



Catholic Maritime News



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CALLED AND CREATIVE

Over the past few months I have had the opportunity to listen to the personal stories of a number of port chaplains across the USA. Since beginning as the Bishop Promoter of the AOS in the United States on July 1 these stories have helped shape me for the ministry. In the process of listening several themes seemed to come to the surface of our conversations, and I've felt very honored and blessed to serve as a Bishop Promoter for such a devoted, talented group.



Bishop Brendan J. Cahill

One of the strong realities that I've experienced is the clear sense of the call to the ministry. Some chaplains were asked to fill a vacancy and didn't know much of what they were getting into. Some chaplains had experience with the maritime industry and sought out ways to serve. Whatever the experience some have had when entering this ministry, what I felt in the tone of voice and passion about the ministry from each chaplain was a firm belief in the value and dignity of every person involved in the maritime industry. Port chaplains are in love with the ministry and the people.

From the sailors, to the port personnel, to other chaplains, to each person who is a part of the port community, I could hear the deep desire to bring an authentic humanizing experience to what can be a very rough environment. Our port chaplains represent the best to me about bringing the human touch of Jesus to each person we encounter. This leads to a second theme that stands out – the creativity of the port chaplain.

I've learned that there are large ports and small ports, deep-water ports and cargo ports, etc., etc., etc.... I don't think any two ports are the same! In each of the different environments, I've heard how the port chaplain adapts to the situation and creates the best possible setting for the ministry. In each case, it becomes clear that it is a team ministry that involves a whole network of connections. As I'm writing this, I want to communicate to every port chaplain my deep admiration for your commitment and talent!

In the coming years, I look forward to getting to know each of our port chaplains, and hopefully offering support and

encouragement for each of them. I know this is just the first of many letters I will write for the Maritime News! May God bless each of you who are in the port ministry and who support the ministry, let's keep one another in prayer,
+Brendan

+ Brendan Cahill



Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ

BE THANKFUL: GIVE THANKS ALL THE TIMES

As the psalmist says, "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to your name, O Most High." (Psalm 92:1). During the past thanksgiving we rejoiced, we celebrated, we thanked God for his abundant goodness and for the gift of our families and friends. We thanked God for His many gifts because, "In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land." (Psalm 95:4-5)

In the joyful spirit of thanksgiving which we should not celebrate only once, I encourage you to give thanks. "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonian 5:18) We are to be grateful for all the things in your life; feel the gratitude of all the graces and mercies of the Lord, the prayers answered, and be happy because of the blessings of the lord. We are to be thankful for God's protection and above all for the gifts of family and friends. Be thankful always even in the difficult situations you find yourselves – try to see a reason to thank the Creator who sent His Only Son to us as a baby in the manger. My friends, during this Christmas season, how will you express gratitude for the great sign of God's blessing (the gift of our Savior Jesus Christ)?

In his 2016 Christmas message Pope Francis says, "Today this message goes out to the ends of the earth to reach all peoples,

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Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church
Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, & Travelers

Bishop Promoter: Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill
Bishop of the Diocese of Victoria, TX

AOS National Director Contact: Sr. Dr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ
3211 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017

Phone: (202) 541-3359 ■ Fax: (202) 541-5417
E-mail: Jokereke@uscgb.org

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.

Contact Catholic Maritime News

We welcome your comments, feedback and suggestions.
Tell us what you think by sending an email to AOS@uscgb.org.

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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 ■ www.AOS-usa.org

especially those scarred by war and harsh conflicts that seem stronger than the yearning for peace.” “Peace to all who, in different areas, are enduring sufferings due to constant dangers and persistent injustice.” “Peace on earth to men and women of goodwill, who work quietly and patiently each day, in their families and in the society, to build a more humane and just world, sustained by the conviction that only with peace is the possibility of a more prosperous future for all.” Reach out to those who may not find a reason to be thankful and joyful. Especially the seafarers who have lost their loved ones, who may have to celebrate Christmas away from their homes and with their loved ones. Make every effort to contact those that are far from their loved ones and give them the joy of Christmas.

Indeed, God is in control of our lives, He has a purpose for our lives and so we should be thankful. I urge you to welcome Christ in your homes and in your heart. May this Christmas be one of peace and gratitude. Be an example of the peace that the Baby Jesus brings. Keep peace alive and burning in your families. Take a special time this Christmas to thank God for sending the world the Baby Jesus. Be thankful for the ultimate sacrifice He made for us all. “He came that we might have life.” (cf. John 10:10) Let us love one another with unconditional love, just as He has loved us.

