



Apostleship of the Sea

Supporting Seafarers Worldwide

Stella Maris Antwerp Bulletin n° 7

Spring Edition 2021

Dear Sponsor, Dear Reader,

It is with deep sorrow that we were informed end of March about the passing away of Brian Millson, our colleague port chaplain in Antwerp.

Brian was an active colleague and a supportive member of the Antwerp Seafarers Centre. As a result of his generous spirit and his pleasant personality he was loved by all. Many seamen will remember Brian as a good friend always having a listening ear for their troubles. Stella Maris Antwerp presented its condolences to his wife, his daughters and his family in Canada. We will miss Brian.

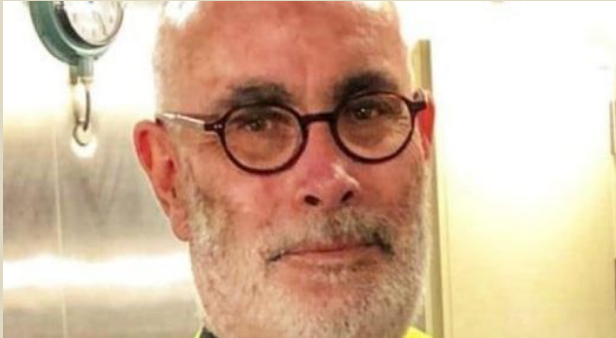


Life as we know it has drastically changed today not at least with the worldwide pandemic. In this Newsletter we reflect on this Covid-19 pandemic and how it turned the life of the seafarer upside down. The virus hit us all without exception. Its spread affected all economies and businesses in an unprecedented way. Being the backbone of global trade and economy, the shipping industry and the seafarers were struck very hard by the pandemic. How will we be able to navigate through the storm and more importantly what effect will it have on our well-being? Some articles and testimonies in this newsletter tell you about the globalisation which took place in the shipping world over the last decades and its impact on live at sea during Corona times.

With all this sad news Stella Maris UK is giving us some hope with the breaching of the 'Stella Maris Centenary Rose'. Last but not least we introduce you two young ladies working as volunteers at the Deutsche Seemannsmission.

Wishing to learn more about Stella Maris ? Then please consult our new website : [www.aposmar.be](http://www.aposmar.be)

## The Antwerp Seafarers Welfare lost one of its Port Chaplains



*Brian Millson*

**The Antwerp Seafarers Welfare Centre mourns one of its port chaplains: Brian Millson. Originally Canadian, Brian was active at the large Antwerp container terminals since 2012.**

Brian was part of the team of chaplains from different denominations that together cover the port of Antwerp. Millson was of Canadian origin and served as a chaplain in the Canadian Army for many years. In 2012 he and his family moved to Belgium. He joined the team of port chaplains of the Antwerp seamen's mission, in which he mainly took care of the cruise ships and the container terminals around the Deurganck and Bevrijdingsdock.

Millson would retire later this year. Unfortunately he was recently diagnosed with cancer. He passed away on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> March. Jos Vanhoof, his Antwerp fellow chaplain, reflects on Brian as follows: "Brian had moved from his official residence to a new place in view of his retirement, but he was no longer able to move into it. In addition to his work as a port chaplain, he was also secretary of Antwerp Seafarer's Welfare and active in the Anglican parish of Saint Boniface in Antwerp. Brian was open and cheerful and quickly integrated into Antwerp", Vanhoof continues. "He learned Dutch, but also Spanish and Tagalog, in order to assist the Filipino seafarers, for example. I admire the spiritual power with which he accepted his fate. "

ITF representative Rino Huysmans also knew Brian Millson well. "Brian was highly regarded by the seafarers. He tried in every way to help them. We met on the board of the Harbour Hotel, where the sailors' missions are gathered. Brian was of gold value to Antwerp's Seaman's Welfare."

Stella Maris presents its condolences to his wife and his two daughters.

## Life at sea, the unknown story.

**T**he impact of the maritime industry on our daily life is overwhelming but most people are unaware of it. Many transport professionals have little knowledge of the conditions of live at sea. Only when major incidents happen such as the grounding of the *Ever Given* at the Suez Canal we are aware that 90% of global trade is maritime trade. Seafarers are responsible for the maritime commerce and our welfare but they do so in isolation. What do we really know about them ?



