



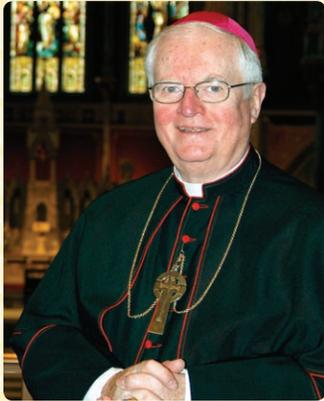
# Catholic Maritime News

SPRING 2015

VOLUME 78

## The Easter Season

In early March I attended the North American and Caribbean Regional Meeting of the Apostleship of the Sea. This meeting was beautifully



coordinated by Karen Parsons who was appointed by Rome as the Regional Coordinator. These were stressful days for Karen because during these days her mother was very seriously ill. At the time of writing Karen's mother has died. The family was by her side. May she rest in peace. The membership of AOS extends to Karen and her family every grace and blessing.

The meeting was held at the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center. It was a perfect location for the event. Each day we shared morning and evening prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist.

We began the conference with a special Lenten meditation which was movingly presented by Karen. It was a spiritual monologue of Mary and the Crucifixion.

In the other presentations there was an inter play between the spirituality of the Chaplain and the spirituality of the Seafarer. They are not mutually exclusive. There is a national dynamic which enriches the life of both parties.

The presentation on building Intercultural competence was fascinating. The Seafarers come from a multitude of differing countries and backgrounds. Their needs and expectations differ widely from those of the Chaplains. The needs of one become the challenges for the other. This presentation greatly enriched how Chaplains should approach their ministry in serving the needs of the Seafarer. It is not a question of what you do but rather when and how you perform the task at hand.

*Continued on page 2 >*

## Message from the Assistant Director

### SUBCOMMITTEE ON PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND TRAVELERS (PCMRT)



Greetings my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. My name is Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ; a member of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus. I have been appointed the new Assistant Director of the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church for the Subcommittee on Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, and Travelers at the United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops. Though new to this position, I am aware of the dedicated national and local Apostleship of the Sea, (AOS) team. Some of you know me as the Program Coordinator and I am very excited to continue working with you as we share a common vision and commitment to develop as well as sustain various programs for the pastoral care of migrants and itinerant people.

I would like to commend the valuable services offered by AOS network of chaplains and volunteers. Your spirit of service and hard work has ensured that the ministries to the seafarers continue to grow for many years now. By visiting and ministering to seafarers on ships, at hospitals as well as those stranded at foreign ports, you have manifested true sense of care and support for their welfare. To those other volunteers who provided spiritual and material support to seafarers and their families, I thank you sincerely. As I assume this new position, I would like to assure you that my goal is to continue these valuable service of providing pastoral care to people of the sea and to pray for the church's continued commitment to this important ministry.

The life and work of the seafarers is indeed difficult and dangerous. Many have risked their lives venturing through the sea to provide for their families. I ask that we continue to pray and ask Our Lady, Star of the Sea to guide, enlighten and intercede for us as we developed structures which encourage and support the Church's response to the pastoral needs of migrants and itinerant people.

As PCMRT plans to continue expanding its outreach, it looks forward to the active participation of all those who are called to witness in the maritime industry. PCMRT welcomes new ideas; it encourages commitment and indispensable services for the welfare of the seafarers and to build a strong foundation for the future.

*Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ  
Assistant Director, Cultural Diversity in the Church*

**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church  
Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees & Travelers / Apostleship of the Sea National Office**

3211 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017 ■ E-mail: [aos@usccb.org](mailto:aos@usccb.org) ■ [www.usccb.org/aos](http://www.usccb.org/aos)



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Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees & Travelers

**Bishop Promoter:** Most Reverend J. Kevin Boland  
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Savannah, GA

**AOS National Director Contact:** Sr. Joanna Okereke  
3211 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017  
Phone: (202) 541-3359 ■ Fax: (202) 541-5417  
E-mail: jokereke@usc.cb.org

[www.usccb.org/aos](http://www.usccb.org/aos)

AOS National Office web address has been changed. **If you have linked to us previously using the old [www.aos-usa.org](http://www.aos-usa.org) address, please remember to change your link to [www.usccb.org/aos](http://www.usccb.org/aos)**

We encourage you to visit our website which has user friendly navigation tools. Check out our interactive map with a list of AOS chaplains and contacts, know about news and events and other relevant information. If you want to know about Mass schedules in parishes around the country, there is even a link to [MassTimes.org](http://MassTimes.org).