During this joyful Christmas celebration, the chaplains and lay ecclesial ministers will be busy welcoming on-board ships and seafarers with hearts full of love, bearing gifts, and bringing to them the love, joy and peace of the baby Jesus. Even as we celebrate, for the chaplains it is a busy time as they welcome and show the love of Christ to seafarers and to let them know that they are not forgotten. To the seafarers and their families who may feel lonely and absence of their loved ones, those who work on difficult environments, those who sacrifice for the love of their families; we pray that the love of Christ may radiate in all your hearts especially this Christmas. We pray that the Peace of Christ may reign in your hearts. From the AOS family, we greatly appreciate the sacrifices of the chaplains and the lay ecclesia ministers, we commend each of them to the Lord to reward and bless them. We send a special joyful Christmas blessing to all the readers of the Catholic Maritime News and to their families. To all the Seafarers and their families, we extend a special Christmas blessing. May Our Lady, Star of the Sea pray for us. Amen.

Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ



Abandoned Ships: As global shipping industry struggles, crews can pay the price

January 19, 2017 - By Ezra Fieser

The Newlead Castellano, one of 50,000 cargo ships that crisscrosses oceans delivering the world's goods, had stopped in ports in Singapore and New Zealand, sailed the Panama Canal and picked up a shipment of sugar before heading to the U.S. East Coast.

That's where its journey ended and the months of waiting began for its 15 sailors.

Built in China, owned by a Greek company, flying a Liberian flag, sailing with a crew of Filipino seamen, the 600-foot-long ship was just a few miles from the port of Savannah, Georgia, when the owner, NewLead Holdings, stopped paying the loan on the ship and signing checks for the crew.

For four months while a court case ensued, the vessel sat in coastal waters about six miles from Tybee Island. On board, 15 sailors waited with little to do, no income and no documents to set foot on U.S. soil.

"These are the ones you hurt for. They had no money to fly home and no visas. They were stuck on the ship," said Father Richard Young, a port chaplain in Savannah at the International Seamen's House, which provides services to sailors. "In these circumstances, we're their only link to the outside world."

Every year, sailors on ships in oceans across the globe find themselves in similar situations. As a globalized and competitive shipping industry struggles to fill ships with enough cargo to turn a profit, the crews aboard pay the price when the owners can't pay the bills. Sailors, who overwhelmingly hail from poor countries and take grueling contracts to support their families back home, in many cases turn to charity, including a global Catholic agency, for support while they're stranded for weeks or months, often thousands of miles from home.

The vast majority of shipowners provide decent pay and conditions for their crews. But a slowing world economy in recent years has cooled demand for goods and commodities, leaving shipping companies with excess capacity. In turn, they are increasingly unable to pay loans on multimillion-dollar ships.

"We're in a position in which the freight rates have become very low and at the same time the lenders are unable to hold off any longer, and they're calling in loans," said Alan Swimmer, president of National Maritime Services, the Florida-based company that oversaw the Castellano until it was auctioned for \$7.4 million, allowing the sailors to collect back pay and the ship to return to service.

The exact number of abandonments is difficult to ascertain. A database maintained by the International Labor Organization shows just more than a dozen a year, but officials in the shipping industry indicate it is incomplete. Swimmer said as many as 10 abandoned vessels can be found around the world at any given time. The crews on board, who may go months without being paid, are often stuck on the ships, waiting for the matter to be resolved and hoping to collect back pay.

"Spiritual support and contact with their families are the most

critical components to keeping a crew's morale positive in these situations," Swimmer said.

From Florida to the Philippines, Hong Kong to England, and the coast of Georgia to Australia, chaplains and employees at charities in ports that see hundreds of ships every year say the need for organizations that support the sailors aboard those vessels is increasingly important.

Father Young and the hundreds of chaplains working through the Apostleship of the Sea, the Catholic maritime ministry, and in conjunction with other charities for seafarers, provide everything from grocery runs to pastoral care to the hundreds of seafarers that are stranded each year. In the case of the Castellano, a chaplain went aboard several times to celebrate Mass.

Goods from the world

As global trade increases, the shipping industry provides an invaluable link between customers and goods made overseas. From 2005 to 2015, the amount of cargo being carried by sea nearly doubled, to about 1.2 billion tons, according to world fleet statistics gathered by the U.K. Department for Transport.

It's an industry responsible for carrying 90 percent of goods to consumers, yet Jason Zuidema, Quebec-based executive director of the North American Maritime Ministry Association, said it's "largely hidden."

"We never hear about shipping companies, even though they have a huge impact on our lives," he said. "People might see a ship sailing, but what [ships] do is in the background. But people have no clue that there are humans aboard those ships, separated nine months from their families."

John, a 27-year-old from Cebu, Philippines, is one of those people. Each year, he leaves his wife and child to take a job on a cargo ship that keeps him away for nine or 10 months.

