



APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

Supporting Seafarers Worldwide

Antwerp Port Bulletin n° 5

Summer Edition 2020

### Breaking News :

Apostolatus Maris will very soon leave its well known address at the Italëlei in Antwerp and move to new premises : The Antwerp Harbour Hotel ! Our organization certainly does not stop but will reorganize its activities to better serve the needs of the seamen. More details can be found in this Newsletter.

As from **16<sup>th</sup> October** our new address will be:

Apostolatus Maris Noorderlaan 100 2030 Antwerpen

Dear Sponsor, Dear Reader,

In this newsletter we explain how we dealt with the worldwide pandemic which severely hit our society, the shipping world in general and the lives of the seamen in particular. Seamen are a vulnerable group of workers and this worldwide crisis affected them in many ways. With a worldwide travel ban, an unprecedented aviation crisis and all kinds of entry restrictions, seamen have been hit very hard. Many are confined to their vessel for a long time and cannot return home. All the more for our organization to roll up our sleeves as you will find out in this newsletter!

Furthermore we bring you in this letter more details about our decision to move to new premises. A hard but a necessary decision.

As this is also an opportunity to look back in time we bring you the first part of the history of the seamen's center Apostolatus Maris/Stella Maris in Antwerp.



## Re-opening Apostolatus Maris

The bar at the Antwerp Seafarers' Center, Italiëlei 72 in Antwerpen, will re-open on Friday the 17th of July at 19.00h. The Club was in lock-down due to the corona regulations. However in the meantime the chaplains of the different missions and their volunteers went on visiting the ships in port.

We also offer again transport by bus from the docks to the Italiëlei **but only on request** and therefore please call +32 3 541 18 57 before 5 pm.

From now on we welcome again all seamen and visitors each day between 19.00h and 23.00h in the Club.

## Apostolatus Maris on the move !



*The buildings of Apostolatus Maris – Stella Maris at Italiëlei 72 / 74 Antwerpen*

Recently the board of Apostolatus Maris took an important and far reaching decision. In the fall of this year the Seamen's center will leave its well-known home at the Italiëlei in Antwerp where it was located since mid of last century.

Chairman Jacques D'Havé explains : 'The buildings are old and started to cost more and more, also due to all kinds of official regulations. At the same time income is falling. For example, there are rooms for students of the Maritime Academy, but there is a lot of competition in the room market for students. The number of crew members also decreases

on ships and they stay less time in the ports, which reduces the number of visitors to us. Although it are still a few thousand visitors a year, we must prepare for the future”



*Apostolatus Maris home for different seamen's missions at Italiëlei 74 Antwerpen*

"It is a pity, but there is no other way, so we fully understand it," adds port chaplain Jos Vanhoof. "At the same time, we are definitely going to continue with our services and are now looking to the future, although it will be an emotional farewell for the employees. "

### A brief history of the Antwerp Apostolatus Maris - Stella Maris (part one )

Without ever having that name, Apostolatus Maris in Antwerp has grown into a maritime center 'avant la lettre'. As the sea has no borders it became an oecumenical parish in the 1960s ( despite its Roman Catholic roots) with the active participation of the other sailor missions in the port of Antwerp: the Sailors 'Society (Protestant), the German Seamen's Mission (Evangelical) and the Mission to Seafarers (Anglican).

The chaplains with their volunteers divided the port on the right and left banks into sectors and the ships visited there. They held one work meeting every Tuesday morning in the foyer at the Italiëlei. There was also a duty list for the reception of the sailors: every evening of the week from 7 pm to 11 pm.

In addition to the welfare for the sailors, many organizations have established themselves over the years related to seafaring, mariners and the port.

The Royal Belgian Sailors' College, for example, is domiciled at this address since its opening in 1951. Also the Secretariat of the 'Day of the Sailors'(the annual tribute to the fallen sea warriors), is located at the premises.