## Contact Catholic Maritime News

We welcome your comments, feedback and suggestions.  
Tell us what you think by sending an email to [aos@usc.cb.org](mailto:aos@usc.cb.org).

**DISCLAIMER** Statements and opinions expressed in articles and other materials herein are the views of individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Apostleship of the Sea National Office.

**Apostleship of the Sea of the United States of America (AOSUSA)** is a professional membership association of chaplains/associates, cruise ship priests, mariners, student mariners and affiliate members.

For AOSUSA membership enquiries:

Doreen Badeaux

1500 Jefferson Drive, Port Arthur, TX 77642

Tel. (409) 985-4545 ■ Fax (409) 985-5945

E-mail: [aosusa@sbcglobal.net](mailto:aosusa@sbcglobal.net) ■ [www.aos-usa.org](http://www.aos-usa.org)

## The Easter Season

*Continued from page 1.*

We were blessed with the presence of Fr. Bruno Ciceri. Fr. Bruno represents Rome and serves on the Congregation that oversees the Ministry of the Apostolate of the Sea on a world-wide basis. He updated us on the latest developments on the AOS on a world-wide basis. He presented us with the Final Document of the 7<sup>th</sup> World Congress for the Pastoral Care of Migrants. Written on the basis of the proceedings of the Congress (conferences, round tables and workshop reports), and enriched by the suggestions and observations made by many of you recently, the Document is the result of hard work and mutual collaboration of all of the participants of the Event.

The document is divided into three sections. The first is a brief summary of what occurred during the Congress, followed by a second section that offers a series of 16 distinct conclusions. The final section of the Document, written in light of these conclusions, is a series of recommendations to which the almost 300 participants have wished to declare their commitment to put into action in the upcoming years of their ministry.

He discussed the changing landscape under the proposed restructuring by Pope Francis. He emphasized the ongoing value of this ministry and that the Church must be present to the Seafarer. His is the loneliest of occupations and it can be an occupation that is greatly abused and taken for granted. The commerce of the sea is absolutely essential for the needs of the world family of nations. It is estimated that 95% of what we use or eat at some time or another was on a sea voyage.

The conference concluded with a most useful interaction panel discussion between Port/Civil/Church authorities. Since 9/11 the landscape has changed dramatically. Access to ports and ships is highly restrictive. The amount of time seafarers are actually in port is greatly diminished as a result of technology advances in loading and unloading ships. All of these factors play their part in the ongoing demands of being a Port Chaplain. In-place procedures must never be so stringent that the Chaplain cannot do his ministry and correspondingly so that the Seafarer does not have access to the Chaplain.

Vespers were prayed, stories were shared, friendships renewed and the ministry to the Seafarer was enriched.

Our Lady, Star of the Sea,  
Pray for us.

+ J. Kevin Boland

Bishop J. Kevin Boland  
Bishop Promoter - AOS

# Texas Catholic Herald News

## Catholicism and cargo ships: Galveston port chaplain ministers to ocean-bound

By James Ramos

GALVESTON — In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls St. Peter out of his fishing boat and onto the water in faith. For Karen Parsons, OFS, however, her vocation called her to step onto a boat. A massive cargo ship, that is.

But Parsons, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Port Chaplain for Galveston and Texas City, almost didn't climb aboard.

Gazing at a steep gangway ladder in the Port of Detroit, Parsons froze in fear. On one side of the gangway, the Detroit River lapped up against the dock. On the other side, some 40 feet up the ladder, curious sailors peered down from the ship at her. And inside, Parson's hesitancy and doubt grew.

"I couldn't do it," Parsons recalled. "I was scared to death of water and scared to death of heights," which happen to be two things port chaplains encounter daily. But with encouragement from the chaplain who trained her, she silently prayed her way up the gangway and never looked back.

Nearly 30 years later, Parsons helms the nonprofit, multi-denominational Galveston Seafarers Center (221 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Galveston) and serves the ports of Galveston and Texas City. A port chaplain and part of the Apostleship of the Sea, Parsons is supported by the Diocesan Services Fund as an outreach of the Archdiocese.

