



STELLA MARIS

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS
AROUND THE WORLD

Catholic Maritime News

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Volume 100

Message from Bishop Promoter

By Bishop Frank Schuster, Bishop Promoter of Stella Maris



It is an honor to serve you as Bishop Promoter of Stella Maris/Apostleship of the Sea for the USCCB. As many of you know, Sr. Joanna Okereke is our National Director who has been directing this ministry for many years. Her dedication, wisdom, and care for our chaplains and ministers

throughout the country inspire me. Together, we collaborate with port chaplains representing seven regions of our country. I am grateful for their wisdom and assistance.

We are joyful that His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV, as decreed the Apostleship of the Sea as its own international juridical person under the direction of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development. We are also grateful for the Holy Father's appointment of the Most Reverend Luis Quinteiro Fiuza as our president *ad interim*, and Father Ritchille Salinas, S.V.D., as our Secretary General *ad interim*. We look forward to collaborating with them in this new international effort to promote this important ministry in the life of the Church.

As your promoter, this past year I have visited the ports of Gary, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; Baltimore, Maryland; Houston/Galveston, Texas; Mobile, Alabama; Oakland, California; Charleston, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; and of course, my home port ministry in Seattle, Washington. I joined Sr. Joanna and several of our regional coordinators attended the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) conference in Barcelona, a vibrant ecumenical organization that specializes in Maritime ministry. I also gave a morning of

reflection for a weeklong ecumenical seminar for ministers who are new to seafaring ministry hosted by the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA). Last October, I hosted a meeting for Apostleship of the Sea-USA (AoS-USA) in Seattle. Apostleship of the Sea-USA is a specialized ministry located in Beaumont, Texas, that focuses on recruiting priests for cruise ships that depart from ports around the country. I also was honored to celebrate the annual Mass for Maritime Workers on May 23rd at the National Basilica in Washington, DC. Going forward I will look forward to continuing my port visits in my role as bishop promoter and enjoy visiting my brother bishops during these visits as well.

As Pope Francis said in a letter celebrating the twenty-fifth world congress of Stella Maris – Apostleship of the Sea, “Creation, our common home, is comprised of a vast expanse of water, which is essential for life and human commerce, not to mention tourism. It should not be surprising, therefore, that around ninety percent of the world’s goods are transported by ships, which is made possible by the daily work of over one and half million people, many of whom are far removed for months at a time from the support of their families as well as their social and religious communities.”

Indeed, the Lord commended his good and faithful servants, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). Our port ministers show us what that looks like each time they visit a newly docked ship. On behalf of the USCCB, and all seafarers, we thank you for your ministry!

“Around ninety percent of the world’s goods are transported by ships, which is made possible by the daily work of over one and half million people, many of whom are far removed for months at a time from the support of their families as well as their social and religious communities.”

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

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We encourage you to visit our website which has a user friendly navigation tools. Check out our interactive map with a list of Stella Maris 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 Stellamaris@uscgb.org

Stella Maris-North America and Caribbean Region

An association of Catholic ministries in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean that serve seafarers, fishers, port workers, and all the People of the Sea.

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Accommodating the Needs of the Seafarers

By: Sister Joanna Okereke, HHCJ,
Stella Maris, National Director

The Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV established the chirograph of Apostleship of the Sea (*Opus Apostolatus Maris*) as a canonical legal entity responsible for promoting the pastoral care of the “people of the sea” - sailors,

seafarers and their families- as well as other people whose lives are existentially linked to navigation and fishing on the seas, rivers and lakes. Following this creation, Cardinal Michael Czerny S.J., Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, responsible for the pastoral care of migrants and itinerant people, appointed His Excellency Luis Quinteiro Fiuza as President ad interim of the Apostleship of the Sea and Reverend Fr. Ritchie Salinas SVD, as Secretary General ad interim of the Apostleship of the Sea. (*Thursday, November 13, 2025* <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/11/13/0866/01547.html>)

The Maritime Apostolate’s mission is to reach out to seafarers, fishers, their families, port personnel, and all who work or travel on the high seas. Especially to accommodate the needs of the seafarers who are often away from their home parishes for extended periods, and seafarers who have no parish setting to help them maintain lasting ties with their faith and families. Around the world, the Maritime Ministry continues to assist seafarers to meet their basic needs: a genuine welcome, spiritual renewal, a safe haven while in port, a safe work environment, a just contract, communications with loved ones back home, and a few hours of recreation at the centers.

The National office of the Apostolate at USCCB in Washington DC unifies the chaplains so that, together, we can achieve the goals, objectives, and mission of the Apostolate. We ensure that ongoing pastoral care activities and necessary resources are provided. We develop relationships, motivate, listen, show compassion, encourage, and support maritime ministers to help achieve the goals and mission of the Church.

As we accompany and support the spiritual needs of seafarers, I invite all people of God to join in the work of accommodating the seafarers’ unique lifestyle and needs. I encourage all people to support, remember and pray for the maritime workers including merchant mariners/seafarers,

fishermen, port personnel and all those in the maritime industry. I invite you to find ways to share your faith and love with the “people of the sea”. Please help us to care for the seafarers and build a better pastoral care ministry for the future.

