

# Ship Report

28 April 2006 | Monrovia, Liberia



## Mercy Ships sponsors conference for Liberian church leaders

Approximately 1,000 pastors and lay leaders from churches throughout Liberia participated in a Mercy Ships workshop and conference from April 17-22. The theme of the event was “The Church as a Change Agent in Reconciliation and Peace Building,” and paralleled a conference held for church leaders in the capital city of Monrovia in January.

The meeting, however, was held in Gbarnga, and offered a unique opportunity for leaders who live and work in some of Liberia’s most remote and underserved areas to receive teaching, training, and encouragement.

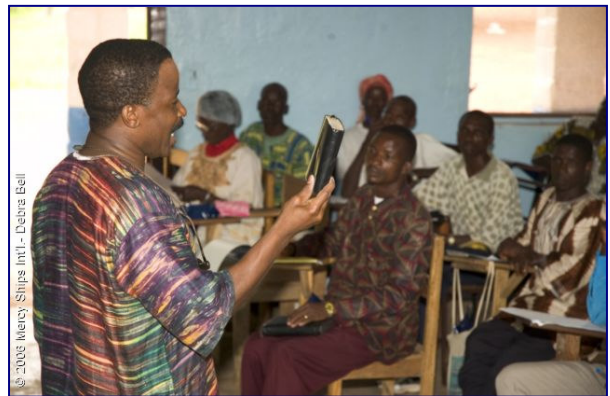
*“We are very excited to see you. Through the tough times, we do not see people like you,”* stated Pastor Sumo O. Singbeh, a conference participant. *“You are coming here to encourage us in the Word of God.... From*



*your empowerment, we are going to move forward.”*

The event began with a two-day workshop for nearly 500 church members. Each local pastor was asked to send a team of four individuals to the workshop; they would each participate in one of 11 eight-hour courses aimed at addressing and discussing specific, relevant needs and issues facing the church in Liberia. These workshops, led by experts in each field, covered topics such as: HIV/AIDS Education for Church Leaders, Marriage & Family Life, etc.

Upon the completion of the workshop, 550 pastors arrived in Gbarnga and began a four-day conference on the same site. The keynote speaker was Reverend Francis Forbes of The Gambia while Andre Cronje of Mercy Ships facilitated a number of the plenary sessions.



Vincent Luwizhi, head of the Mercy Ships Church Empowerment department, planned the conference along with Rev. Jerry Kulah, a Liberian minister and head of the country’s “National Planning Committee on Mercy Ships.” Luwizhi was encouraged by the impact of the event – particularly by the church leaders’ commitment to being agents of change.

*“I think our goal was met.... Our goal was to get the leaders together, communicate transformational messages, to empower them in their thinking, to empower them in their*

*behaviors, and to empower them in their moves in society,” he said.*

*“They always say, we can’t do it, because we don’t have money, because my church is small, because nobody knows we exist out here...and now they hear from us that they can do it. The pastors themselves are saying, ‘Now we know we have a choice. It’s either we are going to move on, or we’re going to just choose to stay where we are.’ ”*

David Logan, another conference participant, summed up its impact: *“[The conference] was so rich, enjoyable, and meaningful. I can assure you [it] will not be a waste because I will also teach it in my home, community, and my church.”*