One of four Archdiocesan port chaplains, Parsons offers "pastoral care to the men and women who come in on ships into the port (of Galveston), regardless of race, religion, nationality, or political beliefs."

"We take care of everybody," Parsons said. "But if there are Catholics aboard, and there usually are, we make sure they have what they need for their faith growth, including Sacraments."

The Center offers seafarers a place of refuge from life at sea.

Located just off The Strand in Galveston and blocks away from the port docks, the center sports ping pong and pool tables for recreation, couches for relaxing and free wireless internet and laptops to contact family and friends back home.

Technology advancements have changed how sailors keep in touch with loved ones, said Parsons. Writing letters, which take weeks to deliver halfway across the globe, has been replaced with video calling in real time.

"The sailors light up when they're able to see their kids and wives again."

In addition to a small supply of convenience store items, the Center houses a Chapel where the Mass is offered each Sunday. Inside a square room filled with chairs, next to a box overflowing with written petitions, a Tabernacle provides a Eucharistic presence at the Center.

"The (sailors) love it. They'll come in and just sit in the quiet," said Parsons.



*Karen Parsons, OFS, serves as the Archdiocesan Port Chaplain for ports of Galveston and Texas City with the Apostleship of the Sea at the Galveston Seafarers Center. The group aims to serve the needs of men and women who live and work on the waters.*

*(Photo by James Ramos)*

*Continued on page 4 >*

## Announcement!

Dear Catholic Maritime News Readers:

Welcome to the spring issue of the Catholic Maritime newsletter. We hope you will enjoy the information contained in this issue.

We are pleased to announce that the Catholic Maritime newsletter will now be mailed electronically via e-mail beginning from the summer issue and also available online <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/pastoral-care-of-migrants-refugees-and-travelers/apostleship-of-the-sea/catholic-maritime-news.cfm> USCCB website. If you wish to receive the newsletter electronically please send us your name, and an email address. You may send your email address to Margaret Marzec at: [mmarzec@usccb.org](mailto:mmarzec@usccb.org). You may contact us by writing to USCCB/SCDC/PCMRT, 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017. If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter please notify us.

To each of you, our dear and beloved friends and supporters, we ask that you allow us to continue to reach you, and keep you informed, through a new electronic Catholic Maritime newsletter. We hope you will enjoy this new way to keep you informed of the exciting Maritime news.

Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ

Assistant Director, Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church

# Catholicism and cargo ships

Continued from page 3.

## CALLED TO MINISTRY

From an early age, Parsons knew she wanted to serve the Church. She grew up in Catholic schools, being taught by Franciscans.

A small ad in her church bulletin caught her eye. Parishoners were invited to learn more about a ministry on the Detroit docks. The priest, who was passionate about taking care of those at sea, knew he could not successfully balance operating a parish, a soup kitchen and minister to sailors all at the same time. This was where the lay people could effectively evangelize outside of the pews, the priest said to Parsons. This humility inspired Parsons.

Then after six weeks of ministry training classes, Parsons found her calling aboard the ships in Detroit.

*"I knew the people I was to serve in my life were going to be on big, scary pieces of metal that I had to climb to get to,"* Parsons said.

*"And somehow, God would give me the courage to do that every single day. And still, there are ladders that I see that I think, 'Lord, you have to push me up this one.' Because when I think I got it, there's one that comes in that's rickety, or higher, hanging over the water more... I look up there and I see their faces looking at me, waiting for me. And if I walk away, what does that tell them? So I just push myself up the ladder."*

Since the rivers and seaway near Michigan freeze during the wintertime, Parsons eventually found that her part-time ministry needed to become year-round.

When a full-time chaplaincy position opened up here in the Archdiocese, Parsons submitted her application. Father Rivers Patout, who was establishing the Houston International Seafarers Center at the time, called her down from Detroit and pushed her case. She credits Father Patout for his legacy of seafaring ministry and for teaching her many skills as a chaplain and as a person. Parsons also finds continued support in Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza and Daniel Cardinal DiNardo.

This network of port chaplains is the strength of the Apostleship of the Sea, said Parsons.

*"This is an ecumenical ministry. We work with a lot of different denominations in this ministry, including other clergy and we meet together occasionally. If a ship passes through Galveston, if they have a ship that has loaded there (in Houston), but needs to stop in Galveston, they let me know."*

This relationship has global strength as well, said Parsons. If a ship has to leave Galveston, and she can't completely resolve a sailor's issue, Parsons will notify the Seafarers Center at the ship's next port of call and let them know of the issue so they're prepared to help upon arrival.

