



2024 Sea Sunday Talk

Seafarer Sunday gives us the opportunity to acknowledge all seafarers, the 1.8 million of them who sail the world's oceans.

Australia is an island nation. We are totally dependent on seafarers to supply us with 99% of all goods that come into our country every day. Seafarers are in many ways the lifeblood of our nation. And yet, the seafarer is not seen. He or she is invisible to the world at large. To quote Pope Francis: '...without sailors the global economy would come to a standstill'.

Those whose livelihoods are spent at sea are vulnerable to unexpected events: for example, the Covid 19 Pandemic made crew changes impossible. No port would allow seafarers to disembark. They were prisoners on their vessels.

This is where Stella Maris (formerly known as Apostleship of the Sea), the official maritime charity of the Catholic Church, steps in. Stella Maris has been caring for seafarers for over a hundred years. It is the largest ship-visiting network in the world and supports seafarers and fishers in Australia and around the world. Their Centre Managers, Chaplains and Volunteers are a lifeline for mariners. They offer a listening ear and much-needed emotional and spiritual support. They bring food parcels, offer Wi-Fi so seafarers can call home, and provide hardship grants, provide access for urgent medical support and access to mental health counselling.

To all seafarers who disembark in Australia, Stella Maris stands as a beacon, In Matthew's Gospel, (Ch:25 V.35) we are reminded of the importance of welcoming the stranger. This is needed more than ever for seafarers today. Imagine the relief they feel when they see a friendly face coming onboard, someone to talk to, someone who cares, where a home away from home atmosphere is created for them, regardless of race, colour, rank, or creed. Volunteers and staff alike, are driven by a passion for and a commitment to support all seafarers in their pastoral, welfare and advocacy needs.

Mariners live on the margins of society with most of their working life spent beyond the reach of land. And they are far away from their loved ones. All these factors considered, you can then understand how some seafarers' mental health could become fragile. Recorded suicide numbers, for example, have tripled in recent years.

Stella Maris is their special place where they feel safe in the environment that is provided. A place where they can relax, and speak freely about all manner of topics. And if needed someone can advocate on their behalf.

Finally when next you take a walk along the beach and you see the ships out there in the bay or in port, please say a prayer for the seafarers working on those vessels.