On 23th March 2021 the container vessel *Ever Given* was travelling through the Suez Canal, when she was caught in a sandstorm. According to reports strong winds could have resulted in a fatal deviation of the giant containership of 400 m LOA. An endless wall of containers was acting as an enormous windscreen. The ship turned sideways, unable to free herself and blocked the canal on both sides at 151 km from Port Said (Mediterranean Sea). In a few days more than 300 vessels were caught in a giant obstruction. After a huge maritime salvage operation the *Ever Given* was finally floated on the 29th March pm. During a week a major artery of world trade was obstructed. A domino effect resulted in European ports with congestion at container terminals and disruption of transport chains.

On 28th March, at least 369 ships were queuing to pass through the canal. Lloyd's list estimated during the blockage the value of the goods delayed each hour at US\$400 million. In just one week time worldwide supply chains were disrupted and oil prices exploded immediately. The accident delayed goods and impacted industries with shortages as a consequence. All of a sudden we discovered that bicycle parts were coming from China and

fashion goods from the Far East. Stocks were running out. Complex global value chains have been particularly vulnerable to lockdowns and closed factories.

The accident with the Ever Given proved not only the vulnerability of our economic system but also our dependency from maritime transportation.

The real impact of the maritime industry is unknown to a larger public. Ports expanded in the last decades and moved away from their historic nucleus. Traditional boundary lines between professions disappeared in the slipstream of globalisation. Transport professionals engaged in daily shipping business are unaware of what is happening on board of the ship. The quick turnaround of ships, spending only a few hours in port, limits a seafarer's free-time ashore. Restrictions on shore leave, coupled with reduced time in port, translate into longer periods at sea. With today's pandemic, mariners even are prevented to go ashore and stay extended periods on board of their vessel. This confinement to a limited living space at sea has a disastrous effect on their mental health with depressions and an alarming suicide rate as a consequence.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said that seafarers “have become collateral victims of COVID-19- ‘

A publication in ‘The Lancet’ in December 2020 stated : *The world's international seafarers have played an indispensable role in the COVID-19 pandemic response by ensuring foodstuffs, pharmaceuticals, and medical supplies continue to flow, working long hours in tough and dangerous environments marked by stress, isolation, and physical and mental fatigue. But their sacrifices have largely gone unnoticed, and instead of gratitude, seafarers have been subjected to harsh restrictions and breaches of their rights, seafarers and UN leaders have declared (The Lancet December 2020)’.*

Our task is therefore more topical than ever. Stella Maris is daily on the move to bring relieve and reduce the pressure on the seafarers.

#### Globalisation in Shipping:

Ever Green is a Taiwanese based shipping Company.

The container vessel ‘Ever Given is owned by Shoei Kisen Kaisha a subsidiary of Japan’s Imabari Shipbuilding. Evergreen's Protection and Indemnity (third party) liabilities insurance coverage is provided by mutual UK P&I Club.

The vessel is managed by Bernard Shulte a German Ship management cy.

The vessel is registered in Panama.

All crew members were Indian nationals. On board was an Egyptian Suez Canal Pilot.

## Seamen in the grip of fear

**F**ollowing is a text from **Marc Schippers Harbour Chaplain Sailors' Society**, one of the missions with whom we work closely together.



*Marc Schippers Harbour  
Chaplain Sailors' Society*

Several (international) maritime organisations proposed already last year to consider seamen as essential workers, in order to allow them to leave the ship after the normal contract term and return to their home country. <sup>1</sup>A few months ago, a ship was detained in the port of Antwerp after it became apparent that the crew had been on board for far too long.

Two Vietnamese sailors have already been working for 21 months, while the maximum duration of a contract is internationally limited to 11 months! The nation-states determine their prevention measures individually, taking little account of their own sailors. For example, I had a sailor who had been on board for a year and who did not know when he could sign off because his country had closed its

borders. A crew change that used to take two or three days can now easily take two to three weeks.

By keeping the sailors on board longer, time and money are saved. At the beginning of February, the Indian deckhand Bhupender took his own life on board the 28-year-old tanker Sea Princess. He was on the job for thirteen months, three months longer than the original duration of his contract. His body was placed in the cold room. The shipping company did not want to repatriate the remains by plane and ordered the captain to keep the body until the ship arrived in India, which according to the sailing schedule would take another 12 days. The first engineer told the captain that the refrigeration system was not working properly, which would be detrimental to the preservation of the body. The responsible person of management on shore threatened the crew. The presence of the remains frightened the crew. Sailors panicked when they had to enter the cold room to get food.