"The pay is better than anything I could make at home. It's enough for my family," he said of the \$600 per month he is paid, about three times the minimum wage for workers in the Philippines' big cities. He'll wire home most of his pay, keeping a little to buy Filipino foods he craves while he's away.

"It can be tight," he said, meaning that cutting his trip short, or refusing a decent-paying contract, is not an option.

So when he found himself last year on a ship that the owners had abandoned, he had no choice but to wait aboard, hoping that his nearly three months of back pay would come through. The conditions were difficult, he said, because of the uncertainty.

"We had food being supplied. And a chaplain would come from the port to give Mass a couple times," he said. "It's just that you don't know what's going to happen."

He and the other crew, about a dozen, were eventually paid and flown home after they left the ship, he said. But in the meantime, his family had to borrow money to pay the bills. The steep interest payments ate into John's pay and forced him to cut short his time at home and take another contract as soon as one

became available.

Catholic News Service is withholding John's last name and details about the ship that he was aboard because sailors, particularly those in the Philippines, can be blacklisted by shipping companies if they complain or speak to the media.

"They are afraid to complain. They are afraid to exercise their rights in some cases, because if they get sent home early, let's say, they get a stamp in their seafarer's book that says they're blacklisted. Then, legally they're dead. They can't work anymore," said Scalabrinian Father Paulo Prigol, director of the Apostleship of the Sea's Stella Maris Center in Manila, Philippines.

The plight of Filipino sailors largely tracks the industry as a whole because the Asian country supplies about one of every four of the world's 1.65 million seafarers, with workers from China, Indonesia, Russia and the Ukraine also in the top five, according to the International Chamber of Shipping.

Father Prigol said Filipinos' ability to speak English, their attitude and training make them attractive to shipping companies. Each year, government-run and private training programs churn out around 25,000 graduates ready to be deployed, Department of Education statistics show.

Yet, the same attitude that makes them attractive to employers makes them vulnerable to abuses, Father Prigol said. "It's in their nature to just shut up and do the job they're given and not complain," he said.

Sometimes, that can lead to disastrous results, such as last year when eight Filipinos were sailing a tugboat they were not supposed to be on — their contract was for a cargo ship — and it was lost at sea. They're presumed dead, said Father Prigol, who is pushing legislation in the Philippine House of Representatives that would give sailors better protections from abuses. It would follow similar laws passed in recent years that have incrementally provided more protections.

Depressed crews

The difficulties faced at sea prompted the Vatican to ask Catholics to keep sailors in their prayers.

"The human and working dignity of the seafarers is at risk when they are exploited with long work hours and their wages are delayed for months or, in cases of abandonment, not paid at all," said a July message from the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers signed by Cardinal Antonio Maria Veglio, council president.

Conditions aboard a ship can deteriorate very quickly when a ship has been abandoned, said Tommy Moloy, a Liverpool, England-based inspector with the International Transport Workers' Federation, a trade union that promotes rights for workers and inspects ships.

"When you see a crew that's depressed by their situation, the ship very quickly looks like that as well," he said. "I've seen crews who have had to catch their own food, who are provided with no recreational facilities, old televisions and radios that don't work. It can be very difficult."

In the worst cases, Moloy said he has been on ships that are so poorly maintained that he has been able to "put my fingers

through holes of rust."

In places like the waters off the coast of Australia, abandonments are rare, said Sister Mary Leahy, Sydney-based Oceania regional coordinator for the Apostleship of the Sea.

"We still have a reasonably strong maritime union here, so we tend to see the more seaworthy vessels coming this way," said Sister Leahy, a member of the Religious of St. Joseph of Australia.

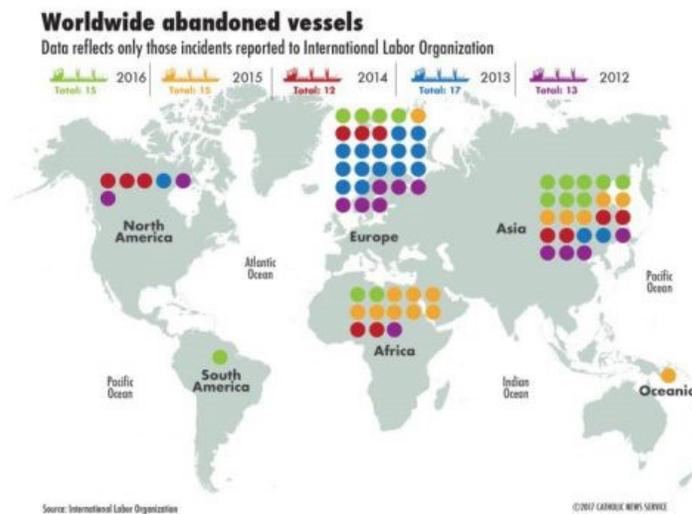
Human and labor rights advocates want to extend those types of protections internationally. That's the aim of the Maritime Labour Convention, which will require ships to prove they are financially secure, provide basic labor protections to seafarers and give inspectors the power to detain ships if conditions are not up to snuff. Each country needs to individually ratify the convention, however, and companies sometimes employ tactics to skirt the law.

