

TWO MONTHS ALONG THE AFRICAN COAST

Leland Couple Boards Mercy Ship For Next Volunteer Mission

BY TERRY POPE

A Leland couple leaves this week for a two-month stay along the African coast aboard the *Anastasis*, one of three Mercy Ships operated by Youth with a Mission Ministries.

For Ronald and Lula Nance of the Westover Subdivision, it is their second volunteer mission aboard the Christian ship that provides medical care and outreach programs for nations stricken with poverty.

Youth with a Mission operates its ships in areas where there is a need for medical relief, education, construction, agricultural and sanitary training. Its other goal is to help spread Christianity to people in the underdeveloped nations it visits.

Today (Thursday) the Nances were to fly to Africa's Ivory Coast to board the ship that will spend a month at Abidjan before setting sail to Guinea. They plan to return home March 1.

A recovery room nurse at Cape Fear Memorial Hospital in Wilmington, Lula will work in the recovery room aboard the ship. The type of surgery performed will depend on the specialty of doctors who help make up the crew of 350 volunteers staffing the ship and its three operating rooms.

Ronald, a mechanic at the Du Pont plant in Leland, will report to the ship's chief engineer. During the

couple's January 1990 tour, he was assigned to the engine room.

When the *Anastasis* was docked in Wilmington in April 1989, the Nances toured the ship along with thousands of other local residents. They had no intention of becoming volunteers. That thought lingered in their minds for six months before they agreed to a two-week stay. They later agreed to spend a month aboard the ship.

"We would have to say the Lord started dealing with us to give a little time to it," said Ronald. "It was as if the Lord was calling us to serve for that time."

The Nances will pay for their flight to Africa plus a crew fee to stay aboard the ship. It is far from being a cruise, said Lula.

"It's hard and hot work," she said. "But it's enjoyable."

Some days Lula will work from 9 a.m. to 3 a.m. non-stop. Volunteers can sign up to work a minimum of two weeks aboard the ship to a maximum of six months. Persons could easily perform the equivalent of a full year's work in six months' time, said Ronald.

"We found it kind of strange going out of the United States and into another world," he said. "We saw some things that kind of enlightened us to the needs and situations of people that are not as blessed as we are."

Their daughter, Susan, has also devoted part of her life to missionary work. She's preparing to leave for a two-month outreach program in Thailand, where she will teach English to Thai students in Bangkok and practice street evangelism.

"Hopefully, we'll also be dealing with the problem of child prostitution," she said.

Sometimes, girls as young as 11 or 12 turn to the streets to make money in the poverty-stricken country. Susan spent four months in missionary discipleship training in England and Holland to prepare for her outreach mission.

Another daughter, Victoria, is stationed in Kuwait with the U.S. Army. She served in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm last year and recently re-enlisted after returning to Leland in October for a 10-day visit with her parents.

During the couple's January 1990 stay aboard the *Anastasis*, the ship was docked in the Dominican Republic. In addition to providing medical treatment to patients who could not pay, the ship's crew went into the surrounding villages and local hospitals to teach health and personal hygiene in the 90-degree heat.

"You begin to see what those people have to wear and to eat," said Ronald, "and you get to see that America is the land of the blessed."

Villagers would raid the ship's trash containers at night. A small stream that supplied drinking water to a village would also serve as a bathing spot and a place to wash clothes. People did not have equipment or the knowledge to drill for wells.

Volunteers representing 36 nations made up the *Anastasis* crew. Ronald was assigned mostly to the ship's engine room where he could put his technical expertise to work.

"I was surprised that a lot of the equipment on the ship was similar to some of the equipment that I've worked with," he said. "It's like running a small factory. It's got to run 24 hours a day."

The couple's employers have been cooperative in allowing the couple to take time off from their jobs to do volunteer work.

Lula said on several mornings when the mission first began, she had second thoughts and wished she had not made the trip. But that feeling quickly left.

"I think the greatest part of the expedition is when you see people whose lives have been changed," said Ronald, "when you see a child that is able to look straight for the first time or crippled limbs fixed. There's a big smile that comes upon their faces."

The *Anastasis* is a 522-foot former freight and cruise ship, one of three Mercy Ships owned by Youth with a Mission Ministries, an international inter-denominational orga-

nization with a goal to eventually operate 10 ships in areas of need worldwide. It's 350-member crew includes about 50 children.

"It is a calling," said Ronald. "It's not a cruise. We knew this would be a task, a difficult task."

Spreading Christian beliefs can also aid persons in poverty, said Ronald, for the gospel teaches humanitarian ideas and how to work for food. In countries like the Dominican Republic, the rich get richer while the poor get poorer, added Lula.

"The big reason for so much decay and poverty is the lack of the teachings of Jesus Christ," said Ronald. "There are so many beautiful countries in the world with so much poverty. A lot of these people have no hope because they are considered outcasts. When you can give them this type of hope, it makes it all worthwhile."

