

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL JUNE 3, 10:00 am ET**



**Nursing Students from Baylor University, Belmont Abbey College and Texas Christian University Embark on Mission-Driven Internships with Mercy Ships this Summer**

*Pilot program offers transformative experience aboard the Africa Mercy® in Madagascar through service, faith, and global healthcare*

[Link to Images](#)

**Lindale, TX (June 3, 2025)** — Mercy Ships, a global nonprofit organization that delivers healthcare to communities in medical deserts by operating fully volunteer staffed hospital ships that provide free, life-changing surgeries and medical care, today announced the inaugural cohort of its mission-driven internship program, *The Mercyship*. This two-week international service-learning experience for nursing students will take place aboard the hospital ship *Africa Mercy* in Madagascar this Summer. Five exceptional students from Baylor University, Belmont Abbey College and Texas Christian University (TCU) have been selected to participate in the immersive opportunity combining clinical shadowing, spiritual reflection, and cultural exchange.

The program provides junior and senior nursing students a firsthand look at the power of healing through service by immersing them in Mercy Ships' unique model of hospital care. Students will shadow medical professionals in key areas such as rehabilitation, outpatient services, and patient recovery at the Hope Center, a hospitality facility supporting patients as they heal. They will also gain exposure to Mercy Ships' surgical specialties, which include maxillofacial, reconstructive plastics, pediatric orthopedics, ophthalmic surgeries, and women's health. These life-changing procedures restore mobility, vision, and dignity, and of course save lives, for patients in medical deserts who would otherwise go untreated.

"We created *The Mercyship* to give student nurses a deeper understanding of global health equity and to inspire them with what it means to provide care with compassion," said Merryll Mackenzie, Hospital Director, Africa Mercy Madagascar for Mercy Ships. "By integrating faith, clinical learning, and cultural humility, this program nurtures both skill and spirit."

In addition to the clinical experience, students will participate in a Vision Trip, meeting patients and volunteers from around the world and exploring the holistic model of care that defines the Mercy Ships mission.

Like all Mercy Ships volunteers, participating students are responsible for raising funds to cover their travel and participation costs. To support their efforts, Mercy Ships has partnered with GoFundMe to provide personalized fundraising pages, toolkits, and coaching. Launching June 3, each student's fundraiser page will be featured on a campaign hub showcasing their journey and goals.

<https://www.gofundme.com/c/mercyships-summer2025>

“GoFundMe’s mission is to help people help each other, and that includes fueling the important work of nonprofits,” said Margaret L. Richardson, chief marketing and corporate affairs officer at GoFundMe. “For more than 15 years, people have turned to GoFundMe to support the organizations they believe in. Our partnership with Mercy Ships and these inspiring students is a powerful example of how GoFundMe continues to be a trusted platform—for individuals and nonprofits alike—to drive life-changing impact around the world.”

## MEET THE STUDENTS

**Caroline Gutierrez, Belmont Abbey College:** Caroline is a rising senior nursing student who is passionate about combining healthcare and service to create lasting impact. Born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and raised outside Charlotte, Caroline’s personal journey, marked by perseverance through ADHD, recovery from early substance abuse, and a deepening Catholic faith, has shaped her into a compassionate caregiver and emerging healthcare leader. Five years sober and committed to service, Caroline serves as a Resident Assistant on her campus and plans to pursue a career in labor and delivery nursing. Caroline’s story reflects resilience, purpose, and a belief in the power of community and faith to heal and transform lives. Please find Caroline’s GoFundMe page [here](#).

**Emma Harris, Belmont Abbey College:** Emma is a rising senior nursing student whose faith and family ties have shaped her lifelong desire to serve. Raised in Charlotte, North Carolina, Emma was homeschooled alongside her siblings and grew up in a close-knit Christian community. Her path to nursing began at a young age when her cousin was diagnosed with leukemia. With her family closely involved in supporting her cousin during treatment, Emma often joined her mom at the hospital—witnessing nurses who not only provided clinical care but also offered prayer and presence beyond their shifts. Later, Emma saw that same spirit of compassion in the surgeon who treated her brother who was born prematurely with a club foot, an orthopedic specialist who spent years volunteering with Mercy Ships. Emma hopes to become a NICU nurse, helping not just infants but their families feel cared for and supported in critical moments. She sees her future in nursing as a calling: a chance to share the love of Christ through every act of care. Please find Emma’s GoFundMe page [here](#).