The ship finally docked in the United Arab Emirates. Bhupender's body was taken from board for an autopsy and repatriated by plane to Delhi a few days later.

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<sup>1</sup> Note from the redaction : Seafarers working on Belgian Flag vessels are meanwhile considered as essential workers and can receive a vaccination but there is no overall settlement for the sector.



These are some extreme examples of sailor life in corona times. However, I have also seen several cases in the port of Antwerp where not much attention was paid to sailors. Where physical and mental pain was deliberately not noticed and treated, partly out of fear, partly out of indifference, or out of laziness for not taking the responsibility.

Even during this pandemic, harbour chaplains sometimes have in-depth conversations with sailors about their concerns, their need to make money, the fear of being disembarked because the relationship with a hierarchical superior is far from good. The port ministry is a mixture of spiritual and material care.

In the nineteen years of my ministry in the port of Antwerp, I have seen many changes: the ships became bigger, the mooring times shorter, the crews smaller and more multicultural. These changes were mostly motivated by cost control and profit maximisation.

Regardless, the sailors' missions and their harbour chaplains continue to do what they have been doing for over two hundred years: showing the love of Christ to sailors in word and deed. Providing Bibles, offering a listening ear, bringing medicine, saying a prayer, handing out warm coats and sweaters, all this in a fluid movement from the Christian faith. That's the port ministry!

Marc Schippers Harbour Chaplain Sailors' Society

[www.sailors-society.org](http://www.sailors-society.org)



*One of the volunteers ( Hanna Seegers - right) from the Deutsche Seemannsmission providing some toiletries from our shop to the crew confined on board due to Covid 19.*

## Covid-19 and the Antwerp Harbour Hotel

The seamen's missions and the Antwerp Harbour hotel play an essential role in coping with the present sanitary crisis. In case of crew changes or contaminations on board, the Antwerp Harbour Hotel is offering rooms for quarantine or isolation of the crew in order to comply with the sanitary rules set by the government.

*'Since the start of the pandemic in our country, crew members have spent all together some 1600 nights in the Antwerp Harbour Hotel' explains Frank Van Heesch, hotel manager at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel. 'We always have some 20 rooms available for crew members arriving in Antwerp having to go in quarantine according to the federal sanitary regulations. In case of need we can even increase this number'.*



*'In March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic we worked out a set of procedures in cooperation with Mediport and Saniport' says Frank Van Heesch. 'These procedures have proven to be very useful and effective. For the management of the AHH they are a helpful guideline to continue the service to the maritime community. This service is not only available to crews visiting the port of Antwerp but also for the neighboring ports of Ghent, Zeebrugge Vlissingen and*

*Terneuzen'.*

*The Antwerp Harbour Hotel has proven to be an essential factor in keeping our port operational during this pandemic.*

### Antwerp Harbour Hotel extending its service to seafarers

The Antwerp Harbour Hotel is extending its services to the Seafarers. From now on the hotel guests can use **PressReader**.

This service provides free digital entry to read and download 6000 newspapers and magazines. An ideal solution for sailors and guests who are far away from home.



The service is free of charge. You simply log in via WiFi from Antwerp Harbor Hotel [www.pressreader.com](http://www.pressreader.com)

## Covid-19 stories and seafarers

**A global oral histories project to record seafarers' testimonies of their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic is underway.**

The UK's National Maritime Museum is working in partnership with unions and maritime welfare organisations for the project, which aims to record the stories of seafarers who have been unable to dock in ports across the globe because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Working with the ITF Seafarers' Trust and The Mission to Seafarers, the testimonies will be recorded and entered in the permanent collection at the National Maritime Museum, so future generations can also learn, study and understand the impact of this pandemic on the global maritime sector.

Union representatives affiliated with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) will receive online training on best practice for gathering oral histories, before collecting the experiences of seafarers during coronavirus from their local communities in the Philippines, Indonesia, Ukraine, Hong Kong and India.