The Belgian non-profit association Ships Archives found shelter in the basements of number 72 pending a permanent housing. EMPA (European Maritime Pilots Association) hired the first floor of nr 74 until they moved to Brussels. Later the Professional Association of Pilots (BvL) established its secretariat at this address. The backdoor building was then hired by Swedish welfare.

A first sailor house of Catholic origin in Antwerp was built in the 1930s founded by Father Scheutist Kruyten who took care of the Congolese sailors, sailing on Belgian ships and in particular on the so called 'Congo boats'.

The Compagnie Maritime Belge, ship-owner of the 'Congoboats' provided a house at the Van Dyckkaai 1 in Antwerp. It was named "Ndaka ya Bissu" or 'Ons Huis - Our Home'. Sailors found shelter when their ship was in dry dock at the port for repairs, or in case of emergency etc.

However, the good relationship with his sponsor did not last. Because Kruyten was also too concerned about the working conditions on board of the ships he came in conflict with the shipping company's personnel department. Officers found that Chaplain Kruyten also interacted too familiarly with the crew, undermining their authority on board. Conclusion: exit Ndaka ya Bissu!

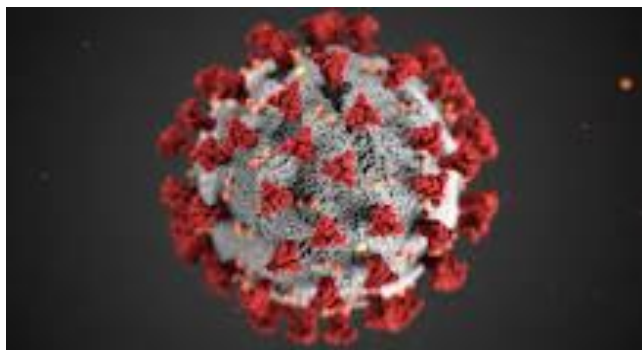
( to be followed in our next Newsletter)



## Apostolatus Maris and the Coronavirus

With a view on our 100<sup>th</sup> year celebration, we opened last Newsletter with the remark that 2020 was going to be a very special year for Apostolatus Maris. No one expected however that this year would change the world history !

The Coronavirus outbreak in China end of last year caused in the beginning of 2020 a worldwide pandemic. In February the virus reached large parts of Europe. On March 18<sup>th</sup> the Belgian Government introduced a lockdown of the economy and public live similar to measures taken by other European countries like Germany, France and The Netherlands. Borders were closed and people were ordered to stay home. All public





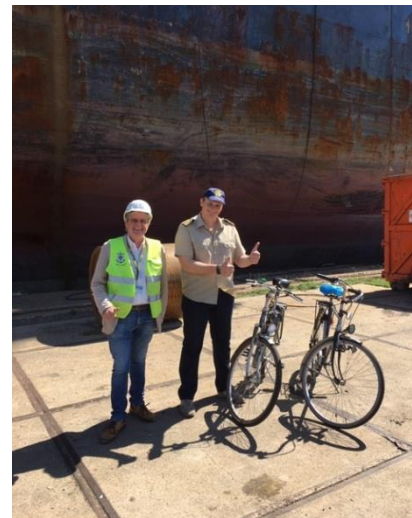
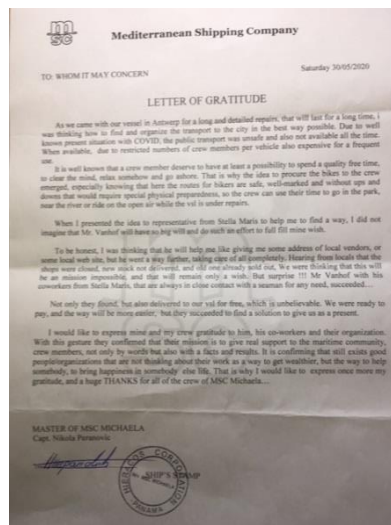
events were cancelled; restaurants and pubs had to close their doors. The government was actively promoting people to work from home. Health workers were constantly in the frontline and received unanimous appreciation for their heroic work.

