



Sea Sunday – 10 July 2022

## APPEAL TALK

Every year, over 28,000 merchant ships visit Australian ports. These ships are crewed by over 300,000 seafarers. Most of these mariners come from developing countries and are employed because they represent cheap labour for the ship owners. Even in the best of times, seafarers suffer harsh and demanding conditions aboard the ship. Having signed on for 8 to 10 months contracts, seafarers suffer from boredom, loneliness, constant noise and vibration, and the ever-present fear of suffering an injury or sickness whilst at sea. Every year, thousands of seafarers are injured and many die, many having taken their own life. Last year, more than 250 seafarers were hospitalised in Australia because of a medical emergency suffered on board a ship.

So, what is *Sea Sunday*? This is a national appeal undertaken by the Catholic Church in Australia each year across every parish on the second Sunday in July to raise awareness of the needs of seafarers – the often unseen, vital workers that keep our economies going, but often at great personal cost to themselves and their families.

When Jesus said: “...love the Lord, your God...and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27), the instruction was very clear.

But, quite apart from any wish to follow the teaching of Jesus, all Australians should be grateful for the work performed on their behalf by seafarers. All of the cars we drive came to us from overseas on ships. Most of the clothing we wear comes from overseas, brought to us on ships. Much of our furniture and white goods come to us on ships. The wealth we enjoy comes from the export of products on ships. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to overseas seafarers, but they are very largely forgotten – we never think of them.

Pope Francis in 2014 called on those who work for the wellbeing of seafarers and their families to “be the voice of those workers who live far from their loved ones and face dangerous and difficult situations.”

Stella Maris seafarers’ ministry has the largest number of centres and chaplaincies around the world. It sits within the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and its network headquarters is in Rome. In Australia, Stella Maris runs seafarers’ welfare services centres in all the major ports and offers chaplaincy services in many others. Stella Maris Seafarer Centres are places where the stranger is welcomed. They are places where volunteers assist seafarers with their telephones and internet and Wi-Fi connections to keep in touch with their families. Complying with COVID safeguards, some volunteers visit the ships in the harbour. And in pre COVID times, some volunteers transported men to and from their ships, the Centre and the nearest shops. They support the sick or injured seafarers in hospital and keep contact with their families overseas. Volunteers at the Stella Maris Seafarers Centres around the world have backgrounds as varied as those of the disciples. What they have in common is the wish to respond to the call of Jesus to spread His love for all people, to welcome and show hospitality to seafarers, to be open to them, to listen to their hopes, their fears, and their joys and to help in practical ways.

Today, we acknowledge the work of seafarers and pray for their safety. Today is also an opportunity for you to respond to the call to mission that we all share. In the famous Parable it's a Samaritan who helps the Jew who's been attacked and robbed. Because the Samaritan didn't see an enemy, but a fellow human being in need of help. At the end of the Parable, the expert in Scripture answers Jesus by saying that the Samaritan was a neighbour to the man who was attacked because he was: *The one who had mercy on him* (Lk 10:37). Jesus says to the man: “*Go and do likewise!*” (Lk 10:37). Those words of Jesus must make their home in us.