



Apostleship of the Sea  
Supporting Seafarers Worldwide

Stella Maris Antwerp Bulletin n° 8

Fall Edition 2021

Dear Sponsor,  
Dear Reader,

**A**fter our move from the Italiëlei in the city to the Antwerp Harbour Hotel (AHH) in the port area last year, we intensified our cooperation with the other welfare missions and the AHH. With the financial help from Stella Maris, the 'Foyer' at the AHH was refurbished as a cosy meeting place for the guests. From now on we offer a superior hotel service to seafarers who need a hotel equipped to their needs. In this newsletter we tell you about the official opening of foyer and bar on which several VIP's from the Antwerp Maritime World were present and we also look back in history to tell you the story of International Seamen's House in Antwerp.

We also have a report on the successful vaccination campaign for seafarers in which our country took the lead. Finally we had an interesting discussion with Father Ghislain Toussé from the congregation of Scheut who served as port chaplain during recent years in our port.

Enjoy the reading !



President Jacques D'Havé

## Stella Maris and AHH join forces to improve 'welfare for seamen'

With a financial support from Stella Maris, the Antwerp Harbour Hotel (AHH) refurbished



*The reading corner at the AHH*

its 'Foyer' in order to upgrade the service to seafarers. So far only some vending machines and a coffee machine were available at the lobby. As from now on however the renovated foyer features a bar with a beer tap, a spacious reading room, TV, billiards, table football and board games. A bookshelf with mainly English-

language literature is constantly replenished by the concerns of the city library. The city service also installed the PressReader app, on which sailors and guests of the hotel can log in for free and thus get the choice to choose one of the more than eighty newspaper titles and magazines to download. Connected to the Foyer is a small shop where seamen will find toiletries, over-the-counter medicines, and a limited choice of souvenirs and clothes as they were used to in the previous Stella Maris premises.



*Volunteers in our shop : Marleen Gremer, Diana De Doncker, Kit Millson en Sharmimi Jacop. ©Felic Rabou*

As not all seamen have 'shore permission' our welfare workers continue to drive into the port with a 'rolling store' to the vessels so that also the seamen on board are not forgotten. From now on the Antwerp Harbour Hotel is a better place to stay for seafarers.

**Since early July the bus service to Stella Maris and the Antwerp Harbour Hotel is operational ‘on demand’.**

**T**he situation in Belgium with the COVID-19 pandemic improved to such an extent that



Bus service to the AHH again operational

pubs and restaurants could reopen, be it on strict regulations. Since beginning July crews were again picked up at the terminals on the right and left bank by buses with a ‘dial-up’ service. The chaplains and volunteers of the Christian-inspired seafarers' missions have a ‘duty list’. Every night of the week they are present to receive the sailors. As before all seamen irrespective of religion, nationality or ethnic origin are welcome. The seafarers' missions that participate in the Antwerp

Seafarers' Welfare are Stella Maris (RC), the Sailors' Society (Protestant), the German Seamen's Mission (Evangelical), the Mission to Seafarers (Anglican). The Scandinavian churches are also involved in the cooperation as well as Mediport ( Maritime Medical Service).

The Welfare Center was developed with the financial support of the international seamen's union ITF.

### **September 3th - Opening of the new foyer of the AHH.**

**O**n the 3th September the Antwerp maritime community gathered at the AHH to assist to the opening of the new foyer for seamen.



Mr. Marc Schippers

Mr. Marc Schippers, President of the Antwerp Seafarer's Welfare, opened the event and welcomed all present. After a few words of welcome he gave the floor to Mrs. Annick De Ridder Port Alderman.

It was with the ringing of an authentic ship's bell, a relic of the former Belgian bulk carrier Eeklo, that Port Alderman Mrs. Annick De Ridder opened officially the new foyer.