Chaplains associated with The Mission to Seafarers will also be trained once lockdown restrictions are lifted, to record the stories of global seafarers who play a vital role in bringing essential goods into UK ports.

The project is planned by the National Maritime Museum to support seafarers. The intention is to launch a charity single to be released on the international ' Day of the Seafarer 25<sup>th</sup> June.







## CSSS CALLS FOR MORE STELLA MARIS ROSE GARDENS IN SUPPORT OF OUR SEAFARERS

The Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society has established a Stella Maris Rose Garden at its specialist maritime care home to celebrate the centenary of the seafarer charity Stella Maris, formerly known as the Apostleship of the Sea.

The garden, designed for the seafarers' home in Banstead, Surrey, UK, is thought to represent the first Stella Maris Rose Garden planted by a maritime-related organisation since the cultivar was introduced in April last year.

The eponymous rose, a Hybrid Tea rose cultivated by Harkness Roses and distributed by World of Roses, follows a Container Shipping Supporting Seafarers (CSSS) initiative to raise funds for Stella Maris, the world's largest ship-visiting network.

World of Roses, which has already raised more than £500 for the charity, donates 35% of the price of every Stella Maris plant sold.

CSSS founder Philip Eastell said: "We are delighted that the Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society is supporting the initiative and encourage more maritime companies to 'say it with flowers'. We would love to see a Stella Maris Rose Garden in every port, in every terminal, or any organisation operating within the maritime supply chain."

The donations received through the Stella Maris Rose initiative contribute directly to seafarer welfare.

The early bloomer, which combines the classic Hybrid Tea shaped blooms with the bushy volume of a Floribunda, has already been included in the Harkness Masterpiece Rose Collection – a collection of more than 100 modern and traditional roses – which will be displayed at the Chelsea Flower Show.

The Stella Maris Rose has been registered and licensed for onward supply to all countries within the European Union.



Springtime at the Royal Alfred estate will include a Stella Maris Centenary Rose garden

## Interview with volunteers from the Deutsche Seemannsmission



Hanna – DSM volunteer during ship visit

**Since September last year two young German volunteers Hanna (19) and Paulina (18) are giving a helping hand at the Deutsche Seemannsmission (DSM). They are spending a year in Antwerp and are discovering a fascinating new world.**

We met Hanna and Paulina in the "foyer" of the Antwerp Harbour hotel, where all seamen's missions have their permanent place. Hanna and Paulina ended secondary school last year. And like many youngsters in Germany they are doing an internship before starting further education. The two volunteers are gentle and smooth personalities and have chosen the Deutsche Seemannsmission (DSM) in Antwerp for

internship as they wanted to get in contact with new cultures.

### Why did you choose DSM Antwerp and what does your work consist of?

Hanna : I wanted a new challenge and the shipping sector seemed to me an ideal opportunity. I could go to Rotterdam, Amsterdam or Antwerp but some friends told me that Antwerp was the place to be and I did not regret it. Since I volunteered at the DSM Antwerp for an internship a new world has opened up to me. The life and work of seafarers was so far



unknown for me. Every day I do realise how important the work of the Deutsche Seemannsmission is. We pay a visit to the vessels coming to Antwerp. At Christmas time and at Easter we bring small gifts on board.

### How is it to come on board of a ship as a young girl ?

Hanna: During our ship visits we are welcomed with an openness and joy that I could not have imagined before. Most sailors are very kind and sweet to us. Sometimes they call us the 'beautiful twins' or 'the

Hanna Scheers – DSM volunteer

beautiful girls' to laugh but that is OK and we never feel threatened. We are always together and that helps of course. If they become too personal, I say that we want to keep it professional.

### **Can you tell us something about these ship visits ?**

Paulina : I certainly will never forget the visits on board and the contacts with so many different cultures. Despite the existing restrictions due to the pandemic, I already had so many nice contacts with people of different nationalities. Short encounters on the gangway are now the rule, long and intense conversations as used to be the case in the past are the exception. Nevertheless, together with my fellow colleague Hanna we have managed to build very good relationships with some seafarers who come on regular base to Antwerp. The joy of seeing you again on both sides is always very great.

When the seafarers are finally allowed to go home after the end of their long contract, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, there is the grief because I know I probably won't see them again. But on the other hand, I am happy for them because after so many months at sea they can finally meet their family and friends again.