In England, for example, companies register the ships in foreign countries so they are not subjected to stricter British labor laws, said Moloy, the inspector.

"I know ships that are trading exclusively in U.K. with Filipinos and Russian crews, and they will run across to Republic of Ireland (to make stops) in order to give it international status," he said. "In those cases, they don't have to even pay minimum wage."

Even with additional safeguards in place, the need for groups to support seafarers is increasingly important, said Lesley Warrick, executive director of the Seafarers' House at Port Everglades, Florida, one of the busiest shipping ports in the U.S.

"For us, it's the human side of the issue," she said. "These are the people we rely on to bring us almost all the things we see, eat and touch. What did you have under your Christmas tree this year? You can bet it came through a seafarer."



ANGELUS NEWS January 19, 2017 - Reprinted with Permission
This is one in a series of articles produced in collaboration with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic News Service

Marooned crew gets spiritual, temporal support

By Mark Pattison

Washington(CNS) — Dec. 20 was the last day of autumn. It was also the three-month mark that the crew of the Newlead Granadino remained at anchor near the Port of Baltimore.

The owner of the Granadino, an asphalt and bitumen tanker, declared bankruptcy during the ship's voyage.

The vessel is now owned by a bank, which could try selling it whole, or have it sent to Texas to be torn apart for scrap.

"It's like cars with their license plate, or VIN number. It's a very complicated legal thing," said Msgr. John Fitzgerald, head of the Apostleship of the Sea for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Under bankruptcy, he explained, "they take the VIN number away from the ship, so to speak. Once that happens, that's no longer a ship. It's a piece of steel in the water. It gets auctioned and goes to a scrapyards, and it gets broken up."

That's cold comfort for the Romanian master – merchant marine parlance for captain – and the 11 Filipino crewmen left aboard the Maltese-flagged Granadino. But the Apostleship of the Sea, the Port of Baltimore's chaplaincy office, and others have done what they can to attend to the spiritual and temporal needs of the men.

The fact that the boat is near the port – but not actually docked there – presents the biggest challenge. The port will not allow the boat to sit in a dock, since those docks are liquid parking spaces to load and unload cargo. Individuals seeking permission to get access to the port require a background check by the federal Transportation Security Administration, which took over responsibility for all U.S. ports after the 9/11 terror attacks of 2001.

The process can take as little as 15 minutes, but it can also take up to two hours. Even so, two representatives of the Embassy of the Philippines made a trip in December to talk with their countrymen stranded aboard the Granadino, which is floating on the Patapsco River in Baltimore. But to get to the ship, they had to commission a tugboat to take them to the vessel. Six crewmen who had been on the ship the longest were repatriated. The rest did not have the proper visa to set foot on U.S. territory. Further, their employment contract requires them to stay with the Granadino until its "mission" is completed — and despite the asphalt having been unloaded, the mission has not yet been declared completed. Should they step off the boat before completion, they would be considered in breach of contract, which could ruin their chances to work as merchant seamen ever again.

All supplies have to be sent by tugboat. The Granadino has become, in essence, a charity case. The hot and steamy days of late summer, when the Granadino first reached Baltimore, have since changed to the chill of winter. And for men on a metal ship, that can be brutal. The Rev. Mary Davisson, an Episcopal minister with the Baltimore International Seafarers Center, an ecumenical port ministry, told Catholic News Service that the

8-year-old ship's air conditioning and heating system had gone out of whack while at anchor. Supplies delivered to counter that outage have included winter wear, such as long johns, and space heaters. Urban Pirates, which conducts pirate-themed boat tours around Baltimore's Inner Harbor, made a deal with nearby restaurants to deliver donated hot meals once a week to the crew.

The Knights of Columbus donated a large-screen television, said Msgr. Fitzgerald. The crew already had a large-screen TV, but it did not work with U.S. TV signals. Msgr. Fitzgerald was stymied in his efforts to board the Granadino to celebrate Mass. He was set to do so the week before Christmas, but became ill the day of the scheduled Mass and had to scuttle his tugboat trip to the vessel. What made matters worse was a late-2016 fire that rendered the apostleship's offices unusable, destroying its computers and furniture. The apostleship has been using a spare room in a nearby mall until its original quarters can be repaired. But that did not deep-six aid efforts.