Contact us, Tel: 202-541-3359 or e-mail: stellamaris@uscgb.org; or JOkereke@uscgb.org;
Visit our website: www.uscgb.org/stellamaris.
Please donate, any amount is appreciated.

Please make Check payable to USCGB, on the memo line write Stella Maris. Mail check to:

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Maritime Mass 2026 - A Day to Celebrate the Church's Work with Seafarers

On Saturday, May 23, 2026, the annual Maritime Day Mass was joyfully celebrated at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. The main celebrant was Most Rev. Frank R. Schuster, Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle and the U.S.' Bishop Promoter of Stella Maris; His Excellency delivered a wonderful homily about the difficulties faced by seafarers, and how important the Church's accompaniment is for these workers.

Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ, who serves as the U.S.' National Director for Stella Maris, delivered closing remarks at the conclusion of the Mass. In a special way, these remarks highlighted the legacy of the recently deceased Most Rev. René Henry Gracida, who served as the U.S. maritime ministry's first bishop promoter.

Before the Mass began, Bishop Schuster convened the U.S. regional coordinators of the Stella Maris ministry for a meeting. This gathering - which also included representatives from the Apostleship of the Sea of the United States of America (AOS-USA) and the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA) - allowed leaders to share information and challenges from their regions, and to uplift best practices that make port ministry more effective.

Those interested in learning more about the Stella Maris ministry in the U.S. can visit the USCGB's Stella Maris website at <https://www.uscgb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/stella-maris>





Deacon Directors from Region V

By Deacon John Archer, Stella Maris Deacon

This past week I was invited to attend a meeting of the Deacon Directors from Region V. The meeting was held at Our Lady Queen of Peace retreat center located outside of Memphis. Region V is comprised of the following states.

Alabama (Mobile and Birmingham), Mississippi (Biloxi and Jackson), Louisiana (New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Houma/ Thibodaux) and Kentucky (Lexington, Owensboro, Louisville, Covington) and Tennessee (Memphis, Knoxville and Nashville). While Diocese did not attend, I was able to present the ministry to several ports with opportunities.

Biloxi has an existing Deacon in Gulfport, but I discussed possibilities for future assistance at Pascagoula and Gulfport.

“Stella Maris Ministry, supporting Seafarers and all people of the sea at the Port of Mobile, Alabama.”

Memphis recognized that they are a major port. I asked that they share the possibilities with the local Deacon community to identify potential ministry assistance.

Paduca, Kentucky has a deacon candidate in the city and Fr Ken Mikulck the Deacon Director is a sailor and his grandmother served as a cook on river tugs.

They were all interested in the ministry and offered to be open to potential opportunities.

I am thankful to Our Deacon Director Ronnie Hathorne for the invitation and the support. A group picture is included below.



A Spiritual Vision for Seafarers' Welfare: Bishop Frank Schuster

By [NAMMA](#)



On February 23, during the Houston Training, we were honored by the presence of Bishop Frank Schuster, Stella Maris Bishop Promoter for the United States. His participation brought both pastoral encouragement and theological depth to the gathering. Speaking first at Morning Prayer, he reflected on the Gospel of Jesus walking on the water and connected it powerfully to the lived experience of those in seafarers' ministry. Drawing on the Genesis image of primordial chaos — *tohu wa bohu* — he described the stormy waters of life as moments when “what was ordered becomes disordered,” yet reminded us that Christ steps into precisely that chaos. “When we are focused on Jesus as a people of faith,” he said, “we can transcend the storminess.” Without Christ in the boat, the storm overwhelms; with him, it becomes manageable.



Later, in his extended reflection on “Spiritual Vision,” Bishop Schuster turned to the healing of Bartimaeus and explored Christianity as fundamentally “a way of seeing.” Quoting Bishop Robert Barron, he emphasized that “Christianity is first and foremost a way of seeing. Everything in the Christian life flows from a transformation of vision.” He illustrated this through personal stories — receiving his first pair of glasses as a child and suddenly seeing the world in clarity — and through theological reflection on metanoia, the call to “transcend your mind” and see reality through God’s eyes.

For those engaged in maritime ministry, he described evangelization as “spiritual optometry.” In a ministry of hospitality, he noted, much begins with presence and witness: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” First impressions matter. Symbols matter. “Optics matter.” When we step aboard a ship, we enter someone else’s home. We are there to welcome, to listen, and to serve. In his words, seafaring ministry can be summed up simply: “Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring a friend to Christ.”

He also spoke candidly about the danger of discouragement and burnout, using the metaphor of the black dot on a white page to warn against focusing only on darkness while missing the light and grace surrounding us. Spiritual vision, he reminded us, allows us to see not only the world differently, but ourselves differently — as God sees us. Echoing Archbishop Fulton Sheen, he described God as a “Relentless Lover” who pursues the soul.

Bishop Schuster concluded by inviting us to examine our own sight: “What would happen if we saw ourselves and the world around us with Jesus’ eyes?” For those serving seafarers — strangers who become neighbors — this question lies at the heart of the ministry. His presence in Houston was a gift, and his reflections offered both encouragement and a renewed spiritual foundation for the work ahead.



Father Sinclair Blessing in Cape Vincent 2026

By Father Sinclair

I was honored to be invited by 1st Assistant Engineer James Earley to board the MV Cape Vincent on Friday, April 10, 2026.

