



STELLA MARIS

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS
AROUND THE WORLD

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An Article to memorialize our Stella Maris Deacon Pepe.

From: Fr. Peter Lin, Stella Maris port chaplin at the port of Everglades, Florida

A Faithful Servant of God and Friend to Seafarers: In Memory of Deacon José “Pepe” Chirinos

On January 3, 2025, in his beloved homeland of Peru, Deacon José “Pepe” Chirinos peacefully entered eternal rest at the age of 74. His passing left a deep void in the lives of his family, the seafarers he served so faithfully, and those of us privileged to work alongside him in ministry. For more than a decade, Pepe was not only my colleague in the Stella Maris maritime ministry at Port Everglades but also a dear friend, companion in prayer, and constant reminder of the joy that flows from serving God with humility.

A Life Rooted in Faith and Family

Born on October 28, 1950, in Cayme, Arequipa, Peru, José was the twelfth of sixteen children in the Chirinos family. Growing up in such a large family gave him a sense of community and solidarity from an early age. He often spoke of the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood that shaped him, of learning to share not only food and space but also joys, sorrows, and responsibilities. These early lessons prepared him for a life of service, teaching him that love multiplies when it is given away.

José pursued his studies at the Universidad Católica de Santa María in Arequipa and at GUE San Miguel de Piura. His education gave him discipline and a broad vision of the world, but it was his faith and his openness to God’s call that shaped the path of his life.

Later, José moved to the United States, where he built both a professional and spiritual life. He attained an Associate of Arts degree in International Business from Miami Dade College, and later, a Master of Business Administration in International Business, Trade, and Commerce from Nova Southeastern

University. His sharp mind, fluency in languages, and ability to understand people of diverse cultures made him uniquely suited for a ministry that touched the lives of mariners from across the globe.

Called to Serve as Deacon

Beyond his professional accomplishments, José responded to God’s deeper call: a vocation to the diaconate. He was ordained as a deacon for the Archdiocese of Miami and faithfully served the community of St. Augustine Parish in Coral Gables. There, he proclaimed the Gospel, assisted at the altar, baptized children, celebrated weddings, and consoled families in times of grief. His parishioners knew him as a man of prayer, a deacon whose voice carried the Word of God with conviction yet whose demeanour was gentle, patient, and kind.

As a deacon, Pepe embraced the three-fold ministry of Word, Altar, and Charity. While he loved serving at Mass, what made him truly come alive was the ministry of presence—being with people where they were, listening with compassion, and offering both practical and spiritual support.



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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A Friend and Brother in Stella Maris Ministry

I had the privilege of working alongside Deacon Pepe for many years in the Stella Maris maritime ministry at Seafarers' House in Port Everglades, a multifaith community serving mariners far from home. For twelve years, I have been chaplain there, and for much of that time Pepe was my closest collaborator. Together we boarded countless ships, greeting crews from every continent.

The rhythm of our days was simple but profound: climbing gangways, shaking hands, exchanging smiles, and bringing words of encouragement. Often, we offered prayers with seafarers who were anxious about their families back home. At other times, we distributed Bibles, rosaries, devotionals, or simply shared a moment of laughter. Pepe occasionally assisted in celebrating Masses on board, bringing the sacraments to men and women who longed for the Eucharist while far from their parishes.

What struck me most about Pepe was his joyful presence. Mariners would immediately notice his warmth. He had the gift of speaking heart to heart, whether in Spanish, English, or simply through a smile when words were unnecessary. He never rushed conversations; he listened deeply, allowing seafarers to feel seen and valued.

His Qualities of Spirit

Pepe's character was marked by humility. Though highly educated and capable, he never sought recognition. His joy was simply to serve. He was cheerful, always ready with a kind word or a joke to lighten the mood. He was patient—especially with those who carried heavy burdens or spoke in broken English. He was deeply in love with God and had a profound love for the men and women of the sea.

His ministry was not about programs or strategies but about presence. For Pepe, the Gospel was lived one encounter at a time: a prayer said together on a ship's deck, a blessing for a captain about to begin a long voyage, a comforting hand on the shoulder of a sailor missing his children. In these simple gestures, the Kingdom of God was made visible.

A Brother Remembered

Since his sudden passing while visiting Peru, many seafarers, parishioners, and fellow ministers have shared stories of how Deacon Pepe touched their lives. Some remember his words of encouragement when they felt far from home. Others recall the way he accompanied them through loss or sickness. For those of us who worked alongside him, the memory of his laughter and dedication remains vivid.