The mid-Atlantic's Filipino-American community came through with clothing, toiletries and reading materials, said Msgr. Fitzgerald. He said he supplemented their contributions with religious goods befitting crew members from a nation where

***"No one sees them
when they come,
no one sees them
when they're here,
no one sees them
when they go."***

four out of five people profess Catholicism.

"Scapulars, rosaries, Bibles, religious literature and tracts," he told CNS. "We give them all the used Catholic magazines and all the unsold (church vestibule) literature. People who subscribe to America, St. Anthony Messenger,

U.S. Catholic, we give it to them. Seafarers read a lot. When you're not on shift, there's not a lot to do. Reading helps your mind."

"They have no idea of Catholic parish life. They have no experience of it at all, so they've got to get it on their own. Evangelization is a big part of this ministry. Sacramental celebrations, they just love it. When we have Mass and benediction, I try to give them DVDs of famous preachers," Msgr. Fitzgerald added. "If we can get DVDs and CDs out there, they can pass them around, or gather in a group and just play it themselves. Then we'd give them the addresses of as many Catholic internet organizations as we can," although internet access is often subject to the master's approval, since Wi-Fi is needed for navigation today.

One plus for the Granadino's crew: They have received some back pay from the bank that holds the mortgage on the ship. Frequently, crewmen get just a fraction of what they're owed from a bankrupt vessel — and sometimes don't get paid at all. The Granadino's master did not respond to a request by Catholic News Service for permission to board in the event that Msgr. Fitzgerald could celebrate Mass there.

However, noted Rev. Davisson, “the master of the ship sent a message about how kind the people of Baltimore have been to him and his crew during this ordeal – a very appreciative note.”

“(St.) John Paul II called merchant seafarers ‘the invisible strangers in our midst,’ and I thought that was a beautiful way of putting it,” Msgr. Fitzgerald said. “They come and go into our largest metropolitan areas, which are usually major ports. No one sees them when they come, no one sees them when they’re here, no one sees them when they go.”

Catholic News Service, January 24, 2017 - Reprinted with Permission



Above - The Key Bridge in Baltimore is seen at sunrise Jan. 9. The owner of the Newlead Granadino, an asphalt and bitumen tanker, declared bankruptcy during the ship’s voyage and remains at anchor near the Port of Baltimore. (CNS photo/Kevin Parks, Catholic Review)

Below - Newlead Granadino at anchor near the Port of Baltimore.

MINISTERING TO ‘INVISIBLE PEOPLE’

By Rob Herbst

MOBILE – The Archdiocese of Mobile’s Apostleship of the Sea ministry strives to reach “invisible people.”

As among the busiest ports in the United States, thousands of ships visit the Port of Mobile each year. Many of the seafarers who have arrived have been out to sea for months. Many of those same seafarers are also stuck on their ship, prohibited to leave because they don’t have a necessary visa.

Led by Chaplain Fr. Lito Capeding and assisted by Deacon John Archer, the Apostleship of the Sea is there to help.

“The seafarers are like migrants,” Fr. Capeding explained. “We don’t know their face but they always come to our port. We call them ‘invisible people.’ We go there and bring Christ to them. That is what we are doing.”

By Fr. Capeding’s rough estimation, 20,000 seafarers come to the Port of Mobile each year and bringing Christ to them comes in different forms.

For those seafarers prohibited from leaving the ship, that might mean offering small welcoming items such as MoonPies. Newspapers are also popular because the Internet on ships can be spotty and seafarers out to sea for months might not have any idea what’s taking place in the world.

And sometimes being a good conversationalist is a valued gift.

“They pull out a chair and immediately point you to sit down,” Deacon Archer said. “(You are) somebody different to talk to. Whether they are Catholic or not, you ask them ‘is everything OK? Is the crew OK?’ It’s hard. You can’t offer too much because there’s not much you can do other than talk with them and be with them.

“But what (Fr. Capeding) said about just being present to them - that’s the biggest ministry. Bringing Christ to them. Since they cannot go down, we go up. We bring Jesus to them.”

Those higher in command on the ship might have a visa and that’s the proverbial golden ticket.

Then the Apostleship of the Sea ministry, which also includes four volunteers, will transport seafarers to various stores to restock on supplies or for whatever needs they have, or maybe provide a tour of Mobile.

“We are a caring ministry,” Fr. Capeding said. “We want to let them see they are welcome here. God loves them and we’ll take care of them and extend whatever help we can.”

Sometimes that gets put to the test.

Fr. Capeding recalled that a captain arrived at the Port of Mobile after hearing his daughter had committed suicide while



Fr. Lito Capeding ministering to his parishioners

he was out to sea.