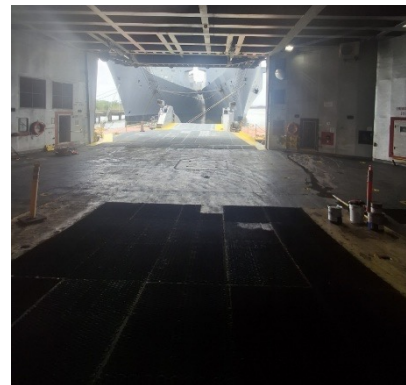
The Cape Vincent is part of our National Ready Reserve Fleet, and is docked at the Beaumont [Maritime Administration - MARAD](#) National Reserve Fleet.

The crew was very busy activating the vessel. Yes, they took a moment to join me on the bridge to bless this ship in preparation for her sailing from the reserve fleet.

After using the blessing for a ship from the Book of Blessings, 1st Assistant Engineer James Earley led me to the engine room where I blessed the control room and the main engine.

Through the intercession of Servant of God [Brother Marinus](#)/ Captain Leonard La Rue, may God carry the crew of the MV Cape Vincent in the palm of his hand, and return them home safely to their families.

From left to right: Chief Mate Dennis Badaczewski (MM&P, Cape Victory), 3rd Assistant Engineer Edgar Pacana (MEBA, Cape Vincent), 1st Assistant Engineer James Earley (MEBA, Cape Vincent), Fr. Sinclair Oubre (SIU & Apostleship of the Sea - Diocese of Beaumont), Captain Karen Reyes (MM&P, Cape Vincent), 3rd Mate Jeremy Rychlik (MM&P, Cape Vincent), Electro Ray Orosco (MFOW, Cape Vincent), Steward Assistant Keydi Montes (SIU, Cape Vincent)



Houston Training 2026: Building Capacity for Seafarers' Welfare

By [NAMMA](#)



From February 22 to 27, the North American Maritime Ministry Association's Houston training was back in full strength. Officially known as the Introduction to Seafarers Welfare and Maritime Ministry course, the program gathered a remarkable group of students from across the globe for a week of learning, reflection, and fellowship in one of the world's great port cities. Participants came from Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Chile, Panama, Canada, and the United States, representing a rich diversity of backgrounds and ministry contexts.



Designed especially for new chaplains, ship visitors, and volunteers, the course offers an essential overview of the maritime industry, the realities of seafarers' lives, and the wide variety of people encountered in this ministry. In recent years, seafarers' ministries have undergone profound developments. Challenges related to shore leave, mental health, connectivity and internet access on board, and shifting industry expectations have reshaped the landscape of welfare work. Those involved in seafarers' welfare ministry must continue to grow professionally in order to adapt wisely and faithfully. This course provides not only foundational knowledge, but also practical strategies for increasing the capacity of maritime ministry in changing times.

Managed by NAMMA with the generous assistance of local committee hosts at the Houston International Seafarers' Center, the training benefits from strong partnerships. It carries the endorsement of Stella Maris (United States region) and the International Christian Maritime Association, reflecting a spirit of collaboration across traditions. After completing online introductory lessons on seafarers' welfare and ship visiting, students arrived in Houston ready to deepen their understanding through lectures, discussion, and site visits.

A highlight of the week was a visit from Bishop Frank Schuster, bishop promoter of Stella Maris in the United States, who spoke about maintaining a proper vision and perspective in this demanding yet deeply meaningful work. Dr. Jason Zuidema coordinated the course, with teaching support from Dr. Christopher Graham, Assistant Director of NAMMA, who also led the daily prayer times that framed each day in reflection and encouragement.

The program included a wide range of lectures and off-site visits. Students toured the Seafarers International Union, explored maritime history at the Houston Maritime Museum, and visited the Norwegian Seaman's Church. The Rev'd Mark Nestlehutt of the Seamen's Church Institute delivered thoughtful sessions on the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, and seafarers' advocacy. Dr. Shannon Guillot-Wright of the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston addressed critical issues related to seafarers' and fishers' health. Additional contributions from Darren Shelton, Deacon Jeff Willard, Father Ian Hutchinson Cervantes, and representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard broadened the students' exposure to the many partners involved in maritime welfare.

Houston is an ideal setting for this course. Its scale, diversity of maritime activity, and concentration of ministries allow participants to see firsthand how different organizations approach their work with distinct emphases and strengths. Students often remarked that they learned as much from one another as from the formal sessions. The conversations around tables, during van rides, and over shared meals were as formative as the classroom lectures.

Throughout the week, participants experienced generous Texas hospitality, strong support from the Port of Houston and other partners, and, not least, excellent food. More importantly, they shared prayer, best practices, and mutual encouragement. The return of the Houston training was not simply a resumption of a program; it was a renewed commitment to equipping those called to serve seafarers. For all who took part, it was a week of learning, fellowship, and deep gratitude.