Personally, I miss his companionship deeply. Ministry can sometimes feel heavy, especially when faced with the loneliness of mariners or the vastness of the sea. Yet Pepe always reminded me that we were never alone. "God walks with us on every ship," he would say. His faith was steady, his hope unshakable.



His Legacy

Deacon Pepe leaves behind more than memories; he leaves a legacy of faith, service, and love. His life reminds us that ministry is not about grand achievements but about fidelity in small, daily acts of kindness. He showed us that joy can be found in humility, that patience bears fruit, and that God's love reaches every corner of the earth—including the deck of a cargo ship in the middle of the ocean.

Though he has gone to the Lord, his spirit remains with us at Seafarers' House and at St. Augustine Parish. His witness continues to inspire us to welcome the stranger, comfort the lonely, and bring the sacraments to those far from home.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: "Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord." We believe that Pepe now hears these words, spoken to him by the Lord whom he served so faithfully.



Conclusion

As I reflect on the life of my friend and colleague, I am filled with gratitude. Gratitude for the many ships we boarded together, for the countless prayers we offered, and for the friendship that was a gift from God. His passing is a great loss, but his example is a greater gift.

May we continue the mission with the same cheerful humility that Pepe embodied. May his memory inspire all of us in ministry to love God more deeply and to serve His people more generously. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace.



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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@usccb.org

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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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THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US. ‘Charita Christi Urget Nos’ (cf. 2nd Corinthians 5:14-15).

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

“For unto us a child is born, unto
us a son is given” (cf. *Isaiah 9:6*).
As we rejoice in the gift of the
Child Jesus, I wish all seafarers,
fishers, and those who work at sea

and their families the blessings of Christmas and a happy
New Year.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect of the Vatican’s Dicastery
for Promoting Integral Human Development, in his statement
on Sea Sunday, July 13, 2025, remarked that “We want all
those who work at sea to know that they are in the heart of the
Church,” and that “they are not alone in their demands for
justice, dignity and joy.” (<https://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/news/2025-news/06-giugno/messaggio-domenica-del-mare/EN-Msg-Domenica-del-Mare-2025.pdf>)

Indeed, the people of the sea’s plight is of great concern to the
Catholic Church. These men and women labor tirelessly on
the seas. They are often away from their homes and families,
and some have no parish setting to help them maintain lasting
ties with their faith and families. During this Christmas
season, we ask Mary, our mother, guide, and protector in our
life’s journey, to watch over all those who work at sea. As Jesus
Christ our Lord accompanied his disciples in their vessels,
helped them in their work, and calmed the storms, so too will
the Church continue to accompany and care for the spiritual
needs of those who labor at sea. We will continue to stand in
solidarity, assisting in meeting their needs, providing welcome,
ship visits, on-site chapels for prayer and mass, spiritual care,
safe environment, facilitating communication with loved
ones, encouraging just contracts, and offering recreational
opportunities while at Port.

The Church is dedicated to encouraging chaplains and
maritime leaders to develop active and sustained ministries
of presence to meet the spiritual needs of seafarers. Meeting
seafarers where they are and providing pastoral care is an
important aspect of the Church’s pastoral response. The
Church’s concern for pastoral care stems from its mission
to bring the message of salvation to all people (cf. *Matthew*
28:19). Given the difficult circumstances seafarers face, we

must challenge ourselves as Christians to figure out ways to
help, with mercy and love for our neighbors. It is important
to remember that the people who work at sea are human
beings created in the image, and likeness of God. (cf. *Genesis*
1:26-27). As echoed in the scriptures, we must seek ways to
welcome, promote, support, accompany, encourage, and
empower all those who work on the sea.

This Christmas, let us call on our Blessed Mother Mary, Star
of the Sea, and enter into devotions like Mary, Star of the
Sea (Stella Maris) which reminds us of Our Lady’s role as a
guiding star for sailors. Let us ask her to guide the seafarers
when temptation arises, when they are faced with trials and
tribulations in life, and when they are tossed upon the stormy
waves of the seas. This Christmas, as we honor God and
express the great joy of the birth of Jesus, (cf. *Luke 2:10-14*),
we call on people to help one another. We ask that you donate
items to share with seafarers and their families, especially those
in need who have no one to help them. During this Christmas
season, we wish seafarers, their families, and everyone the
blessings of Christmas and a happy New Year!

Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ
Stella Maris, National Director



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The After Mass

By: Deacon Fred Ferrara

On Monday, June 16 at 10 am, Fr Andiy Egargo, & Deacon Fred Ferrara, both from Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Parish, in Massapequa Park, served Mass aboard the Mexican Navel training ship *Cuauhtémoc*.

As many of us might recall from news articles, on May 17th an unexpected event occurred as the *Cuauhtémoc* along with 277 Seamen (177 of which were cadets), struck the Brooklyn Bridge after experiencing a loss of power. Tragically, two cadets lost their lives, and another 20 were injured and brought to Triage in Manhattan. The remaining Cadets soon were transported back to Mexico after this tragic event.

Fr. John Corbett, Pastor of Stella Maris (in Port Newark, NJ), and Ministry Regional Director, had been mentoring Deacon Fred, a recent addition to our Ministry of the Sea, when he received the call from Rev. Dr. Bill Allport, Staff Chaplain for Seamen's Church, to arrange the celebration of mass onboard the ship. Father Corbett and Father Bill took this as an opportunity to involve Deacon Fred with the task and brought him along to the ship's drydock in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

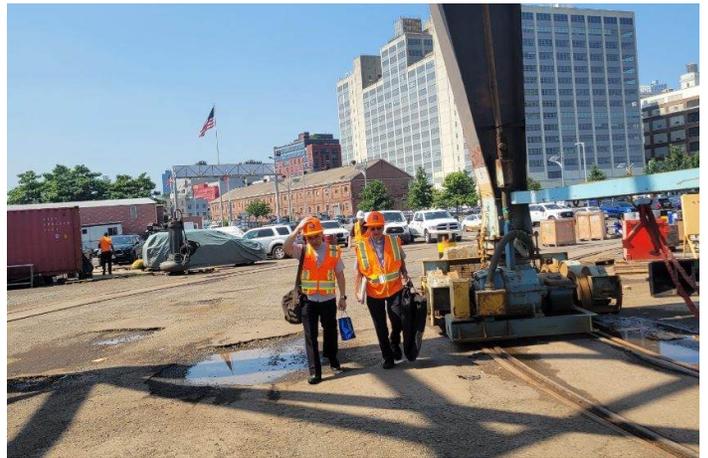
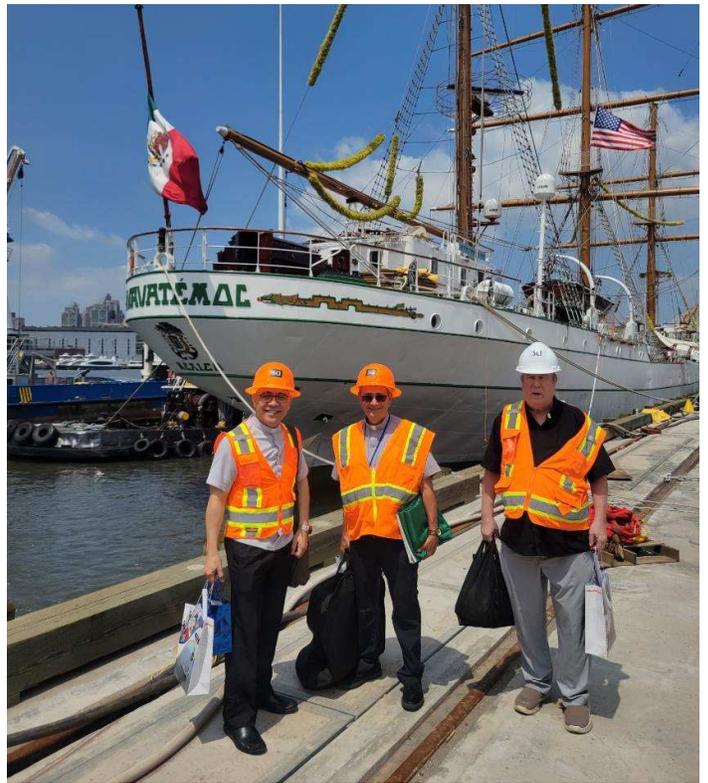
The remaining crew, consisting mostly of 80 trainers, had asked to have a Mass said aboard ship before departing for their next port in Staten Island, where further repairs to the ship's mast would be made before returning to Mexico.