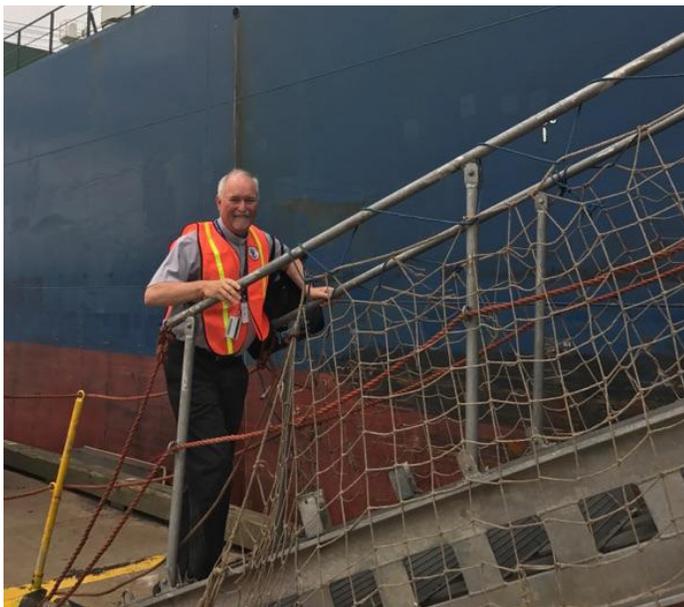
“He came to the port emotionally devastated,” Fr. Capeding said. “He was blaming himself and he could not go back. We talked to him and tried to get him with a counselor.”

Fr. Capeding, who is also pastor of Shrine of the Holy Cross in Daphne, has been chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea since 2008, while Deacon Archer joined earlier this year.

One advantage Fr. Capeding has is his background. He was born and raised in the Philippines and an estimated 40 percent of the seafarers around the world are Filipino.

That can help negate a possible language barrier.

“It makes them feel at home from far away,” Deacon Archer said. “When (Fr. Capeding) speaks in Tagalog you could see they are much more comfortable. They are at home for a small bit of



Deacon John Archer Boards ship for Ministry

time.”

Along with being a welcoming committee, there are times for evangelization.

Fr. Capeding sometimes offers Mass on a ship. When he does, he also rolls out the red carpet.

“I always start Mass by saying ‘on behalf of Archbishop Rodi, we welcome you to the port city of Mobile,’” Fr. Capeding said. “I always start with that to let them know that they are welcomed.”

Deacon Archer recalled being on a Turkish ship recently and the captain asked about Christianity. While that’s obviously a big topic to discuss in a short period of time, Deacon Archer did his best.

“I gave him the information on the Istanbul cathedral as that was the home port of his ship and I gave him a prayer in Turkish,” Deacon Archer said. “You adapt.”

He added: “It’s just simple face-to-face ministry. It’s Church one-by-one.”

The Catholic Week August 4, 2017 *Reprinted with Permission*

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
Upon those who lived in a land of gloom
a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy
and great rejoicing;
They rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest,
as they exult when dividing the spoils.
For the yoke that burdened them,
the pole on their shoulder,
The rod of their taskmaster,
you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.
For every boot that tramped in battle,
every cloak rolled in blood,
will be burned as fuel for fire.
For a child is born to us, a son is given to us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero.
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.
His dominion is vast
and forever peaceful,
Upon David’s throne, and over his kingdom,
which he confirms and sustains
By judgment and justice,
both now and forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!*

Isaiah 9:1-8





A Cruise ship at port of Los Angeles is seen Dec. 30 just outside the Stella Maris chapel and hospitality center in Los Angeles. The center hosts crew members from cruise ships, who get just a few hours on land when their ships port. / photo: (CNS photo/Victor Aleman, Angelus News)

FOR CRUISE CREWS, CHURCH CENTER OFFERS SPACE FOR FAITH, FRIENDSHIP

By R.W. Dellinger

LOS ANGELES (CNS) — Akbar Pathan of Mumbai, India, had on the red vest and dress slacks he wears during his shifts as a bartender on the Princess Cruise line. The 36-year-old married father of two sons has been serving on crews for 13 years.

“I can make more money as a bartender on a ship like the Ruby Princess than any job I could get back home,” he said Dec. 30 at the Apostleship of the Sea’s cozy center near berth 93 of the Port of Los Angeles. He offered a half-smile when asked about being away from his family for as long as nine months at a time.

“Now I’m used to that different way to live,” he mused. “We have, like, nice facilities, and we get along nicely. We are like family, so it’s not that bad.”

After a moment, he added: “I like it. It’s a good income with friends. This is like my second home now. Really! I have been almost all around the world: Alaska, Europe, Mexico, South America. When I get lonely, I call my wife. That’s what I’m doing right now. With the free Wi-Fi here, I’m calling everybody,” he added with a chuckle.