Archbishop Rivituso Celebrates Mass onboard MV Cardiff

By Deacon John J. Archer
Stella Maris Chaplain and Director of Region V

When Archbishop Rivituso joined the Archdiocese of Mobile, he immediately offered his support to the ministry by celebrating Mass in commemoration of our 80th anniversary. During November Archbishop indicated that he would be available for masses on the weekend of December 20 and 21st. On Sunday December 21 MV Cardiff docked at a lay berth awaiting their slot at the McDuffie Coal terminal. Based on my initial conversation with Capt. Gary and crew they indicated that they would like to have a Mass on board if possible. Chaplain Fr Lito Capeding said “It’s a milestone for us in the Ministry to be accompanied by our shepherd on this 4th Sunday of Advent”. The MV Cardiff came from Belgium and will be heading to Turkey with a cargo of coal on a 25-day journey. What a blessed Christmas gift to bring Jesus to them. Archbishop has already indicated that he would like to schedule time several times a year to be available for visits.





Stella Maris, Our Lady,
Star of the Sea pray for us.

ICMA Welcomes Leadership of the Apostleship of the Sea

By [Jason Zuidema](#)

A cordial and hopeful meeting took place in London, UK on April 10 between the newly appointed leadership of the Apostleship of the Sea and representatives of the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA), marking an important moment of renewal and continuity in global seafarers' welfare. The Apostleship of the Sea, *Apostolatus Maris* in Latin, is known in many ports or countries also by the Latin title *Stella Maris*, which refers to Mary, Star of the Sea.



Dr. Jason Zuidema (ICMA), Fr. Avelino Chico (Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development), His Excellency Luis Quinteiro Fiuza (President ad interim of the Apostleship of the Sea), Pastor Matthias Ristau (General Secretary, Deutsche Seemannsmission eV and Trustee, ICMA), Reverend Fr Ritchille Salinas SVD Secretary General ad interim of the Apostleship of the Sea)

Pope Leo XIV updated the structures of the Apostleship of the Sea in the official [chirograph document dated 13 November 2025](#). Following the establishment of the Apostleship of the Sea as the central and coordinating body of the work of the Apostleship of the Sea worldwide, the *Apostolatus Maris* now enjoys canonical public juridical personality and has its headquarters in the Vatican City State. It is canonically dependent on the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, which exercises both the direction of the entire work of the Apostleship of the Sea and the supervision of its central body.

During this foundational period, Bishop Luis Quinteiro Fiuza serves as President ad interim, and Fr. Ritchille Salinas, S.V.D., as Secretary General ad interim, entrusted with guiding the organization in its initial phase of development. This process has carefully accompanied by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. In this context, Fr. Avelino Chico, S.J., Capo Ufficio (Head of Office) of the Dicastery, joined and accompanied the leadership of the Apostleship of the Sea leadership during the official visit to London.

Bishop Fiuza had previously served as Bishop Promoter to the Spanish Episcopal Conference and Fr. Salinas, as Port Chaplain in Hamburg, Germany. In addition to serving as the international reference leaders for the Apostleship of the Sea, they are entrusted with the primary task of preparing its first General Assembly.

In these early days of its renewed life, the Apostleship of the Sea leadership has undertaken a series of high-level meetings in London, a city of central importance to the global maritime community. As the home of the International Maritime Organization, as well as key industry and labor bodies, London provides a natural gathering point for dialogue among those shaping the present and future of maritime life. Over several days, the Apostleship of the Sea delegation has engaged with these partners, strengthening relationships and deepening mutual understanding.

Among these meetings was a scheduled and warm exchange with ICMA. The association was represented by Trustee, Pastor Matthias Ristau and General Secretary Dr. Jason Zuidema. The conversation provided an opportunity to reflect on ICMA's global mission, its network of member organizations, and its long-standing commitment to the welfare of seafarers in ports around the world. Particular attention was given to the historic and ongoing contribution of the Apostleship of the Sea within this shared work.

Indeed, the Apostleship of the Sea holds a place of deep significance within ICMA's story. As one of its founding members in 1969, it has been central to the development of ecumenical cooperation in maritime ministry. Its global reach, pastoral presence, and longstanding dedication to seafarers have shaped not only its own tradition but also the broader ethos of collaboration that defines ICMA. This shared history provided a rich backdrop for the present conversation, underscoring both continuity and renewal.

Looking ahead, the relationship between the Apostleship of the Sea and ICMA will continue to be strengthened through

active participation in governance and shared initiatives. Fr. Ritchille has been confirmed by Apostleship of the Sea to take on the role of trustee within ICMA, representing the Apostleship of the Sea at a global level. In doing so, he will bring the perspectives, priorities, and lived experience of Apostleship of the Sea chaplains and volunteers into the heart of ICMA's decision-making processes.

The meeting in London was marked by a spirit of mutual respect and genuine enthusiasm. It offered a valuable opportunity to exchange priorities, to learn about emerging projects, and to establish a firm foundation for collaboration in the years ahead. At a time when seafarers continue to face complex challenges, such moments of unity and shared purpose are both encouraging and necessary.

Update from Mobile, Alabama Spring 2026

By: Deacon John Archer

While we have not had any major events in the last few months, we have stayed busy attending to the varying needs at the port. Reflecting on our activities several events stood out as worthy of note.

On January 17th, we welcomed Fr Barry Kundu aboard the MV Maria to celebrate mass for the crew. Fr Barry is the pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes parish here in Mobile and he offered to fill-in while Fr Lito was visiting family in the Philippines. Fr Barry was impressed as the crew fully participated in Mass and sang very well even with our music leader. During this time in port one ordinary seaman visited with his great aunt who is a member of the local Filipino community here in Mobile. Fr. Barry looks forward to his next visit.