Paulina – DSM Volunteer

### **What are the conversations about?**

Paulina : Unfortunately, we don't always have such pleasant conversations: once a sailor told us confidentially that his wages have been drastically cut and that further cuts have been announced. We noticed how much this situation troubled him, because the money they earn goes largely to the family at home. I certainly gained a new awareness of life on board for seafarers and everything related to it; For example, how our society depends on these seafarers and how stressful everyday life on board can be. The few minutes that we talk to them represent a welcome break from the sometimes monotonous life on board. Many seafarers are also very grateful that we occasionally do some shopping for them as they have seldom the opportunity to go ashore.

Hanna: During Corona times, most crews are not allowed to go ashore for the risk of contamination is just too great. That's why we take a few "orders" every now and then. At the moment Paulina and I have some crew who will return home very soon. They often ask to buy small presents for their family and friends. Belgian chocolate in the form of seafood is particularly popular.

**What do you want to achieve before your internship has ended?**

Hanna : I'm very sportive myself and I love athletics. I hope to organize some sporting events in the summer on the sports field in the port! It is important to show the seafarers that they and their work is rightly appreciated.

**News from Stella Maris**

**T**ogether with our removal to the new premises at the Noorderlaan we redesigned our website :



[www.aposmar.be](http://www.aposmar.be) .