Pathan, who is not Catholic, said Mary Star of the Sea Parish’s maritime ministry is good because he gets to “hang out with the crew here, to relax and get some coffee. So I always come here. You don’t have much time off the ship in ports, but it’s so close to the ship. It’s nice.”

The Port of Los Angeles looks like its own city on water, with ships stacked high with 20- and 40-foot metal containers carrying every kind of cargo conceivable. From the Harbor

Freeway, one can see cranes, which resemble giant mechanical grasshoppers from a Star Wars movie, loading these containers that can be easily transferred onto tractor-trailers.

Cargo ships carry heavy loads like iron, copper and chrome, as well as cereals, sugar and fertilizers. Tankers carry hundreds of tons of crude oil destined for depots and refineries in consumer countries.

But the number of workers on these pale to the crew and workers on multideck cruise ships. Many ships from lines like Royal Caribbean and Princess carry 2,500 to 3,000 passengers apiece along with crews of 1,000. And these ocean-going behemoths continue to be one of the fastest-growing of all shipping sectors, with more than half of their staffs coming from Catholic countries like the Philippines.

Passengers taking a cruise are pampered with gourmet meals, formal-attire dances and first-rate entertainment, including gambling, well-known comedians and Broadway-like stage shows.

But for the crew, it’s a whole different story. These men and women work eight to 10 hours, seven days a week, for weeks at a time. And contracts with cruise lines mean six to nine months away from their families. Most return home for a break of one or two months before beginning a new contract.

Crew members often come from poor or developing nations such as India, Indonesia and, especially, Philippines.

More than eight decades ago, Mary Star of the Sea Parish in the San Pedro section of Los Angeles recognized the hardships seafaring workers face, so it started the maritime ministry at the Port of Los Angeles under the auspices of the Apostleship of the Sea, the Catholic Church’s maritime ministry.

Cruise ship voyages out of Los Angeles usually last from four to 14 days. Popular destination are south along the Mexican

Riviera, with stops in Puerto Vallarta, then Mazatlan, Cabo San Lucas and other tourist havens. Ports of call from Los Angeles to Alaska include Vancouver, British Columbia; Juneau, Skagway, Glacier Bay and Ketchikan, Alaska.

For almost 12 years, Jacquiline Sumaoy has been a waitress on the Norwegian Jewel, often with nine-month contracts. Now she serves for eight months. The 32-year-old Filipina is married but has no children.

"I like it because we go to different places all the time," she said. "Like today at 4 o'clock, we are going to the Mexican Riviera, then coming back here. And soon we have a 14-day cruise to Alaska."

In April, Sumaoy will fly home to the Philippines for a two-month break before flying back to Los Angeles to work on another monthslong voyage.

"We work seven days a week and, like, only have a little time off every day," she said. "For example, if we work in the morning, we don't work in the afternoon. Then you go back to work at night. For eight months. But I don't get tired. I'm used to doing it."

"The hardest part is being away from my family," she said. "Yes, especially if you're not feeling well and are sick. Yeah, it's very hard. Especially to call back home for emergencies. On a ship we can use the satellite, which is very slow and expensive. But during the port visits, like here, you can call and chat."

Sumaoy, who is Catholic, said she also really appreciates the center's chapel.

"Usually, every Sunday back home we go to Mass, and here we can, too," she said. "If you're lonely or stressed, this is a very good place, with the Wi-Fi and just to have some coffee."

When asked what she likes most about her job, Sumaoy did not hesitate: "I like my position as a waitress. And my salary is like a big boss' in the Philippines if you compare the salaries. With tips and everything, you can save your money. So I just keep it and send it home."

The Stella Maris Chapel and Hospitality Center is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. when ships are in port and volunteers are available. Olga Cruz has volunteered here for more than four years, mostly on weekends. But because she works nearby, the 53-year-old woman often shows up during her lunch hour.

"I've always wanted to volunteer here because I thought it would be a good service to the crew members," she said. "I'm Filipino and I speak the language. So I thought, you know, it would make them feel more at home, maybe more welcome. I can interact and help them a little bit more."

If crew members want to go shopping for themselves or for gifts for those back home, she drives them to nearby stores in her car. And if they can't call relatives because of time differences, she'll sit and talk to them and, hopefully, strike up new friendships. Most like to talk about their families, especially their children and plans for their future. And, of course, they share experiences about the Philippines.

Cruz considers it a sacred ministry.

"To me, this is really serving the people," she said. "We don't do much. But whenever I come here on Saturday, I'll bring a hot lunch for whoever is here. It's just to get in touch with these

people. It's just welcoming them."

Fran Giagalone agreed. As a parishioner at Mary Star of the Sea, the 92-year-old woman volunteered for 26 years and only stopped going down to the center a year ago. But she still raises money as a liaison to the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, who support it.