Captain Dave Berault was pilot aboard the liner MV Cherokee. He welcomed Capt. Michael back to Mobile and congratulated newly promoted Capt. Manny on his promotion from Chief Officer. The Cherokee along with sister ship Mayan move rail cars between Mobile and Coatzacoalcas, Mexico. Many of the crew have returned here over several years. Capt. Berault is the first line of welcome for many arriving seafarers, and he is a staunch supporter of the ministry. Dave's son Gabe has recently joined our team, so it is a family affair.

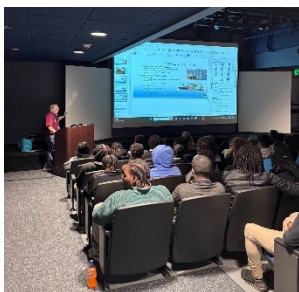
On February 4th new volunteer Nikola King reported that an Ordinary Seaman from the MV Onega Elbe was very thankful for our free Wi-Fi. The seaman was able to use video/phone call, to see his baby son live for the first time since his son was born in November 2025.

On February 18th the MV Century Emerald asked for assistance to buy some provisions from Walmart. When we arrived at Walmart for the pickup we immediately realized the crew's definition of SOME was more than we could handle. Our partners at Mobile Baptist Seafarers Ministry immediately offered assistance with their 10-passenger van, which was quickly filled. Our Toyota Sienna then only needed two additional trips to transport all the provisions to the vessel.

During March, we had the privilege of assisting some crew from the Cable laying vessel Normand Maximus. The vessel docked at the Middle Bay port, which is located some 15 miles south of the main port. The visit was unique in several ways. The vessel was here for almost one month while they loaded cable from the facility at the port. The crew totaled 160 people comprising technical staff, seafarers, and support staff. Crew worked 12-hour days (7 to 7) without days off. The transport times were not our usual midday or early evening as the pickup times revolved around the 7's. As I live nearby I offered to pick up some crew at 8 AM and 8 PM. Due to the crew's rest requirements these times seemed to work best. Trips included the typical Walmart visits, the Mall and a couple of trips to the USS Alabama museum. The crew was appreciative of the customized services provided by all three Mobile Port Ministry teams.

Mr. Daniel Stover one of our most active volunteers has been working with the US Maritime Museum of the Gulf to provide visitors with a firsthand account of life on the sea and life around the port. Daniel was US merchant seaman for 35 years retiring as a Chief Engineer. In retirement, he worked as a surveyor and now he is a ship visitor. Daniel's goal is to raise awareness in the local community about the job opportunities around the port of Mobile as well as the need to visit foreign seafarers here in Mobile.

We are thankful for all the team members who volunteer time to join us in this ministry. Our Archbishop even offered to celebrate Mass on Easter Sunday afternoon, but sadly, the schedules that day did not provide an opportunity.





A Calling, Not Just a Job: Seafarers' Welfare in Corpus Christi

By: [Jason Zuidema](#)



It was a beautiful day in Corpus Christi when I stopped in to visit the Corpus Christi International Seafarers Center. The sun was bright over the bay, and the breeze carried that unmistakable sense of a working waterfront. I was only passing through, but I was received with warmth and generosity by Sharon Emerson and her staff. What followed was a friendly, unhurried conversation about history, hospitality, and the deeper meaning of seafarers' welfare in this port city.

Sharon speaks about the center with clarity and conviction shaped by years of service. "It is a hospitality home away from home for all the foreign and domestic seafarers whose ships call on our port," she explained, comparing it to "a USO, which is all over the world for American military. Seamen

centers are all over the world for Merchant Seafarers." The comparison is helpful. Just as military personnel find familiar welcome far from home, merchant crews arriving in Corpus Christi find a place where they are known and received.



That phrase, “home away from home,” captures the heart of the ministry. In a typical week, she explained, “we provide transportation for them. We take them to the mall shopping or places of worship, if that’s what they would like. Or they come here and they drink beer with their buddies and chat and watch TV and order Hawaiian pizza.” It is simple, practical hospitality. It is also profoundly human. After months at sea, even an ordinary evening of pizza and conversation can feel extraordinary.

The center is also a place where global tensions soften in the face of shared experience. Sharon told me, “We had Russians and Ukrainians in here at the same time, at the same table, and they were sympathetic with each other because they had their families to watch out for.” Most of their families, she said, “were moved into Poland for safety.” Around that table, nationality did not disappear, but something deeper took precedence. They were seafarers, far from home, concerned for loved ones.

Advocacy is as important as hospitality. “If there’s a problem,” Sharon said, “if I can’t get the Coast Guard to fix it, then I’ll call our ITF inspector in Houston, and he’ll fix it, which we just recently did.” The center is not merely a lounge or community hall. It is a place where someone will make a phone call, ask hard questions, and ensure that issues are addressed.

The history of the center reveals why that advocacy matters. It was founded in 1974 after “the bishop called Alice Malloy, who became the founder of the Seaman center, and said, ‘Alice, you have to do something. These seafarers are getting off their ships, walking downtown and being mugged and robbed of their money.’” Alice went to work. The city donated a building on Water Street. Later, when they were asked to move, she secured support from the Kenedy Foundation to build the current facility. “We’re in a spot called Heritage Park,” Sharon explained, “and so we had to build to the Heritage Park code, which makes it look like an old building, but it’s not.” The building may echo the past in its design, but its mission remains timely.