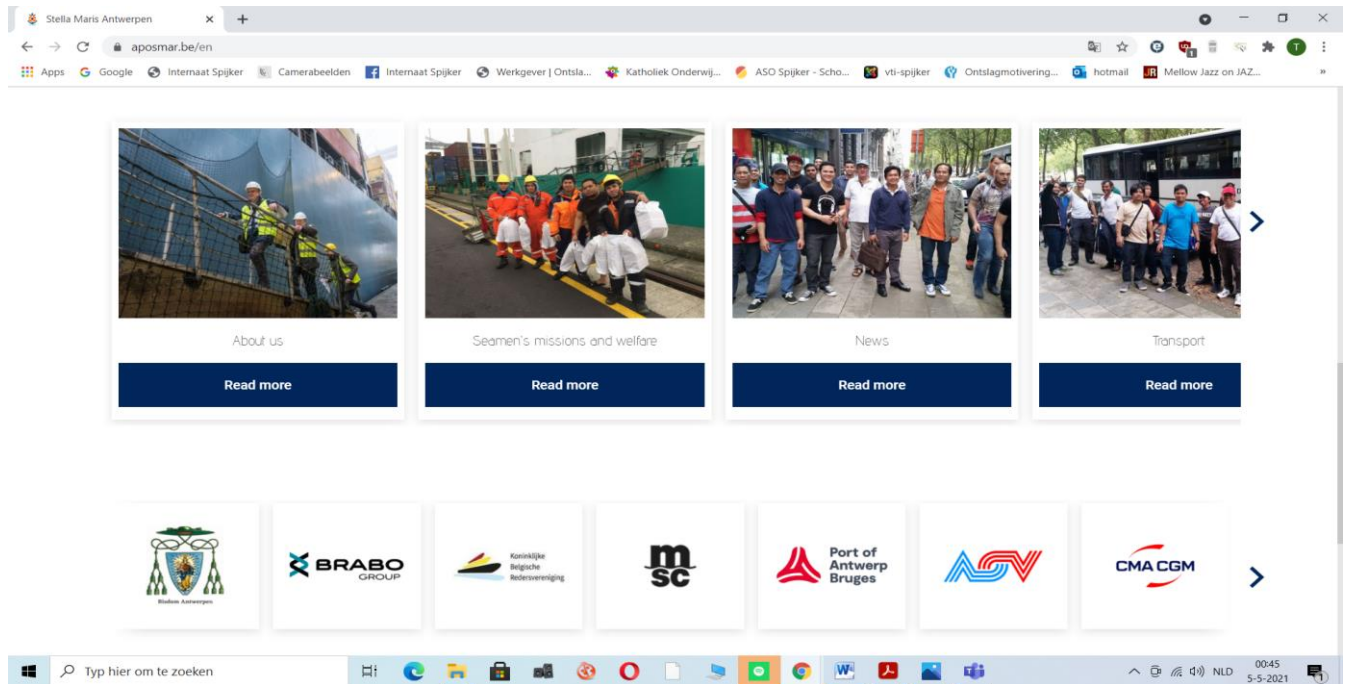
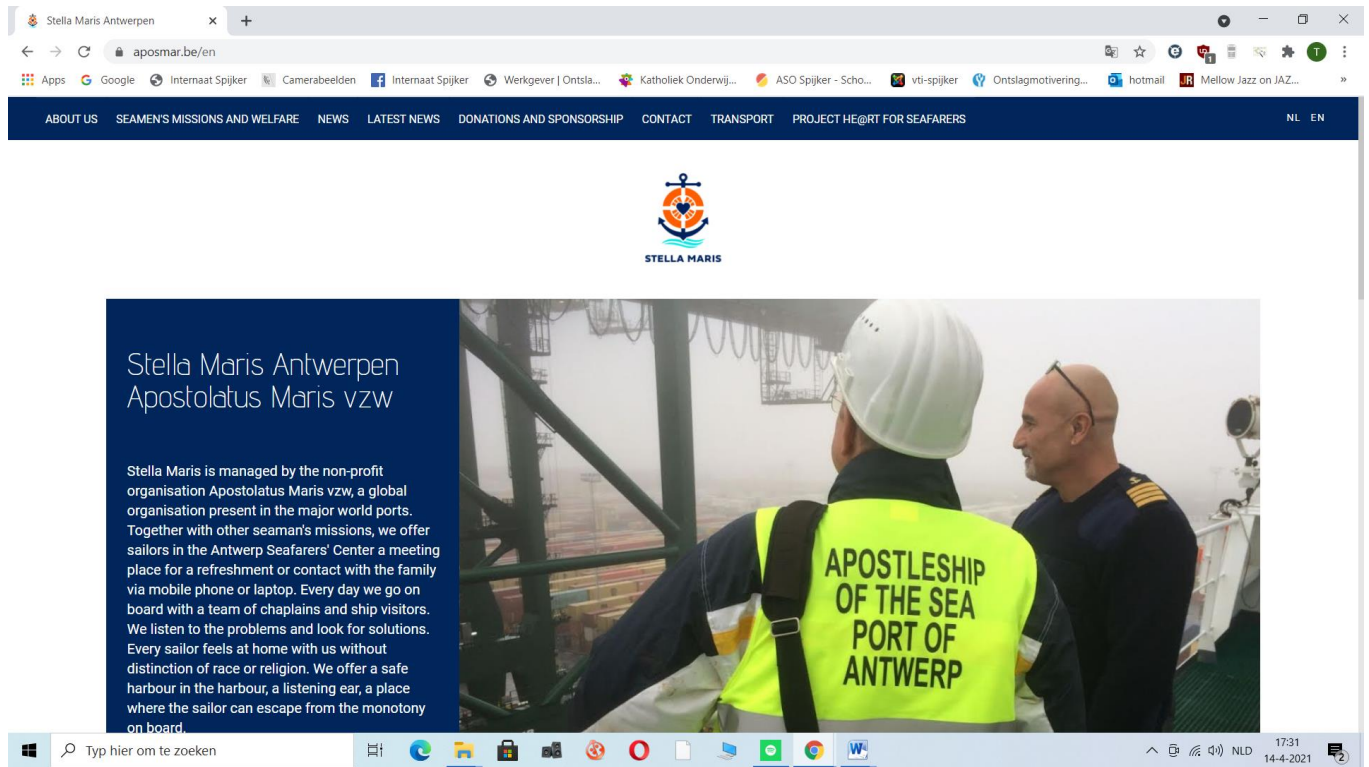
The website is in Dutch and English and gives a comprehensive overview of our history, our background, our partners and our activities. The website gives also information on the Antwerp Seafarers' Welfare and the other seamen's missions located at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel. Sailors will find on the website information about public transport and the daily bus service which runs from the terminals in the port to the Antwerp Harbour Hotel.

Also contact with our secretariat and the Stella Maris Port Chaplains can be made via the website.

**We hope you like the new presentation and we invite you to visit our new website to learn more :**

- **About us**
- **About Seamen's Missions and Welfare**
- **Our Newsletter**
- **The Latest News**
- **Donations and sponsorship**
- **Contacts**
- **Transport**





Any reaction on our website is very much appreciated !



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