Parsons' nearly 30 years of ministering on the docks does not go unnoticed by sailors or the Vatican, either.

Parsons was awarded the US Coast Guard's Public Service Commendation, then later was recognized by Rome and appointed regional coordinator for the Apostleship of the Sea for North America and the Caribbean Sea by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. She serves as the liaison for the Vatican and Sea Chaplains and is just one of two women on the council.

## REAL LIFE AT SEA, ON LAND

Sea chaplains navigate many realities, both physical and emotional, while ministering to sailors.

*"Any day is different. I can never say, 'A day will be like this,' because I won't find out until I get out there, meet them and find whose on the ships, and what they need,"* Parsons said. *"You have to pray before you go."*

*"If someone gets hurt on the ship, we become their family and advocate in the hospital,"* Parsons said. *"If someone gets in trouble, we're their jail visitor. It's all connected; life on board a ship is real life. Everything continues to happen in their families back home. A father will die or a child is born. There is all this stuff they have to deal with when they're thousands of miles away from home."*

When Typhoon Haiyan decimated the Philippines, which is home to many Filipino seafarers, Parsons helped sailors reconnect with family, pray for victims, arrange for deliverable supplies and coordinate financial aid.

Her ministry as a port chaplain extends to the men and women involved with work at the port, as well. From security officials to dock workers, all are affected by the rough port life.

Last Christmas, a dock worker fell to his death, prompting Parsons to immediately minister to other workers who knew the victim, and those who were near the tragic accident.

*"Eventually I'd stop over occasionally, checking on them and just listening to their stories,"* Parsons said. *"We open ourselves up to the whole port. It's just an amazing thing."*

According to Parsons, her own family grew up at the Center. Her children would do their homework on the tables, much to the curiosity of the sailors around them.

*"Seafarers miss their families so much,"* said Parsons. Her children were the same ages as the sailors' children, at the time. *"The seafarers would ask, 'What are you learning? Do you like it? Do you need help?', even offering their own tips and tricks on certain subjects like math."*

Parsons said she appreciated this because the seafarers taught her children to play ping pong and chess, eventually giving them a well-rounded view of the world.

## INSPIRED BY ST. PAUL

Inspired by St. Paul's letters to the faithful, Parsons' ministry extends beyond her work on the docks.

*"(St. Paul's) idea of keeping in contact with the Church through his letters, I took from day one,"* Parsons said. If there was ever a seafarer who was so vulnerable, shared deeply personal needs, she made sure to get an email or mailing address to keep in touch. Before Hurricane Ike, she had collected over 20,000 letters from sailors. Now, hundreds of uncounted but read-and-responded-to letters fill a large filing cabinet.

In addition to her continual training and Vatican appointed role, Parsons attends international conferences to gain skills and education from other chaplains at other ports. These travels not only help her improve her work as a chaplain, but give her the opportunity to draw another picture of a sailor's life at sea: the family back home.

From Poland and Russia to the Philippines, this ministry of writing and conversation has allowed her to meet the wives, children and communities of the sailors she's helped at the Center in Galveston.

## SURVIVING IKE

When Hurricane Ike made landfall in 2008, it destroyed Galveston Island. The storm brought in a 7 - 12 foot surge of water into the Center, taking Parsons' letters, supplies, and even the roof with it. The Center remained closed for three years, pushing Parsons to work out of her own car for a period of time while the Center was repaired. Eventually, the center reopened to serve the men and women at sea once again.

But even after surviving Ike, the Galveston Seafarers Center continues to need a community of support.

"We can always use monetary donations to keep the doors open," said Parsons. The Center holds an annual gala and auction event to support operations beyond the DSF funds. In addition to full-size toiletries (shampoos, shaving creams, razors, etc.), The Center also accepts gently used clothing donations to stock a free clothing store offered to seafarers. Desired clothing includes jeans, shirts, work shirts, jackets, all in small to large sizes.

"What a blessing this (ministry) has been for my family and for me," said Parsons. "And being able to work in the church? God knew where he needed me, and I was open to that call." Her work also inspired her to join the Third Order of St. Francis as a Secular Franciscan.