One of the distinctive features of the Corpus Christi center is its broad embrace of the maritime community. While the heart of its services is directed toward foreign-flag crews, the doors are open much wider. “For the American mariners, we provide the same transportation and anything advocacy that they like.” The Coast Guard uses the facility “for their advancements and for their retirement parties, all at no charge.” Maritime groups

gather there regularly. It is not only a seafarers center but a meeting place for the port community itself.

The connection to the wider port is evident in its fundraising events. St. Patrick’s Day celebrations, barbecues, and an annual lobster feast bring hundreds through the doors. “Last year the port bought 600 tickets,” Sharon noted, explaining that they distribute them to customers and employees. These events do more than raise funds. They build awareness and deepen relationships between the port and the people who serve those who pass through it.

When I asked Sharon what advice she would offer to someone new in maritime ministry, her answer went straight to the core. “This is not much of a job to me. It’s more of a calling.” That sense of vocation shapes her approach. “You have to be one with the seafarers and listen to them and be sympathetic, and get them to talk.” She begins by asking about their position on board and then about their families. “You just have to make them feel at ease and not bring up anything controversial.” Over time, trust grows. She has received letters and emails of thanks, she told me, “with hearts all over them.”

Her reflections on social isolation were particularly striking. Many assume that

“This is not much of a job to me. It’s more of a calling.” - “You have to be one with the seafarers and listen to them and be sympathetic, and get them to talk.”

connectivity solves loneliness. “Well, no, that’s not like being there when your daughter graduates from high school, or your son gets married, or one of your parents dies. It’s not the same.” That absence, she said, “is the cause for a lot of distress.” Chaplains go aboard ships to listen and support, but the center itself offers a tangible sign that someone ashore cares.

Sharon’s own journey into this work was shaped by years as “a paralegal and a marine investigator.” Responding to emergencies such as oil spills or man overboard cases, she saw firsthand how crews lived and how they were treated. “I’ve seen how these seafarers live. I’ve seen how they’re treated, some fair, some not so fair.” At the time, she said, “I never could say anything about it while I was in the position I was in. But now I can and do.” That experience gives weight to her advocacy today.

National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for mariners and all people of the sea

May 22nd is National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for mariners and all people of the sea. This was designated and approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 14, 2005 to encourage the faithful in the United States to support, remember and pray for maritime workers such as merchant mariners/seafarers, fishermen, port personnel and those in the maritime Industry.

May 22nd coincides with National Maritime Day in the United States, celebrated since 1993 to honor those who serve merchant mariners and to recognize the benefits of the maritime industry. Ninety percent of the world's goods are transported by sea and the waterways and there are an estimated 1.2 million merchant mariners/seafarers worldwide.



In Loving Memory



Bishop René Henry Gracida (1923–2026) significantly shaped the Apostleship of the Sea in the USA by serving as its National Episcopal Promoter, a role he held during his time as the first bishop of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee (1975–1983). He had a tireless dedication to the people of the sea and to the Stella Maris Ministry, an international Catholic organization which provides pastoral care to seafarers and maritime workers. He reached out to those on the peripheries for many years, something we have all been encouraged to do by the late Pope Francis who urged the Church to embrace “encounter” and “accompaniment” of those in the peripheries. “Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen”

“Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen”

Stella Maris ministry in the United States of America

Stella Maris ministry in the United States of America – Apostleship of the Sea serves seafarers, fishers, their families, port personnel, and all who work or travel on the seas. Seafarers are often away from their home parishes, and some seafarers have no parish setting to help them maintain lasting ties with their faith and families. A network of Catholic chaplains assists seafarers to meet their basic needs, offer genuine welcome, spiritual renewal, and to continue the mission of Christ himself in the maritime world, through Encounter, Service, and Celebration.

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/list-port-chaplains>

Stella Maris Prayer: O Mary, Star of the Sea,

Light of every ocean, guide seafarers across all dark and stormy seas that they may reach the haven of peace and light prepared in Him who calmed the sea.

As we set forth upon the oceans of the world and cross the deserts of our time, show us, O Mary, the fruit of your womb, for without your Son we are lost.

Pray that we will never fail on life's journey, that in heart and mind, in word and deed, in days of turmoil and in days of calm, we will always look to Christ and say, "Who is this that even wind and sea obey him?"

Our Lady Star of the Sea Pray for us.

Amen.



Sea Sunday Message 2026

July 12, 2026

Beyond Cargo and Commerce: The Human Face of the Sea

Dear brothers and sisters,

The life of the world continues to pass through the seas, rivers, lakes, and waterways of the world. Behind global trade, fishing industries, ports, inland navigation routes, and maritime networks are countless seafarers, fishers, port workers, and maritime communities whose labor sustains nations, connects peoples, brings livelihood, and supports families across continents. The crisis of the Strait of Hormuz has reminded the world of how deeply humanity depends on the sea and those who work upon it.

Much of what societies rely upon each day arrives quietly through perseverance, sacrifice, skill, and endurance of the people of the sea. On Sea Sunday, the Church remembers these men and women not merely for the work they perform or the goods they transport, but as human persons created in the image and likeness of God and endowed with inviolable dignity. Each carries a unique story shaped by hope and fears, burdens and resilience, relationships and dreams that deserve to be seen, honored, and cherished.