She said before computers, smartphones and iPads, the center had a bank of phones and would place calls for crew members. It also had two vans that took them shopping. In those days, the Port of Los Angeles was open, so volunteers could go onto ships.

That all changed after 9/11, said Giagalone; security has greatly tightened. In port, crews can only be off their ship for short periods, mostly just a couple hours.

"But actually our prime concern was the chapel, where a local priest would celebrate Mass and hear confessions. And also to help crews stay in touch with their families. Only now it's all high-tech, and they have their own devices," she said.

"I think back when the port was all open," Giagalone said. "You could go down to the ships. The guys could come off and on the ships. We had guys who would come with greasy clothes just in time for Mass. We had guys who came regularly to sing. One played the guitar."

After a reflective pause, Giagalone continued: "Those who come from India and the Philippines are very devout. I mean old-fashioned devout. They'll walk into the chapel and take their shoes off. And they'll get down on both knees. They'll touch the crucifix with their own hands." She paused again. "So it's been a wonderful ministry."

Dhan Kumari Gurung, 30, of Nepal was sitting back on a comfy couch between two co-workers and could not agree more. She works security on the Norwegian Jewel, patrolling the huge cruise ship at night. She carries handcuffs, a baton and a radio to call for help.

"Of course you get homesick because it's a very long contract, eight months, we have," she said. "Coming here, it's very good. I'm Hindu but sometimes I go into the chapel and just sit. It's very nice."

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Stella Maris Center Chapel - Port of Los Angeles

XXIV WORLD CONGRESS OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) ministry continues to reach out to seafarers, fishers, their families, port personnel and all who work or travel on the high seas. Over 250 Port Chaplains and other Maritime personnel participate in the XXIV AOS World Congress in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, October 1-7.

The Congress focused on the Theme: Caught in the Net (Putting the Fishers First). His Holiness Pope Francis sent greetings and prayerful best wishes to the participants in the twenty-fourth World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea. His Holiness said, "In giving thanks to Almighty God for the many graces received through its work over many years, His Holiness prays that the bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful gathered for this significant Congress, will be strengthened in their support of all those who work at sea." The Pope entrusted all seafarers and their families to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Stella Maris and Stella Matutina.

In his opening address, His Eminence Peter Cardinal Turkson, noted that around 38 million people are engaged in fisheries in the world and 90 percent of them are in small scale industries, largely located in Asia and Africa. According to Cardinal Turkson, "The Apostleship of the Sea's work with fishermen is a vital part of the Church's work of evangelization," The Cardinal proposed the importance of encouraging bishops of countries without chaplains for the ministry to establish an outreach. He wants the apostleship to encourage their home countries to implement the International Labor Organization's Work in Fishing Convention. Finally, Cardinal Turkson prays that

Mary, Star of the Sea, may sustain the services and dedication to seafarers, fishermen and their families and to protect all the people of the sea until they reach the "safe port" of Heaven," Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon, Myanmar noted that, 25 million fishermen have little or no legal protection, which will change with the implementation of the fishing convention. Cardinal Bo also said that, "Sea Sunday' needs to be a mandatory worldwide celebration across the Catholic Church to prevent Church congregations remaining ignorant of the plights of seafarers and fishermen and the work of the Apostleship of the Sea."

Other speakers challenged the participants to find new and creative ways to continue their ministry of serving the people of the sea. It was also noted that abuses are still present in the fishing industry, including forced labor and human trafficking. Exacerbating the problem is the practice of some fishing vessels being at sea for months or years, making it difficult for fishermen to report abuses. The Chaplains were motivated to be instruments of new Evangelization in the maritime ministry; to be advocates, witnesses as well as work in solidarity with others nations and ports.

The participants were urged to support one another, strengthen and develop best practices for equipping various ministries. Among other things the resolutions include: Training, communication, branding, structure renewal, Twinning, family support, collection of evidence of slavery and connection with bishop's conference.

Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ





Photos Courtesy of NAMMA



Apostleship of the Sea, National Office
Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church
Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, and Travelers
3211 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017

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Upcoming Events

FEBRUARY 18 - MARCH 2, 2018

Houston Maritime Ministry Training Program
Houston International Seafarers' Center

APRIL 17 -19, 2018

AOS-USA Annual Conference
American Maritime Officers' STAR Center, Dania, FL

MAY 19, 2018

Mass for day of Prayer and Remembrance for Mariners and
People of the Sea
Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception,
Washington, DC

MAY 22, 2018

National Maritime Day Celebration
U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington D.C.

*Our Sincerest wishes and prayers for
hope, happiness and peace for you
during the Christmas Season and
thought the coming year.*