Karen Parsons (Photo by James Ramos)

In addition to speaking to schools and groups, these years of ministry have inspired Parsons to gather her experiences into book form. Recently, she published 'Diary of a Port Chaplain: My Journey of Faith with Seafarers,' detailing her personal story as a port chaplain ministering to those at sea.

To purchase the book or for more information about the nonprofit Galveston Seafarers Center, call 409-762-0026 or visit [www.galvestonseafarerscenter.org](http://www.galvestonseafarerscenter.org).

Galveston Seafarers Center

Phone: 409-762-0026

Address: 221 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Galveston, Texas 77550

*Catholicism and cargo ships: Galveston port chaplain ministers to ocean-bound, © 2015 Texas Catholic Herald, All rights reserved. Used with permission.*  
<http://www.archgh.org/default.asp?id=500&hid=2419>

## Association of Seafarers Wives Maasin City, Southern Leyte Philippines

by Violette Feefy



A small group of Seafarer's wives in Maasin City, Southern Layte Philippines, attend a Weekly Prayer Meeting held each Friday. They pray about all aspects of life, including the challenges and blessings.

It started with the Holy Rosary, then Bible sharing, the love offering, thanksgiving and sharing under the care and guidance of the chaplain Rev. Father Amiel Campilan Vallinas.

Different agendas and programs have been developed and are practiced during the year, including the giving of cash donations and sharing of goods to the needy, and if calamities come, help and comfort for the victims by the seafarer's wives. In the time of an OFW's (Overseas Filipino Worker's) family loss, the group visits the family to show love and sympathy. Through this group prayer meeting, much help and relief is given.

While appreciating all the material blessings received as a seafarer's wife, still the seafarer's wives earnestly desire to have him home every day and every night. When he is on board, the wife feels miserable. Life is never the same when he is gone. It is really hard adjusting to a time of being a solo parent. It is difficult. Very difficult indeed!

There are many related personal stories, such as the feeling of agony of being a seafarer's wife, living in a manner of waiting. Waiting for one bland day to end, only to look forward to a bland day to come. Some seaman give only allowances, there are misunderstanding with the in-laws and most of all are the incredible and horrible stories heard regarding third parties.

Despite one's sometimes wanting to give up, we all know that they are having a hard time out there too. With this understanding, our mission in this group is to continuously pray for them, for their safety, for their love. We will pray for our lives now and pray for our future. Because each one of us wants to grow old with him, wants to serve him more, wants to laugh with him again, and just wants to be with him in this journey called life.

Seafarer's wives dream of the days of togetherness again, dreaming of the time that both of us will be happy and enjoying each other's company, enjoying the bliss of life. Wives dream of life to be together, forever.

## AOS Philippines Visit by Sr. Myrna Tordillo, mscs



I had a wonderful opportunity to visit two AOS chaplaincies – one in Maasin City, Leyte, the other in Davao City, and a meeting with the AOS National Director of the Philippines, Father Ulysses Desales in Cebu City last December, on the occasion of my home visit in Leyte, Philippines.

December could be a rather busy month for many especially in anticipation of Christmas and this is especially true in the Philippines, which as observers would point out, has one of the longest Christmas celebrations. In the secular sphere, as early as September, it is not unusual to see Christmas displays pop up in shopping malls and hear Christmas songs in the airwaves. In the religious sphere, because the country's population is predominantly Christian and *"eighty one percent are Catholic"* (Pew Research Center, 2013), faith plays an integral part in day to day Christian life. *"Filipinos celebrate the Roman Catholic Liturgical events with their own uniquely religious practices and devotions such as the Simbang Gabi during Advent, Pabasa during Lent and Salubong during Easter."* (Bamboo Bridge Across the Pacific, 2004).

So, there was some hesitancy on my part to contact the AOS chaplains and make arrangements months prior to the Philippines visit. But I was pleasantly surprised because the chaplains responded positively and were looking forward to the exchange of ideas and information, sharing best practices and meeting them and the seafarers' families.

My first trip was to AOS Maasin, City. Fr. Amiel Vallinas is AOS chaplain in that quaint city that sits on the western coast of the Province of Southern Leyte. He briefed me on AOS programs for seafarers' families and took me to one of the seafarer's home where the seafarers' family members gathered. We had a lively conversation and said some prayers and partook of the delicious food prepared. Most of the family members mentioned that the seafarer husband, or son or brother was onboard and could not be with the family during the Christmas season.