Today, many maritime workers continue to face growing uncertainty and hardship. The sea, which has long connected peoples and nations, is increasingly marked by tension, insecurity, war, and fear. Many crew members not only navigate the inherent dangers of the sea and waterways but have also recently been affected by armed conflicts that have resulted in their virtual confinement on board, food shortages, and even fear for their lives. This has heightened their sense of loneliness, their isolation from society at large, their separation from loved ones, and their emotional exhaustion.

Paradoxically, even in an age of greater digital communication, many seafarers experience deeper isolation. Human closeness is becoming rarer. Reduced crew size, shorter shore leaves, demanding schedules, and the constant pressure of modern maritime life often leave little space for rest, fraternity, or genuine human encounters. In such realities, people need more than efficient systems or distant words. They need a presence. They need to know that they are remembered, welcomed, heard, and loved.

As Pope Leo XIV reminds us in his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, technological and economic systems must never reduce the human person to “data, a cog in a machine or a commodity” (n.180). Rather, they must always safeguard the dignity, freedom, and humanity of every individual. A ship, therefore, must never become a place of silent isolation or indifference, a modern Babel where people live side by side yet remain unseen and unheard. Instead, maritime life can stand as a living witness that people of diverse nations, cultures, and beliefs are still capable of fraternity, solidarity, mutual respect, and peaceful interdependence.

In many ways, the sea itself teaches humanity that we belong to one another. Oceans do not divide people; they connect them. Each day, those who work across seas and waterways become bridges between nations, cultures, religions, and economies. In a world wounded by conflict and fragmentation, their lives bear witness to the enduring possibility of cooperation, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. Through her pastoral presence, the Church seeks to remind every seafarer, fisher, and maritime worker that they are never forgotten and never alone.

At the same time, the sea calls humanity to deeper reflection. The oceans are not merely routes of commerce or sources of economic wealth; they are part of God’s creation, entrusted to human responsibility and care. They nourish populations, sustain livelihoods, and remind us of both the beauty and fragility of our common home. Yet today, the seas increasingly suffer from pollution, exploitation, environmental degradation, and the consequences of irresponsible human activity. When the oceans suffer, humanity suffers with them - especially fishers, coastal communities, and all those whose lives depend directly on the health of marine ecosystems. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us in *Magnifica Humanitas*, authentic progress can never be measured solely by efficiency, technological advancement, or profit, but must always be guided by the dignity of the human person, the common good, and responsibility toward future generations (nn. 12, 92). These words speak powerfully to the maritime and inland navigation world, where many seafarers, fishers, and maritime workers quietly endure loneliness, fatigue, danger, and prolonged separation from their families and usual places of worship while faithfully carrying out the essential work that sustains countless lives and communities across the globe. In this context, care for the sea can never be separated from care for the human person. Protecting marine life, promoting ethical and sustainable practices, defending the dignity and safety of maritime workers, and fostering a spirit of global responsibility are not competing priorities but dimensions of

a single moral commitment to the common good and to the flourishing of both people and our shared marine environment.

This commitment is rooted in the Gospel itself, which offers an image that continue to speak powerfully to the maritime world today. Amid the storm, while fear overtook the disciples and the waves threatened the boat, Jesus remained with them: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40). Christ did not remain safely on the shore. He entered the vulnerability of those crossing troubled waters. Even today, the Lord accompanies all who live and work at sea, walking beside those who face uncertainty, fatigue, danger and separation from families.

Because the Church is called to continue Christ’s mission in the world, She too cannot remain distant from the lived experience of maritime workers. The Lord who entered the boat with his disciples continues to draw near to those who navigate the seas and inland waterways of our time, and the Church is called to make that closeness visible through her presence and ministry. She is called to enter the boat: to accompany, to listen, to console, to defend human dignity, and to become a visible sign of hope and home amid the storms of human life. Through chaplaincies, maritime ministries, and a humble human presence rooted in the long tradition of the Apostleship of the Sea (*Opus Apostolatus Maris*), locally known in many places under names such as *Stella Maris*, the Church seeks to remind every seafarer, fisher, maritime worker, and inland navigation worker that they are remembered, valued, and never alone. Within this broad mission of service and accompaniment, our Catholic port chaplaincies throughout the world welcome men and women of all nationalities and creeds. At the same time, we are especially grateful for the opportunity to provide prayer, pastoral care and the sacraments to Catholic seafarers, who constitute a significant portion of the crews and officers arriving in ports far from their homes, families, and usual places of worship.

I express deep gratitude to all seafarers, fishers, and maritime workers and their families throughout the world. I thank you not only for what you do but for who you are. Your sacrifices sustain global trade, food security, and the well-being of countless communities. I also express my heartfelt gratitude to chaplains, volunteers, maritime welfare organizations, and pastoral workers who faithfully continue to bring friendship, prayer, listening and practical support to ports and ships around the world. May this Sea Sunday renew in all of us a deeper commitment to closeness, solidarity, care for creation

and care for all the people of the sea and inland waterways. Entrusting them to the care of Mary, Star of the Sea, we pray for safety, dignity, peace, and hope for all who journey and work upon the waters.