**Erik Dike, Belmont Abbey College:** Eric is a rising senior nursing student known for his deep compassion, faith, and commitment to service. Originally studying mechanical engineering, Eric felt called to nursing after realizing his true passion was caring for others. A pivotal personality test and a season of prayer helped confirm that calling. Today, he sees nursing as not just a career, but a purpose-driven path to serve people in their most vulnerable moments. Born and raised in Wake Forest, NC, Eric’s faith has been a guiding force in his life, helping him navigate personal struggles in high school and ultimately leading him back to the church and into nursing. As the youngest of three siblings, Eric values close family ties, and his experience caring for others started young. He credits his emergency room nurse cousin and his clinical instructors for inspiring him to explore global service opportunities like Mercy Ships. Please find Erik’s GoFundMe page [here](#).

**Tom Strandwitz, Texas Christian University:** Tom is a recent graduate of the Harris College of Nursing & Health Sciences at Texas Christian University, driven by a passion for equitable healthcare and a hands-on approach to service. Born and raised in Austin, Texas, he grew up attending First United Methodist Church, where early mission trips to underserved communities in Houston, San Antonio, and Appalachia sparked his lifelong commitment to serving others. A former high school athletic trainer with a love for sports and science, Tom felt called to nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic—seeing it as the most direct, tangible way to make a difference. At TCU, he has deepened his focus on global health and public health justice, with particular interest in infectious diseases like TB and HIV that remain prevalent despite being preventable and treatable. Looking ahead, he hopes to pursue a degree in epidemiology and work in disease surveillance and community health planning. Please find Tom’s GoFundMe page [here](#).

**Valerie Moon, Baylor University:** Valerie Moon is a senior in the Louise Herrington School of Nursing whose life story is a testament to resilience, faith, and compassion. Raised in the rural town of Midlothian, Texas, she grew up in a blended family of seven siblings and experienced a tumultuous childhood marked by instability, separation, and a long period of difficult family circumstances. But through it all, Valerie

found strength in her church community, in service to others, and in her growing relationship with Christ. She first discovered her love for caregiving as a pre-teen volunteering at a children's hospital, where she read to young patients recovering from orthopedic surgeries. Later, she worked at a local shelter, helped at food pantries, and eventually took a job as a caregiver at a nursing home, where she witnessed firsthand the heartbreaking gaps in patient care. That experience solidified her desire to become a nurse, one committed to compassion, accountability, and justice in healthcare. She plans to pursue a career in critical care nursing and dreams of working in the ICU, where she can support patients and families through their most vulnerable moments. Please find Valerie's GoFundMe page [here](#).

The Mercyship's program reflects the organizations' long-term vision to cultivate the next generation of faith-inspired healthcare leaders, equipping them to integrate service, compassion, and cultural understanding into their future careers.

### **About Mercy Ships**

Mercy Ships operates hospital ships that deliver free surgeries and healthcare services to those with little access to safe medical care. An international faith-based organization, Mercy Ships has focused entirely on partnering with African nations for the past three decades. Working with in-country partners, Mercy Ships also provides training to local healthcare professionals and supports the construction of in-country medical infrastructure to leave a lasting impact. Each year, more than 2,500 volunteers from over 60 countries serve on board the world's two largest non-governmental hospital ships, the Africa Mercy and the Global Mercy. Professionals such as surgeons, dentists, nurses, health trainers, cooks, and engineers dedicate their time and skills to accelerate access to safe surgical and anesthetic care. Mercy Ships was founded in 1978 and has offices in 16 countries as well as an Africa Service Center in Dakar, Senegal. For more information, visit [mercyships.org](http://mercyships.org) and follow @MercyShips on social media.

### **About GoFundMe**

GoFundMe is a community-powered fundraising platform dedicated to helping people help each other. Founded in 2010, GoFundMe combines storytelling and fundraising to make it easy for people and nonprofits to share their stories, connect with supporters, and reach their fundraising goals. GoFundMe empowers individuals and organizations to make a meaningful difference for the causes and communities that matter most to them. GoFundMe has enabled more than \$40 billion of help for communities across the globe.

For media inquiries or to schedule interviews with participating students or Mercy Ships leadership, contact:

### **Mercy Ships**

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