglobal.org

Mercy Ships Australia
www.mercyships.org.au

Mercy Ships Belgium
Excelsiorlaan 902
B-1930 Zaventem
Belgium

Mercy Ships Canada
Unit 5 - 3318 Oak St
Victoria, BC V8X 1R1

Mercy Ships Canada
www.mercyships.ca

Mercy Ships Denmark
Jernbaekvej 6, Ramloese
DK-1200 Helsingør
Denmark

Mercy Ships France
Bureau Aéroport
Chemin de Colomars
01210 Femy-Voltaire
France

Mercy Ships Germany
Rudolf-Diesel-Str. 20
DE - 88099 Lindsborg am Lech
Germany

Mercy Ships Korea
353 Eupjin Building
Seoul
402 31 Göteborg
Sweden

Mercy Ships Norway
4 Athene Building
Co Corner and Henley Roads
Muizenberg, Cape Town

Mercy Ships South Africa
4 Athene Building
Co Corner and Henley Roads
Muizenberg, Cape Town

Mercy Ships Spain
Naves de Esperanza
Apartado 11001
08004 Barcelona
Spain

Mercy Ships Switzerland
Wenham, MA, USA

Mercy Ships United Kingdom
The Lighthouse
12 Hobday Court
Strangford, Hartsholme, SGT 2EP
United Kingdom

www.mercyships.org.uk

Please contact:
development@mercyships.org

* To request a financial report for the year 2018, please contact: development@mercyships.org

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