The Mass served to memorialize the two cadets that died and comfort the crew with messages of hope through reflections shared by their fellow cadets. Despite the cultural differences, the compassion and caring exhibited by both the Ministers and Officers of the ship pierced all barriers, reflecting the universality of our faith in Christ.

The temperature that day, nearing 100 F°, was only exceeded by the warm welcome and thanks from the officers and crew, and who later provided each minister with gift souvenirs of the ship.

Upon departing the ship, the unspoken message was clear...in Christ, we will all live.







New Bishop for Stella Maris USA visits region August 21, 2025

By: Erin Ciszczon,
Northwest Indiana Catholic

Bishop Schuster, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle, became the Bishop Promoter for the United States on June 1 of this year, after Bishop Brendan Cahill of Victoria, Texas, completed a seven-year term in the role.

In 1920, the Catholic port ministry was conceived and developed in Glasgow, Scotland, by Rev. Donald Macintosh, Arthur Gannon and Peter Anson, who were concerned about the lack of witness the Church was showing aboard ships, which laid the foundation for Stella Maris.

Stella Maris means “star of the seas,” and is one of the favorite titles mariners give to Our Lady, explained Bishop Schuster.

“On the water, you can imagine a star, the North Star, never moving, never changing, being stable, while the oceans are often turbulent,” he said. “All of us, not just mariners, can look at our Blessed Mother as that star, almost like a moon in the sense that the light that comes to us comes from Christ.”

Today, ships carry 95% of goods transported globally, and the international ministry remains focused on serving seafarers worldwide.

“At some point, the materials, components, or just the actual physical goods, have come to us by way of our seafarers,” explained Bishop Schuster. “Our seafarers spend months and months and months at sea, away from their families, and when they come to port, some are able to come ashore, some aren’t.”

He continued, “When they’re on a shore, as Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, ‘Good and faithful servant, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,’ and Jesus also said in the Gospel of St. John, ‘Love others, as I have loved you.’ We need to share that love with everybody that comes our way, but in a particular way, those who often get forgotten.”



MERRILLVILLE – Bishop Frank Schuster, Bishop Promoter for Stella Maris USA, visited the Diocese of Gary on Aug. 12 to learn more about the ports in the country and how best to minister to the needs of seafarers.

That’s why the apostolate of the sea, the bishop stated, is very important. While there are more than 100 cargo and cruise ports throughout the United States, and lots of issues Stella Maris is involved with, the heart of the ministry is very simple.

“It’s about loving our neighbor and loving the stranger,” said Bishop Schuster.

The Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle expressed his appreciation for the hospitality of Bishop Robert J. McClory and others at the Diocese of Gary. The day of his visit to Northwest Indiana, the bishops celebrated Mass at the Pastoral Center in Merrillville and had the opportunity to visit the Port of Indiana in Burns Harbor. It was the first port Bishop Schuster visited outside of his home diocese.

He explained that in Seattle, the diocese has a good relationship with the port officials who allow them to come aboard with the captain’s permission for ministry work. In fact, on Holy Thursday, Bishop Schuster celebrated Mass on a freighter carrying corn from the Philippines that was predominantly Catholic.

“I was able to do the Last Supper Mass with them and wash their feet,” he said. “It was a very powerful thing.”

No ships were in the Port of Indiana on the day Bishop Schuster and Bishop McClory arrived in Burns Harbor; however, they received a warm welcome from port authorities, including Port Director Ryan McCoy, shipping agents and others who gave details on the history of the area and provided a tour of the grounds by bus.

Accompanying the bishops on the tour was Deacon Robert Petro. Deacon Petro, appointed by the Diocese of Gary's Bishop Robert McClory to serve in the local ministry, shared that at the Port of Burns Harbor, he has met with seafarers from Ukraine, Poland, Eastern Europe, India, Yemen and the Philippines.

"These seafarers can go months without even placing their feet on solid ground and struggle with isolation from society and their religious communities," he said.

Deacon Petro learned of the opportunity to support South Lake Michigan, including the Port of Burns Harbor and the mills, upon becoming ordained a deacon in June 2024, and Bishop Robert J. McClory gave his approval to work with the ministry.

"I love serving others," Deacon Petro said. "My interest in seafarers originated with my great uncle, who was a merchant mariner during the war, whose ship was sunk in the Arctic Ocean as part of convoy PQ-17, taking supplies to Russia. I remember him sharing stories with us when I was a small child, and the experiences he described as an individual and crew left

their mark on me."