Lula actually began her career in the recovery room in the Dominican Republic. When she joined the *Anastasis* last year, she was working as a nurse in the critical care unit at New Hanover Regional Medical Center in Wilmington. The ship's staff assigned her to the recovery room, where her duties ranged from scrubbing the floors to caring for patients.

"They told me that I would learn, that I could do it," said Lula. "And I did."

She has since taken a job as a recovery room nurse. This time around, the Nances say they know what to expect and are ready for the tough assignment ahead.

While watching a video on the Mercy Ship's work in their living room last week, the couple sat together and cried.

Ronald explained that the courage they need to board the Mercy Ship comes from a higher being, that it is a calling in life.

"We're convinced that a person can have all that they desire," said Ronald.

Attention is often placed on the medical treatments offered aboard the Mercy Ships. A high incidence of cleft lips and cleft palates, often a result of poor nutrition, require reconstructive surgery. Doctors also



TWO SHOESHINE boys pose for a photograph in the Dominican Republic with Ronald Nance during a January 1990 mission.



LULA NANCE, a recovery room nurse, attends to a boy who had a cleft lip repaired in an operating room aboard the *Anastasis*.

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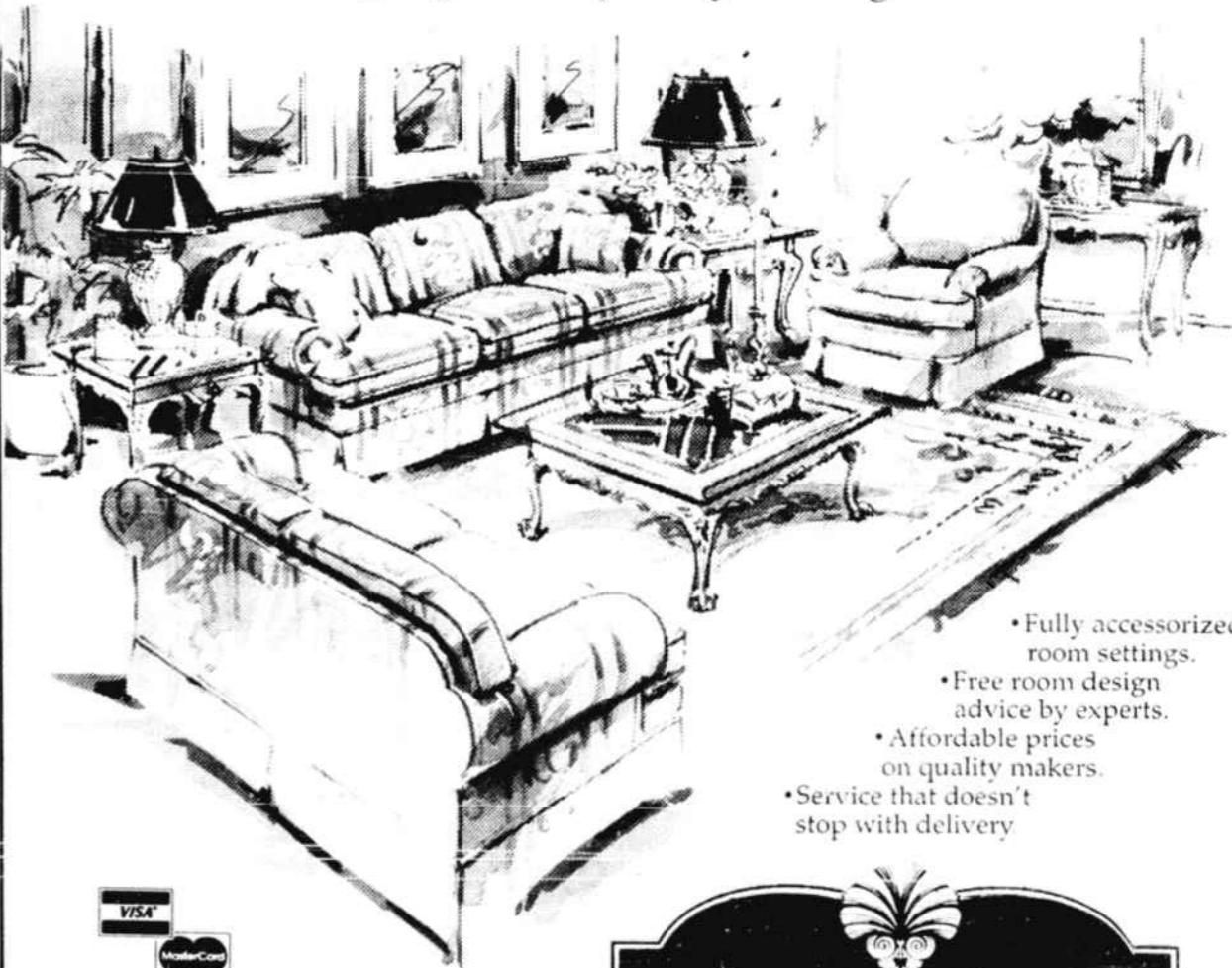
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