

**PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE  
OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE**

**1920 — 2010  
4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

Message for the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Foundation  
of the Apostleship of the Sea  
(AOS)

**THE BEGINNING**

Already in the nineteenth century there were several Church-related organizations offering scattered assistance to seafarers. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul opened clubs for Catholic seafarers in Dublin, London, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Quebec and Sydney. On his part, Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini of Piacenza (Italy), was placing chaplains in the ports of Genoa and New York, and assigned his missionaries on board the vessels accompanying the thousands of European migrants seeking a better future in North and South America.

It was only in 1890 that the movement of the Apostleship of Prayer, through a series of articles published in their magazine, the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, invited its members to pray for Catholic seafarers and organized the sending of magazines and books to them. Unfortunately, after a few years, very little was left of these activities.

Shortly after the Great World War some members of the Apostleship of Prayer brought forward the idea of enrolling the seafarers themselves into the Apostolate and began visiting vessels in English ports and contacting seafarers.

**THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA (AOS)**

Finally, on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1920, a small group of lay people (Mr. Peter F. Anson, a convert from the Anglican Church, Mr. Arthur Gannon and Bro. Daniel Shields S.J.,) gathered in Glasgow and decided to unify these efforts among seafarers in a single work. Getting inspiration from the movement of the Apostleship of Prayer, they called it *Apostleship of the Sea (AOS)*. On the same occasion, Peter F. Anson advanced the idea that became the seed for the development of AOS. Besides the religious aspect, he introduced the dimension of assistance to the seafarers. This area became the purpose of AOS and later was spelled out in the first Constitution: “*to promote the spiritual, moral and social development of seafarers*” .

The AOS motto in the words of P. F. Anson was “*to reveal Christ to those who go down the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, with the object of bringing them to a deeper knowledge of Christ and his Church*” and the logo was an anchor intertwined with a lifesaver with, at the center, the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In 1922 the Archbishop of Glasgow, as Chairman of AOS, submitted to the Holy See a copy of the Constitution. The Holy Father Pius XII responded with a letter addressed to P. F. Anson in which he blessed the “work” of religious assistance to the people of the sea and expressed his hope that the initiative would reach the coasts of the two hemispheres.

At that time in the world there were no more than 12 Catholic Centers in six countries and they were not connected to one another. Since then the Apostolate has grown to cover many ports with hundreds and hundreds of dedicated chaplains and volunteers providing for the spiritual and material needs of seafarers and fishers of every culture, nationality or religion.

Throughout the years the succeeding Popes have recognized that this organization born lay and independent had a pastoral and ecclesial value. First it was included among the activities of the Church, then it was placed under “*the overall direction*” of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People with a precise field of action and finally, through the Motu Proprio *Stella Maris* of John Paul II<sup>1</sup>, it was also given the appropriate structure and instruments for fruitful work among the people of the sea.

Looking back at its small beginning we rejoice for the great achievements obtained. In all the happenings we can see the providential hand of God who has inspired and provided vision to this Apostolate that on this day – 4<sup>th</sup> October – while celebrating its 90 years of foundation is called to look back to respond to the challenges ahead.

Prayer was the creative intuition at the origin of AOS and has supported it since then: members and supporters were invited to offer prayers for seafarers, fishers and their families, for the port chaplains, ships visitors and volunteers. Religious communities even “adopted” ports to guarantee to AOS the constant help of prayer. It is to prayer that we should attribute the rapid development of this apostolic “Work”.

I would like to quote Mr. A. Gannon, the General Secretary of AOS, who said the following at the International Conference held in Rome in 1958: “*Several founders of this movement have been mentioned. I would like to add here that without the prayers, offerings and the individual assistance of many thousands of members (especially religious in a great number of convents) the wonderful development of AOS in such a short time would not have been possible. Also they are regarded as founders*”.

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio “*Stella Maris*” on Maritime Apostolate, 1997.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

This year when the *International Maritime Organization (IMO) Council* has proclaimed the “Year of Seafarer” and on this day, while we are celebrating the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of AOS, we are called to reflect on the basic and important elements of our ministry, to support and encourage the ongoing apostolate around the world, and to embark on a journey of renewal and innovation to develop new pastoral strategies and to improve the AOS structure in order to effectively continue the *Work of the Maritime Apostolate* in the years to come. This is a considerable undertaking which calls for the contribution of each one of us.

### Prayer

It is important to rediscover and plunge the roots of our ministry in prayer. Only in it we will find the strength to climb the gangways of all the ships docking in the ports. Prayer will create unity among seafarers of different nationalities and beliefs. Prayer will suggest words of encouragement to distressed seafarers. Prayer will provide inspiration and vision to respond to the new challenges brought by the changing maritime world, as well as consolation in moments of difficulty and failure. Prayer will bring AOS close to the people we are called to serve.

### Ships visit

The ships' ever shorter stops, the new safety laws and the distance from the ports to the city greatly limit the opportunities to go ashore. So today, more than ever, visits to the ships are a priority. They make it possible to meet the seafarers, listen to them and not leave them alone in a port which they often do not know, to be an expression of concrete solidarity and, above all, to give attention to the person, his life and work. Without the visits to the ships, the local Church would not exist for the seafarers.