Deacon Petro works closely with Father Mike Enright from the Archdiocese of Chicago and other seafarer supporting groups in serving those coming to the south end of the lake.

"A ship's time in port has become increasingly compressed, and so we try to provide them with the services they need in a tight window of time," he said. "We usually communicate via WhatsApp to coordinate taking them to Mass, shopping runs, and meeting with them on their ships. We are a contact for them on the rare occasion they can get away for a few hours, helping them get to Chicago, using Uber, etc."

Deacon Petro continued, "We are also working to build a relationship with the Coast Guard in Michigan City to provide ministerial services if needed. The USCG includes many young men and women who remind me of my own children, including my daughter, who is on active duty."

During the visit, Bishop Schuster and Deacon Petro discussed the needs of seafarers and the industry support structure port workers, shipping agents, when visiting South Lake Michigan and how they can support them, in addition to how the diocese can become further involved.

For more information on Stella Maris, visit usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/stella-maris-who-we-are

"These seafarers can go months without even placing their feet on solid ground and struggle with isolation from society and their religious communities."

A Shepherd on Shore and at Sea

By: Fr. Lito Capeding

When I first entered the priesthood, I thought my ministry would remain within the familiar walls of a parish—celebrating Mass, administering the sacraments, and journeying with people through the joys and sorrows of life. Today, I do all those things as pastor of the Shrine of the Holy Parish and St. John Mission Church in Bromley. But God has also entrusted me with another calling: to serve as chaplain for the Catholic Maritime Ministry. Since 2008, I have been blessed to serve as port chaplain in Mobile, Alabama, a role that has widened my heart and stretched my priesthood in ways I could not have imagined.

In the parish, I find stability. It is where families gather around the altar of the Lord, where children are baptized, couples exchange vows, and where we say farewell to our loved ones in hope of the resurrection. It is a place where community grows and faith takes root in daily life.

On the ships, however, my ministry looks different. I step into the lives of men and women who spend long months at sea, away from their families. Sometimes we celebrate Mass in the mess hall, sometimes I hear confessions in the quiet of a cabin, and often I simply listen to stories—stories of sacrifice, longing, courage, and faith. These moments remind me that the presence of Christ is not confined to church walls; He walks with His people even in the middle of the ocean.

Being Filipino by heritage, I feel an especially deep connection with the many Filipino seafarers who arrive at the Port of Mobile. For them, I am not only a priest but also a kababayan—a fellow Filipino who understands their culture, their language, and the ache of being far from home. My hope is that Mobile becomes for them a welcome port away from home, where the Church embraces them as family.

Balancing parish responsibilities with maritime ministry is not always easy. Yet I have come to see how one vocation enriches the other. My parishioners in Bromley learn that they are part of a global Catholic family, and seafarers discover that the Church remembers and welcomes them, even in foreign ports.

This ministry has taught me that being a priest is, above all, about presence. Whether in a parish pew or on the deck of a cargo ship, I am called to make Christ's presence real. His promise echoes in my heart every time I step aboard a vessel: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20).

A Prayer for Seafarers

Lord of the seas and skies, bless all who journey across the oceans. Protect them from danger, strengthen them in loneliness, and comfort their families who wait for their return. May every port remind them of Your love, and may the Church always be a home for them, wherever they go. Amen.

About the Author

Fr. Lito Capeding, Archdiocese of Mobile, is pastor of the Shrine of the Holy Parish and St. John Mission Church in Bromley. Since 2008, he has also served as Catholic Port Chaplain in Mobile, Alabama. A Filipino by heritage, he ministers to seafarers from around the world—especially the many Filipinos who arrive at the Port of Mobile—helping them find a welcome port away from home.



STELLA MARIS

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS
AROUND THE WORLD

Spirit afloat

Port Ministry supports the world's seafarers on land, at sea, and in the office

By: Maryann P. Hobbie BCC

This article is courtesy of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. The NACC publishes a magazine, Works of Hope, dedicated to supporting and promoting pastoral ministry across the country.

In our global economy, roughly 80 to 90 percent of the consumer goods we use every day has been transported by cargo ship somewhere in its journey from manufacturing to our homes.

Generally speaking, each of the 100,000 floating behemoths are operated by comparatively tiny crews of 20 people who are at sea for months at a time. Tallied up, that's a population of nearly 2 million seafaring souls working on ships, away from their loved ones, away from their faith communities, and away from society.