Also the activities of Apostolatus Maris were severely affected by the pandemic. The bus services from the port to our Seamen's club were suspended. For the first time in its history the Seamen's club of Apostolatus Maris had to be closed just like all other businesses in our country. No one believed this would ever be possible !

As you can read further in this Newsletter our volunteers and port chaplains however continued their work to the benefit of the ship's crew, be it that they had to reorganize and redirect their activities e.g. all ship visits took place in the open air and on deck with a facemask. The appreciation from the crews visited which in many cases were very vulnerable was great.

In June Apostolatus Maris organized a query amongst the Antwerp Ship Agents on the instructions of the owners about the shoreleave for the crew. As a result we will re-open the club now as from on Friday the 17th of July at 19.00h.

## Bicycles for MSC Michaella



*Master and crew of MSC Michaella expressed their sincere gratitude to Apostolatus Maris for the bicycles*

Some vessels stay for a long time in the port e.g. during repair works. This was the case for MSC Michaella. The vessel docked for repairs in Antwerp. During one of his ship's visits our port chaplain father Jos Van Hoof met the Master. He explained that due to the Coronavirus the crew was confined to the vessel as no suitable transport was available. They remarked however that in the Antwerp Port area an excellent system of bicycle paths, linking the dock area with the city, was available. Bicycles were the perfect solution to mobilize the ship's crew, but how to get them?

The coronavirus pandemic has brought out the very best in humanity. Soon our volunteers found sponsors and they could deliver finally four bikes to the master and crew who were extremely grateful with this gift!

**All gifts, no matter how simple or small, are always accepted with thanks. The gratitude of the sincere sailors is our greatest reward and motivation to continue our mission.**

### Crew changes, a dramatic problem for sailors and owners in Corona times

A little known fact in the general coverage of the Corona problem was the often dramatic circumstances for many crew members because of the impossibility to organize crew changes. Some sources mention an amount of up to 400.000 seamen trapped on board of their vessel as a consequence of the Corona crisis.

Following the closing of the borders, general travel restrictions and a worldwide aviation



crisis, seamen have been hit extremely hard. Some crews are stranded on board for months or are floating around on one of the 96.000 commercial vessels, leading to dramatic circumstances and even suicides! Other sailors are waiting at home for new work.

Many sources call for a structural solution, by granting seamen worldwide the status of essential worker. The workload if sailors have to work much longer than their contract prescribes increases the risk of major incidents. Certainly on complex and high-tech ships such as oil and gas tankers this is a serious problem.

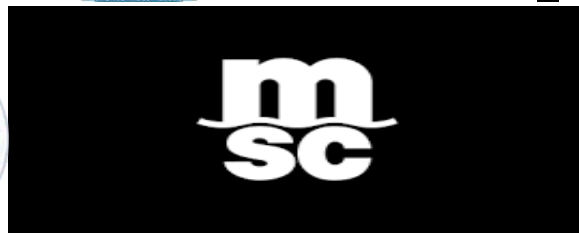
The International Shipping Organization IMO also urged to set up 'international safety corridors' worldwide, within the estimated 1.5 million sailors can travel without restrictions. Also other measures are urgently required : For example, setting up separate transport zones for seafarers in airports and granting to allow maritime documents as identification for customs purposes.

### **Next Events :**

1<sup>st</sup> October : celebration 100 th year Apostolatus Maris - press conference and reception

16<sup>th</sup> October : move to new premises : Harbour Hotel – Noorderlaan 100 2030 Antwerpen

## Our Sponsors :



**You or your company/organization want to support the Seafarers Center?**

**Go for it!**

Your support is greatly appreciated. Any amount is welcome. We worked out some special sponsorship formulas:

Bronze: 2.500 €

Silver: 5.000 €

Gold: > 5.000 € up to your discretion

More information?

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