However, a visit cannot be improvised. It calls for chaplains and pastoral workers who are prepared and trained: that is, aware of the particular forms of fragility of the people they will meet and the difficulties they will encounter even before they go aboard. For this, formation courses are especially important to prepare the chaplains and volunteers for a better professional level in order to be present pastorally in this specific environment and for the credibility of the Apostleship of the Sea. The “Manual of the Apostleship of the Sea for Chaplains and Pastoral Workers”, offers a broad and valuable range of indications in this regard<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Cfr. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, *Manual for Chaplains and Pastoral Workers of the Apostleship of the Sea*, 2008

Therefore, as at the origin of our Apostolate, chaplains and volunteers are called to reach out to the crews to make visible the love of Christ and the concern of the Church for the material and spiritual welfare of seafarers and fishers.

### The local Church

Maritime pastoral care must be marked by concern for hospitality and welcome in the name of the local Christian community. Seafarers as a professional group have always been marginalized. Therefore, the local Church needs to educate her faithful to consider them persons with a job that often keeps them separated from their family and ecclesial community.

The dioceses and parishes that look on to the sea are thus called to an “ordinary pastoral commitment” to the people of the sea. The future of maritime pastoral care can no longer be the work of individuals, priests or laypersons, but must develop into making the entire people of God responsible. In this sense, the parishes that are bridge communities between the reality of the sea and that of the land will be fundamental.

The Bishops' Conferences, the Bishop Promoters and the National Directors have the responsibility to “foster the *Work of the Maritime Apostolate*”<sup>3</sup>, building awareness and persevering, also through the celebration of the “Sunday of the Sea”, so that the Christian communities will become aware of this presence which calls for friendship and hospitality. The pastoral care of seafarers, fishers and their families should become more and more an integral part of the parish pastoral responsibility.

### Lay involvement

The role of the laity is important in organizing and carrying out this pastoral care. The Apostleship of the Sea began as a movement of generous volunteer lay persons animated by missionary zeal. The Apostolic Letter *Stella Maris* specifies that a pastoral worker is someone who “assists the chaplain and, in accordance with the law, substitutes for the chaplain in matters which do not require the ministerial priesthood”<sup>4</sup>.

Today the Apostleship of the Sea can rely on a number of lay people who have important responsibilities in our organization: Regional Coordinators and National Directors to whom should be added the pastoral workers who offer their services together with the chaplains. In the A.M. we all work together: bishops, priests, deacons and laypersons, with each one responsible for the Church's mission by virtue of baptism.

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<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio “*Stella Maris*” on Maritime Apostolate, 1997, Art. IX, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Art. VIII.

Nowadays with the decreasing number of priests and consecrated people involved in the ministry, AOS should return to its origins and invite more lay people with specific qualifications (managers, drivers, lawyers, counselors, etc.) to be at the service and respond creatively to the needs of the people of the sea.

In this context, the *Manual for Chaplains and Pastoral Workers of the Apostleship of the Sea* is a valuable instrument for formation and for a common direction and vision.

### A common effort

If maritime pastoral care wants to be effective and adequate it will have to develop and keep up good relations with all the partners in the sector: governmental authorities and the maritime administration, ship owners and employers, workers and labor unions, NGOs and protagonists of the other Churches and ecclesial Communities. Given the globalized character of this apostolate and the international nature of the environment in which it operates, it is essential to work in a network and continue to strengthen ties through communication, dialogue, exchanges and reciprocal aid.

A common effort could also prove to be especially useful in moments of crisis in order to help the crew members who suffer prolonged psychological effects from the more and more frequent pirate attacks while their families are also traumatized.

Moreover, the depletion of the fish resources, the destruction of the coastal areas and the pollution of the oceans challenge all of us as persons and as a community. The Apostleship of the Sea is thus called to cooperate with its partners to build responsible awareness, which is translated into consistent decisions to protect the marine environment.

In commemorating the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation and in celebrating the “Year of the Seafarer”, the Apostleship of the Sea makes an appeal to all the States to ratify as soon as possible the 2006 Convention on Maritime Labor and the 2007 Convention on Work in Fishing, fundamental instruments for improving the working and living conditions of seafarers and fishers. In this regard, it will be useful to organize meetings and seminars to present, explain and inform the authorities, seafarers, fishers and their organizations about the objectives and contents of the two Conventions.

### **Conclusion**

Looking at the challenges ahead, it seems that the Apostleship of the Sea may face some rough sailing. Therefore, with its 90 years of experience and renewed enthusiasm, AOS can

continue to sail the oceans of the world, remaining faithful to the initial prophetic intuition to care for the spiritual and material needs of seafarers.

We feel the duty to express a deep sentiment of gratitude once again to the Venerable Pope John Paul II for the Apostolic Letter “*Stella Maris*”, which continues to be a strong reference point for our work and a reminder to our communities to give witness to their faith and charity to all the people of the sea.

Let us entrust our work to the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Stella Maris*, ‘*port of salvation* for every man and all humanity<sup>5</sup>, praying that in the maritime world, AOS will continue to be a beacon of hope and a secure port for seafarers, fishers and their families.

✠ Antonio Maria Vegliò  
President

Gabriele Bentoglio  
Under-Secretary

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BENEDICT XVI, Port of Brindisi, June 15, 2008