"I got the impression right away that homesickness is probably the toughest thing seafarers go through," said Bishop Frank Schuster, the Bishop Promoter for Stella Maris in the United States. "It is a huge sacrifice that they make. It's a huge cross they bear."

International seafarers. International Ministries.

There are two primary ministry organizations at work in the United States. Stella Maris, translated as Mary, Star of the Sea, is an international Catholic organization for port chaplains. Bishop Schuster was appointed to his position in May 2025. "My role is to be the bridge between the important work our chaplains are doing in ports all across the country, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)."

But the organization's US day-to-day operations are overseen by Sister Joanna Okereke HHJC, who has served as Stella Maris' National Director since 2015. "Maritime mission was created to reach out to seafarers, fishers, their families, all who work or travel on the high seas, and port personnel," she explained. "This is because the 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. And so, the Church created a network of chaplains, maritime deacons and lay ecclesial ministers to accommodate the seafarer's unique lifestyle and needs, to continue the mission of Christ himself, through encounter, service, and celebration.

"These chaplains," Sister continued, "face challenges including advocating for the rights of seafarers. They face bureaucracy

and physical constraints within the ports, the emotional toll of providing support in crisis and trauma, and the difficult nature of connecting with a transient and diverse seafarer populations. Their work is demanding and can lead to emotional burnout."

The North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA) is the big tent organization, bringing together the spectrum of Christian port chaplaincy associations. It hosts an annual conference and training event to ensure members, new or experienced, are up to date on mission and vision of the organization, safety and security practices, and to energize the entire team toward its common goal.

"Our goal is to ensure every Christian chaplain working in the maritime industry is equipped with the resources and training they need to live out their ministry," explained NAMMA Director Dr. Jason Zuidema.

"We are so propelled in the Western world to look at numbers, to look at bigness and greatness," he commented. "This is not the vision of scripture. As chaplains, seafarers are wonderful to work for because they're also an unseen workforce. This is the space where chaplains operate, too. So port chaplains are the unseen among the unseen, the ones no one ever looks at, but who are the ones who bring light and hope and love to every vessel they board."

Ministry is onboard

Port chaplaincy offers many looks. Some port chaplains enjoy going onboard to visit seafarers in their space. "I was blessed to celebrate the Holy Thursday Mass of the Last Supper on a vessel here in Seattle," recalled Bishop Schuster. "It was my privilege to wash the Philippine crew's feet as a part of the service. It is just one way for our church to show these men and women that we love them, we remember them, and we are here for them. It was the most blessed moment I have had as I entered my new role as seafarer promoter."

Ministry is on land

Others find satisfaction in serving seafarers' worldly needs. "I feel especially close to Christ when I'm simply driving visiting seafarers the back and forth to Walmart," explained Deacon Paul Rosenbaum, who has been serving at the Port of Charleston since 2004. "When I see them climbing the gangplank with their bags of snacks, shampoo, and other things, I know I've done something good. For us that may seem like a trivial thing, something mundane. But I think that's exactly what Jesus wants us to be doing."

Deacon Rosenbaum said he also enjoys meeting and talking to individuals from all faiths. "I encountered an Indian seafarer with a rosary in his hand. I asked if he was Catholic and he replied that he was not. He was Hindu. 'I love the Catholic church,' he told me. 'Wherever we go in the world, you take care of us.'"

“And that’s what we are all about in our ministry. Another time a Hindu vessel officer asked why I do this. I told him I do it for two reasons. First, we depend on the men and women onboard for nearly everything we have, and this is my way of thanking them. Secondly, if I’m going to dress like this, in my clericals, I have to live out my Christian beliefs. God gave us two great commandments: love God and love your neighbor.”

Ministry is in the office

Port ministry is certainly focused on spiritual care for each seafarer. Prayers, blessings, eucharist services, and masses are all elements of the job. But there is also advocacy work to be done. “We step in with major humanitarian violations,” said Michele Barutha, an accomplished commercial vessel officer and member who also sits on the board of the Seattle Seafarers Center. “Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon for some seafarers to not receive the wages they were promised, or to have their medical needs go unaddressed while at sea or even be at sea on an unsafe vessel. We stand with and for those people who need an advocate to help them claim what it rightfully theirs, from payment to safety.

