

Friend Ships Unlimited

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Dear Friends:

Warm greetings. This month, instead of reporting on all that is being accomplished with your support and encouragement here at Friend Ships, we would like to talk about the tremendous part you play in the missions being fulfilled. The scripture tells us that the body of Christ, like the physical body, is made up of many parts that work together to form the whole. Nowhere is that more true than here at Friend Ships.

Our full time volunteer crew serves as the hands on the working portion of the mission, to carry out the physical labor of the projects, whether it is providing humanitarian aid, food support, hosting seminars, medical or disaster relief services or assisting another ministry. This part of the team is critical and nothing could be accomplished without this crew being willing to lay down their lives to serve the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength. They tithe 100% of their income by working for the Lord full time without pay, time that would otherwise be spent in earning a living. Like the man who has spent 23 years of his life collecting and distributing 60 million pounds of food to people in need. Or the woman who heard us speak briefly on a Christian television show 21 years ago, joined us with a plan to serve one year and has been here ever since as a faithful armor bearer and a trusted friend. Or the unlimited licensed sea captain who together with his wife put aside all of their personal plans and dreams to guide these ships around the world and fulfill many facets of the operation.

It isn't just the current crew we need to appreciate. We also need to consider the thousands of men and women who have joined us in the past, put their shoulder to the grindstone and laid a foundation for what was to come.

But the crew is only one part of the body that works to accomplish Friend Ships' missions. There are those of you who pray. This organization runs on prayer—honestly it does. Without the divine hand of God in everything we do, there is no possible way that we could accomplish its missions. Your prayers are perfume that goes to heaven and brings grace, peace, mercy, ideas, protection, provision, opportunity and the sweet fruit of changed lives and praises given to God. Like the orphans in Nicaragua who prayed and fasted one day a week on our behalf when they heard we were bringing supplies to help their country. One hundred and twenty of the poorest children living in dorms with dirt floors, no windows and no doors, sleeping on wooden crates and shooing flies away from their food cooked on a cement slab. Some might call them just ragamuffins, but these little orphans gave up their food once a week and prayed that we might have it easy when we arrived in Nicaragua. And so we did. In turn, we consigned the entire shipload, thousands of tons of goods to the orphanage, for them to dispense as they saw fit. Included in the load was nearly \$3,000,000 dollars worth of PeachTree and Anderson windows and doors, tons of other building supplies and a massive amount of food. These supposed ragamuffins became some of the richest people in the country during the week that we visited. When Nicaraguan government officials came to see us aboard ship, they told us how the country was bankrupt and asked if we would help them with food they could use in lieu of payroll for their highway and street workers who were on strike. We explained that legally the entire shipload of goods belonged to the orphans at Casa Bernabe. But we said, "These children love God and have a great heart. If you ask them, we think that they would gladly help you out of your predicament." What a sight as the government delegation went before the people of the orphanage, pleading their case for food to use as payroll. Look how God, beyond our feeblest imaginations, can take the low and make them high with faith and prayers.

What about those of you who prayed fervently for our missions to Israel? Your prayers not only opened the gates of brass and iron but blew the gates off the hinges! And when a crewmember almost died of malaria as he returned from a mission to Haiti, you prayed and in one weekend, God miraculously and completely brought him back to health! How could we carry on without the support of our prayer warriors?

Then there are those who give finances or goods. Think about it. How long would we be able to function if we couldn't pay our power bills, buy fuel for the ships, repair our equipment, put gas in our trucks or have a telephone to communicate with the world? Not for very long, that's certain. There is nothing that seems to compare with the pressure of not having money to pay bills and they can be big with a large-scale operation like we have at Friend Ships. Our financial donors are God's answer to our prayers and such a tremendously important part of this work. As you listen

to the Lord and respond by sending us funds that you have worked so hard to earn, we realize that you could choose to do whatever you like with your finances. Yet you choose to advance the Kingdom of God, invest in lost souls and meet the needs of the child who is hungry, the elderly lady without a blanket or the man in need of medicine.

Like the family who has given us three wonderful ships, paid for ship repair and dry-docking, filled our tanks with fuel and provided so many other things on so many occasions. Or the couple who bought the ship's fuel for a mission to Central America with the savings they had put away to buy a home. Within weeks the Lord more than made up for the money they spent on the mission by making available to them a beautiful home on the water with elevators and docks, much larger than what they had been looking at and at an incredibly huge savings! How about the men and women who for years have each month faithfully mailed in a check to support our operations? Or those who responded to our call to purchase home base, Port Mercy, and made it possible for us to do so. How could we carry on without our financial donors? You are an answer to prayer.

Then, of course, what would we fill our ships with or cook in our kitchens, without the tremendous product donations that flow in continually? Like the small grocery store in Los Angeles that provides meat, cheese, bread, fruits and vegetables to feed thousands of crew members, disaster victims, medical patients and families in need and has done so for the past 20 years. The company who delivers semi loads of heavy duty vinyl roofing that has protected hundreds of thousands of people and homes after wars and natural disasters in the US, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The sportswear company that for more than 20 years has provided thousands of beautiful new high quality designer t-shirts and sweatshirts each year, without charge of any kind for people in need and for the crew. How could we carry out our programs without this help?

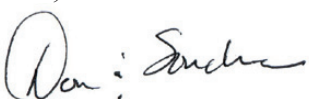
Another vital part of the team is those who come to serve with us on loan from God on special assignments and others who are short term as individuals or groups—here at Port Mercy or on a mission. What would we do without the doctors, nurses and dentists who come to lovingly treat patients and tell them about Jesus? Patients who perhaps have not ever been able to be seen by a medical provider. Or the ship's officers that fly in to take the ship across the seas. The welder who drives hundreds of miles to use his skill to accomplish a special job for us. The church teams who rush into a disaster site to help an elderly man and woman save their home. What about the woman who puts aside all of her own priorities to help us with housekeeping at Port Mercy while most of the crew are away on a mission? Or the pilot who manages and cares for the helicopter as a mother hen looks over her chicks, and his friends who complete the annual maintenance, take care of the mechanics and keep the helicopter meticulous and operating with perfection, all at no charge. What about the remarkable doctors and dentists who treat our crew regularly without a single cost? There are so many more indispensable and amazing people, but we just don't have the space to talk about them in this letter! These acts are true love. What on earth would we do without you?

And, finally, there are those of you who are our very special friends and family, who give each of us, who are here full time, the love, encouragement, counsel, ideas and support that we need to carry on. Like the families in Texas who remember each crewmember's birthday and send gifts and well wishes. The friends who attend each ship's departure and arrival back home, bringing their love, encouragement and ice cream to celebrate and say, "You are appreciated!" There are no words to describe how indispensable our friends and family are to our joy, our strength and our ability to continue.

As it says in 1 Corinthians, the service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

This scripture seems to perfectly describe each branch of the Friend Ships team, a team that is like the body, each part dependant on each other. Together, we are this body and we want to express to you how vital, indispensable and precious you are to us and to the work of the Lord here at Friend Ships. We truly could not do it without you. Please accept our deepest gratitude and may God continue to provide for you and reward you for remembering those in need.

Love,



Don & Sondra Tipton
Directors—Friend Ships