The trip to AOS Davao occurred during the Advent season and it was a privilege for me to attend some of the Simbang Gabi Novena Masses in that area. Davao City is approximately 588 miles southeast of Manila and is located in Southeastern Mindanao. Simbang Gabi (simba means worship and gabi means night) is a series of nine consecutive Masses that starts on December 16 and culminates on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

Simbang Gabi is also referred to in the Philippines as Misa de Aguinaldo or Mass at dawn. *"Philippines Church historian Fr. Rex Andrew Alarcon defines the Misa de Aguinaldo as 'a privileged votive mass, i.e., a mass that does not correspond to the liturgical calendar but has a special intention. He distinguishes it from other masses as having 'a festive mood, [wherein] the Gloria is sung'. Being celebrated 'at dawn before daybreak', it is almost always 'attended by a large number of people, Alarcon explained"* (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines News, December 2014).

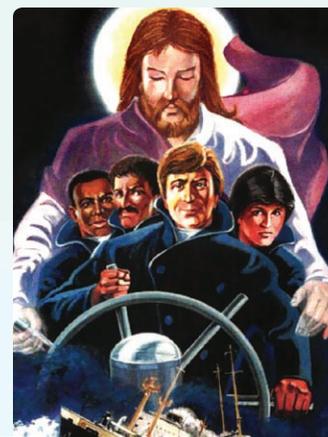
Indeed the Cathedral of San Pedro in Davao City was packed with thousands of people both young and old when I attended Simbang Gabi Masses at 4:30 am. It was truly a blessing to worship with others in preparation for the birth of Jesus.

Father Arnold Balaguinto, AOS chaplain in Davao City was just as equally hospitable. The meeting with the seafarers' family members was very informative and educational. It was held in conjunction with a meeting organized by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), Department of Labor and Employment, headed by Eduardo Bellido, officer in charge for OWWA Region XI.

I am thankful to Fr. Desales, Fr. Vallinas and Fr. Balaguinto for their hospitality and for taking time from their busy schedules, and I am also very grateful to the families of seafarers I met. It was a blessing to have shared and learned from our AOS experiences.

### Mariner's Prayer

Our Lady, Star of the Sea, Mother of God and our Mother, you know all the dangers of soul and body that threaten mariners. Protect your sons and daughters who work and travel on the waters of the world, and protect also their families that await their return. Star of the Sea, Mother of the Church, give light and strength to those chaplains and lay ministers who bring the love of your Divine Son among mariners. Fill their hearts with a supernatural and life-giving zeal for the apostolate. Star of the Sea, light shining in the darkness, be a guide to those who sail amid the storms and dangers of life. Enlighten the hearts of ardent disciples and bring us all to the safety of heaven's port. **Amen**





**Mary Star of the Sea Seafarers  
Family Association  
(MaSSSFA DAVAO INC.)  
Davao City, Davao del Sur, Philippines**

Is a Catholic-based self-sustaining non-profit organization in Davao City under the umbrella of the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS), whose members are seafarer's wives and their families. Through the intercession of Mary, Star of the Sea, MaSSSFA is committed to the Development of community of seafarers' families.

MaSSSFA is an extended arm of Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) and assists in protecting the interest as well as promote the welfare of the Filipino seafarers and their families. In addition, MaSSSFA assists the AOS Center in responding to the needs of the seafarers and families. To God be the glory!



**Pontificium Consilium  
De Spirituali Migrantium  
Atque Itinerantium Cura**

**7<sup>th</sup> World Congress for the  
Pastoral Care of Migrants**

COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT



COOPERACIÓN Y DESARROLLO

Rome, November 17<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014

**Theme:  
Cooperation and Development in the  
Pastoral Care of Migrations**

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/pastoral-care-of-migrants-refugees-and-travelers/news/index.cfm>



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# 2015 MARITIME DAY MASS

## DEDICATION OF OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA ROUNDEL

in observance of the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for mariners and people of the sea.



*Our Lady Star of the Sea,  
Roundel Gifted to the Basilica by  
The Confraternity of Our Lady  
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Apostleship of the Sea of the  
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**Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2015 at 12:00 pm**

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**Most Rev. J. Kevin Boland**  
Apostleship of the Sea Bishop Promoter  
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*All are  
welcome.*