“Seafarer abandonment is at an all-time high,” she continued. “Some companies sail under the flag of countries who don’t adhere to international law. As a result, when they determine the cost of maintenance, the cost of fuel, or the cost of taking care of the crew is more than they want to pay, they just abandon it all, leaving the seafarers to fend for themselves in a foreign port. Our ministry helps those people to not lose hope and to know they are not alone here.”

Follow the star of the sea

Deacon Rosenbaum noted that every port ministry group can offer volunteer opportunities for any interest. “Certainly, there is a need for trained and formed pastoral care ministers and chaplains to tend seafarers’ spiritual needs. But people can also assist in making ditty bags of toiletries, make food packs, or even be a driver on a shopping run.”

“Today’s need in port ministry can be simply summarized by the word accompaniment,” said Bishop Schuster. “Our seafarers need that human connection most of all. It is something we can all provide. When you think of the star out on an ocean, it provides direction, gives you navigation, it shows you where you are. It’s a point of stability over an ocean that’s often tumultuous. And life can be that way...whether you’re a seafarer or not. And so, we can allow our Blessed Mother to embrace us as that star of the sea, on that ocean of life that we travel through together.”

International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) World Conference on the Welfare of Seafarers in Barcelona October 5-11, 2025. **Theme: “Navigating Change”**

The 2025 International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) World Conference in Barcelona, with the theme “*Navigating Change*,” gathered more than 250 participants from 43 countries representing 27 Christian organizations dedicated to the well-being of seafarers, sailors, fishermen and their families.



The Conference addressed the impact of artificial intelligence, digitalization, and mental health in the maritime world. The presentations featured information on the welfare of Seafarers, stories from members, and the pastoral and social care for seafarers. From those presentations, the conference discussed how to cultivate resources and analyzed the main challenges facing people who live and work at sea. Other central issues included maritime training, the growing cruise sector, and issues specific to maritime regions, with the aim of promoting fairer and safer working conditions through international regulations and better state surveillance.

Among the speakers were several Catalan leaders linked to the maritime institutional world. The Director General of Religious Affairs on behalf of the President of the Generalitat, deputy Mayor of Barcelona City Council, and Head of Organization and Sustainability of the Port of Barcelona were all present at the conference. Also present were representatives of the corporation of Pilots of the Port of Barcelona and the provincial director of the Social Marine Institute. Others include top-level international leaders in the maritime field such as: The Secretary General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), other leaders from the International Chamber of Shipping, International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), European projects such as SEA-CARE, Maritime Safety Inspector of the Barcelona Maritime

Captaincy, Provincial Director of the Social Institute of the Navy, the Barcelona Pilots Corporation, and the leadership of Stella Maris Ministries.

The group participated in the opening Ecumenical Worship in La Sagrada Família Basilica Crypt, with Homily by Cardinal Juan José Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona, Spain. The places visited include a tour of the Maritime Museum, a visit to building of Stella Maris, and the Port of Barcelona.

Masses were celebrated by Cardinal Juan José Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona as well as Bishop Frank Schuster, Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, Washington and the Bishop promoter of Stella Maris United States.



(ICMA) continued...

After the ICMA conference, the Stella Maris meeting was held in the Novotel in Barcelona City, October 10, 2025. The day was spent in reflection, sharing, and listening to the various issues concerning Stella Maris Ministry worldwide. Those gathered reflected on the future of Stella Maris network and the mission to the People of the Sea, areas of work, and the challenges facing seafarer's and chaplains in fulfilling their mission.

Fr. Avelino Chico, SJ, recently appointed as Head of the Office of the Dicastery of Integral Human Development, provided an update on the activities of the Dicastery and the future of the Stella Maris Network. Fr. Chico, originally from Angola, had worked for many years with the Jesuit Refugee Services and as the Coordinator of the African Section on Migrants and Refugees in the Dicastery.

The love and devotion of the chaplains served as an example of the Church's support and care for the people of the sea whose work is often invisible and who often feel lost, abandoned, and in need of guidance. Both Cardinal Omella and Bishop Frank Schuster highlighted that Mary Star of the Sea continually inspires people to live the Gospel with faith and hope, reminding them to live her example of prayer, as well as her hope in times of turmoil and despair. She offers reassurance and encouragement in the face of adversity that, through her intercession, we may be strengthened and guided closer to Christ during our earthly journey. Indeed, the respect, solidarity, and dignity of the people of the sea and the importance of accompanying, protecting, and caring for the dignity of the lives of seafarers remain ever important and relevant today.







United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops



STELLA MARIS

SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS
AROUND THE WORLD