Card. Michael Czerny, S.J.
Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

A Significant Pastoral Visitation at Port of Everglades

On the afternoon of April 15, 2026, Port Everglades became the setting for a deeply meaningful pastoral encounter, as the Bishop Promoter of National Stella Maris, the Most Rev. Frank R. Schuster, joined by Stella Maris National Director, Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ, made a special visit to the Seafarers House. Their presence highlighted the Church's enduring commitment to the pastoral care of seafarers—those often-unseen individuals whose work sustains the flow of global trade.

They were warmly welcomed upon arrival by the local team, including team leader Launa and dedicated staff members Amati and Erika. Guiding the visit was Father Peter Lin, the port chaplain, who has been closely involved in the daily ministry of outreach and accompaniment to seafarers. With both familiarity and pastoral sensitivity, Father Peter led Bishop Schuster and Sr. Joanna through the Seafarers House, offering them a firsthand look at the life and mission of this vital center.

The Seafarers House is far more than a physical facility; it is a place of rest, renewal, and human connection. For many seafarers who spend months at sea, often isolated from family and familiar surroundings, stepping into such a space can be profoundly uplifting. Father Peter explained how the center provides not only practical services—such as communication access, transportation assistance, and basic necessities—but also emotional and spiritual support. In this environment, seafarers are welcomed not as transient workers, but as valued individuals.

As the tour continued, Bishop Schuster and Sr. Joanna listened attentively to the experiences shared by the team. Stories emerged of long voyages, cultural diversity, and the quiet resilience of crews navigating both the physical demands of the sea and the emotional weight of separation from home. Father Peter emphasized that much of the ministry lies in simple but meaningful gestures: a listening ear, a warm greeting, or a moment of prayer. These small acts often become powerful signs of care and solidarity.

A particularly significant part of the visit was the decision to go beyond the center and reach out directly to those in need. Father Peter accompanied Bishop Schuster and Sr. Joanna to the vessel SLV Honduras, which had been out of operation for nearly a month. The prolonged delay had created a difficult

situation for the crew, bringing uncertainty, stress, and concern about their future.

Rather than waiting for the seafarers to come ashore, the pastoral team went to meet them where they were. This outward movement reflected the very heart of maritime ministry: a willingness to cross boundaries and bring presence into places of hardship. As they boarded the vessel, they were greeted with a mixture of surprise and gratitude. For the crew, the visit was an unexpected but deeply appreciated sign that they had not been forgotten.

Gathered together on board, the group shared a moment of prayer. Father Peter helped facilitate this encounter, creating a space where language barriers and cultural differences gave way to a shared sense of faith and humanity. Bishop Schuster offered words of blessing, invoking God's protection, strength, and peace upon the seafarers. Sr. Joanna's presence added a gentle encouragement, reinforcing the message of care and accompaniment.

Though simple in form, the prayer carried profound meaning. In the midst of uncertainty, it brought comfort and renewed hope. For the crew of SLV Honduras, it was more than a religious gesture—it was a reminder of their dignity and worth, and of a wider community that stands with them.

Following the visit to the vessel, the group returned to the Seafarers House with a renewed sense of purpose. For Bishop Schuster and Sr. Joanna, the experience provided valuable insight into the realities faced by seafarers and the essential role of Stella Maris in responding to those needs. For Father Peter and the local team, the visit served as an affirmation of their ongoing efforts, often carried out quietly and without recognition.

In conversation after the tour, Father Peter reflected on the importance of presence in ministry. "Sometimes," he noted, "what matters most is simply being there—showing up, listening, and walking with people in their situation." His words captured the essence of the day's events: a ministry rooted not in grand gestures, but in faithful accompaniment.

The visit also underscored the collaborative nature of maritime ministry. From national leadership to local staff and volunteers, each plays a role in creating a network of care that extends across ports and oceans. Encounters like this strengthen those connections, ensuring that the mission remains both grounded in local realities and supported by a broader vision.

In today's fast-paced and efficiency-driven maritime industry, the human dimension can easily be overlooked. Yet the visit to Port Everglades served as a powerful reminder that behind every vessel are individuals with stories, struggles, and hopes. The Church's outreach through Stella Maris seeks to honor that humanity, offering not only assistance but also compassion and dignity.

As the day came to a close, the impact of the visit lingered. For the staff, it was a moment of encouragement; for the seafarers, a source of hope; and for the visiting leaders, a deeper understanding of the mission they support. Above all, it was a testament to a simple but profound truth: that no seafarer journeys alone.

Through the leadership of Bishop Schuster and Sr. Joanna, and the dedicated service of Father Peter Lin and his team, the Church continues to be a visible and caring presence in the maritime world—reaching out across the waters to bring light, comfort, and hope to those who need it most.





United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops



STELLA MARIS

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS
AROUND THE WORLD

Upcoming Events

July 12, 2026

Sea Sunday Message

Philadelphia August 4-6

North American Maritime Ministry Association Annual Conference

September 27, 2026

Feast of Our Lady Star of the Sea.

November 21, 2026

World Fisheries day

June 1–3, 2027 NAMMA Conference

Montréal, Québec, Canada - Le Nouvel Hôtel (1740 René-Lévesque
West, Montréal, Québec H3H 1R3)