

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE
OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

Message for Sea Sunday 2011
(10th July 2011)

Dear chaplains, volunteers, friends and supporters of the Apostleship of the Sea,

The celebration of Sea Sunday is a special occasion to increase awareness in the Christian communities and society at large of the indispensable services that seafarers are rendering to all of us, and to present the maritime ministry carried out since 1920 by the chaplains and volunteers of the Apostleship of the Sea in many ports of the world.

“My presence among you today would like to stress that the Church is close to you, honors your often dangerous and hard work, is aware of your worries and concerns, supports your rights, and gives comfort to your loneliness and homesickness”.

These words which Blessed John Paul II addressed to the seafarers and fishers in the city of Fano (Italy) in his homily on 12th August 1984 are a great message of hope for the almost 1.5 million seafarers from over 100 nations (2/3 of them from developing countries) who are serving daily the needs of the global economy by transporting 90% of world trade.

Though our life greatly benefits from their hard labor and sacrifices, seafarers are a category of workers whom we do not know much about, except when they make the headlines because of some tragedies at sea, or, more recently, because of the increase in vessel hijackings by pirates, but there are very many problems that affect their lives.

In recent years, the criminalization of crews for maritime accidents (shipwrecks, pollution, etc.), the abandonment of seafarers in foreign ports without food or money, the new restrictions on shore leave, the lack of safety and security, and long periods on board have added further stress and strain not only to the seafarers' lives, but also to their families and relatives as well.

The Apostleship of the Sea is aware of the many inhuman situations that persist in the maritime world and it stands at the side of seafarers to reiterate that their human and labor rights must be respected. Recalling our recent statement on piracy (26th May 2011), we stress the importance for the maritime sector (ship owners, P&I Clubs, etc.) to work hand in hand with governments, international organizations and welfare service providers to put preventive measures in place in order to guarantee the seafarers' safety. To provide further protection to the people

working at sea, we appeal to all national governments to immediately adopt the ILO Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) 2006 and favor its coming into force. Otherwise, it would have only theoretical value, even though it is one of the most significant achievements in the entire history of seafarers' rights.

In its fight for justice in the maritime world, the Apostleship of the Sea is guided by the principles of the Gospel and the teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church. The words of Pope Pius XI on 17th April 1922 approving and blessing the first *Constitution and Rules of the Apostleship of the Sea*, encourage us to continue the mission "to expand the maritime ministry" so that the Work "will gather the most abundant fruits of salvation".

90 years after this important event in the history of the Apostleship of the Sea, I am pleased to announce that next year we will hold the XXIII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea in Rome from 18th to 24th November, to reflect and share the challenges brought by the continuous changes in the maritime world.

Finally, on this special day dedicated to the people of the sea, I entrust the seafaring and fishing communities to the maternal protection of Mary, *Stella Maris*.

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President

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Secretary