

## Mercy Ships Philosophy of Missions

John 15:16- He has chosen us to bear fruit and that this fruit will remain!

See appendix I for extended definitions

### Preamble:

The purpose of this document is to serve as a constitution for program development in Mercy Ships and is not intended to replace our core values, mission statement, or statement of faith. It is intended to create a template for consistency in how Mercy Ships presents itself worldwide and to serve as a foundation for the beliefs we hold in common as an organization about who we are and why we do what we do. It is not an effort to produce uniformity in personal beliefs but rather to give clarity to the work of the organization as a whole. Finally, it is intended to stimulate personal and organizational growth by generating constructive dialogue about the complex issues we face in our day to day work of serving the poor.

### 1. How does Mercy Ships view poverty?

We recognize that poverty<sup>1</sup>, defined as the absence of well-being<sup>2</sup>, is a manifestation of a broken world system separated from its creator.

#### A. Fundamental issue:

*-Poverty cannot be fully explained simply as an economic and/or political problem.*

*Consideration must also be given to underlying spiritual issues associated with a distorted world view<sup>3</sup>.*

*-Not all those who lack material things live in poverty.*

*-Some of those who live in poverty have been forgotten or rejected by both local and global societies.*

#### B. Applications:

*-Our primary objective is to be a catalyst for transformational development. We understand this to be promoting the discovery and implementation of a biblical world view which reveals the truth about the creator God<sup>4</sup>.*

*-The nature of our work is essentially redemptive<sup>5</sup> and restorative<sup>6</sup>. In effect, our work is to walk along side the forgotten poor, facilitating and participating in their growth as well as our own.*

*-While health, social, and educational programs are employed to facilitate change, long term benefit must be grounded in a change in community thinking.*

*-Program designs should provide holistic<sup>7</sup> means to address the core problems which may be physical, emotional, economic, political, or spiritual.*

*-Empowerment<sup>8</sup> of the indigenous Christian church and other like-minded faith-based NGO's on behalf of the forgotten poor is a key (but not exclusive) priority in the work of Mercy Ships.*

*-This principle does not exclude a relief response to human suffering and need<sup>9</sup>.*

*-We will promote unity<sup>10</sup> among all people groups and churches.*

## **2. Why does Mercy Ships focus on the forgotten poor?**

The poor, defined as those who lack socio-economic resources, often do not have the opportunity to achieve a state of well-being. Instead, they may live with a distorted view of God's design for them, their purpose, and relationships.

### *A. Fundamental Issues:*

*-Poverty, as experienced by the poor, is a complex system of disempowerment often combined with broken relationships<sup>11</sup> that may lead to being outcasts<sup>12</sup> of society- the forgotten poor.*

*-Restoration, empowerment, and inspiration of the outcast and the communities in which they live are essential to the process of restoring a state of well-being.*

### *B. Applications:*

*-No generalizations can be made about the poor as to their character, faith, or potential*

*-Following the example of Jesus, Mercy Ships has chosen to focus its primary efforts on the forgotten poor.*

*-Mercy Ships programs should combine restorative, empowering, and inspirational elements.*

## **3. What are the primary tools used by Mercy Ships?**

Health Care is the face of Mercy Ships. It provides a direct means to restore the capacity for well-being to the outcast by delivering corrective medical procedures, health education, and health advocacy.

### *A. Fundamental issues:*

*-Mercy Ships cannot address the whole spectrum of need experienced by the outcast*

*-Mercy Ships has developed a unique set of health care tools to participate in the restoration, empowerment, and inspiration of the outcast.*

### *B. Applications:*

*-Corrective surgical interventions can appropriately be seen as a health development<sup>13</sup> tool, empowering individuals to become productive, and inspiring them to give back to their societies.*

*-Vocational rehabilitation, agriculture, construction, and water/sanitation are equally relevant tools. These activities also encourage good health and should act as an extension of the medical health care work.*

*-All programmatic activities will be fundamentally and purposefully linked to the delivery of a message of hope in a loving God. This purposeful connection enhances the potential of our work to result in lasting change.*

#### **4. What is the main message to be communicated?**

At the heart of the universe is a God of love who has made provision for the transformation<sup>14</sup> of lives.

##### *A. Fundamental issues:*

- We recognize that the needs of the poor are more than we can address alone.
- We acknowledge that lasting change towards a state of well-being is dependant upon God who desires all to enjoy the benefits of His creation.
- We acknowledge our dependency upon God for His wisdom in confronting the needs of the poor.
- We recognize we cannot take credit for lasting changes that do occur.

##### *B. Applications:*

- Prayer is a fundamental element of our programs.
- We will deliver our services as a gift from God with no strings attached.
- Our volunteers must be carefully oriented to the messages of transformational development to avoid misrepresentation of a loving God.
- Partnerships with others (including governmental and non-governmental agencies in addition to the church and other like-minded agencies) are not only preferred but essential to our success.

#### **5. How does Mercy Ships approach transformational development?**

Transformational development is people centered and process driven.

##### *A. Fundamental issues:*

- God, the author of transformation, has chosen to use people as agents of change.
- A proper attitude towards others, awareness of cultural norms, and skillful planning are all vital to effectively serve as a stimulus for change.

##### *B. Applications:*

- The message of a loving God is best expressed in the words and deeds of lives which are themselves being transformed by Jesus.
- We acknowledge that indigenous workers may serve as the best mouthpiece for this message while our role may be to simply serve as the hands.
- Transformational development employs processes and actions that integrate intentional Christian witness without proselytizing<sup>15</sup>.
- We gain the privilege of entering the lives of others by being learners.
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity does not necessarily mean acceptance of all cultural practices.
- We are committed to quality assessment and planning, and appropriate implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

## **6. What are the limitations of our approach to transformational development?**

Transformational development work is not an exact science.

### *A. Fundamental issues:*

*-We recognize we cannot precisely predict the outcome of the process in which we are participating.*

### *B. Applications:*

*-We will regularly evaluate our strategies and make appropriate course corrections.*

*-We will pursue incremental change towards the best possible outcomes using physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social tools.*

## **7. How will transformational development be integrated and sustained in Mercy Ships?**

Transformational development is an ongoing process affecting us organizationally and individually.

### *A. Fundamental issue:*

*-We commit to participating in the process of transformational development ourselves.*

*-This document will be most effective when integrated into the culture of Mercy Ships.*

### *B. Applications:*

*-We are committed to providing ongoing training and educational opportunities for staff, donors, and volunteers.*

*-We are committed to maintaining a mentoring culture<sup>16</sup>.*

*-We will use entry level training programs to promote our philosophy of missions.*

## **8. How does Mercy Ships view relief work and disaster response?**

Relief work is an appropriate response to human suffering and need.

### *A. Fundamental issue:*

*-Human suffering warrants a compassionate response.*

### *B. Applications:*

*-Relief work is often the initial step in long term development work.*

*-Disaster relief is appropriate in response to natural and man-made disaster.*

*-In situations where suffering is encountered, we will first try to alleviate the suffering and then address the development issues.*

*-Compassionate surgical intervention is acceptable for palliative care<sup>17</sup>.*

**Partial bibliography for additional reading:**

De Haan, John, AERDO: *Beyond Relief and Development to Transformation*, 2004

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