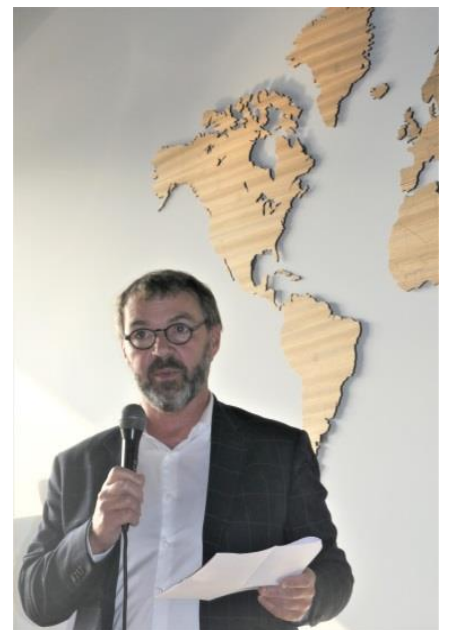


*Port Alderman Mrs. Annick De Ridder*

In her speech she underlined the unique collaboration of religiously inspired groups, together with government services, the private sector and trade unions for the benefit of seafarers.

'It is an unparalleled initiative. You have a unique organisation that many ports in the world envy us' she said.

Jacques Kerkhof, chairman of IZA / AHH expressed the essential role of the AHH in the port of



*Jacques Kerkhof*

Antwerp and promised to continue the efforts to care for seamen by further extending the services and taking new initiatives.

Already in 2011, Antwerp was named 'Port of the Year' by the 'International Seafarers' Welfare' in Geneva. The opening of the foyer was also attended by alderman Tom Meeuws, competent for, social affairs, and honorary alderman Marc Van Peel.



**Photo impression**  
**Opening of the new foyer of the AHH**  
**3th September 2021**





## From Zeemanshuis to Harbour Hotel

The International House for Seamen ( Internationaal Zeemanshuis) has been a hotel, for seafarers in Antwerp since 1950, The House for Seamen was paid by the Belgian authorities and the City of Antwerp was responsible for the operational management and maintenance. The purpose was to offer to seamen good care and proper relaxation during a transit stay or in emergency situations. Initially, the Zeemanshuis was located near the traditional 'Schipperskwartier' in the city center near the old harbour area and the Falconplein. For



years the area had a bad reputation and was known as a poor neighbourhood with a lot of prostitution and shops with criminal business practices. Years of struggles were waged in the district to reduce prostitution and criminal practices. Finally in 2004, the city of Antwerp launched an important revaluation project for the area. The Falconplein-Zeemanshuis area was a crucial lever project in this regard. As a new location, the former Docks Hotel between the

city and the new port area was chosen with a new name : the Antwerp Harbour Hotel .

## Behind the counter of the Seamen's bar

Corinne Sels is the first barmaid in the new seamen's foyer in the Antwerp Harbour Hotel (AHH). She already earned her marks in the hospitality sector before, but due to Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown, her previous employer closed almost immediately the doors.



*Mrs. Corinne Sels, the first barmaid of the AHH (photo HLN- Felix Rabu)*

For Corinne the bar at the AHH was like coming home, because after years of experience this was more or less her habitat. But, she soon realized that the setting and the audience of a sailors' foyer is completely different from that of any other pub in town. In the AHH, the official language is usually

English, the 'Lingua Franca' of the maritime world, both on the ship's bridge and in the sailors' foyer. The opening hours are also unusual: from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m.



**Corinne:** 'The discussion topics are also different. In a bar I usually got the same 'bar hangers' before me, each with their story and their complaints about their wives, their bosses, the bad weather, the price of gas and drinks etc. Here the audience is always different, starting with the different nationalities, cultures, the trips they make, etc.. I had to acquire some background and learn the difference between a tanker, a container, a ferry, a coaster etc. but now I'm fully adapted. The sailors come one or two evenings and then are gone. Months later I may see them again or maybe never again. And the next day I have a different audience with different stories.

Mrs. Sels had already offers and the choice of a number of exotic holiday addresses: Manila, Sofia, Karachi, etc. But with her experience, it is a breeze to keep that boat off gently but firmly. Her self-chosen holiday address for this year will be Malaga!

Corinne hopes for more visitors in the foyer once the Covid pandemic is behind us and more ships will allow more sailors with shore permission. She already experienced that a number of seamen are not aware of the existence of the AHH, nor are that seamen are aware of the free dial-up busses for transport.

Next to the seamen also the tourists, occupying the free rooms in the hotel will return later on.

Cheers Corinne !

### **First Mass celebrated at the AHH**



*Principal Chaplain Jos Van Hoof of Stella Maris and Ben Van Akker celebrating the first mass at the AHH*





It was on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July that Principal Chaplain Jos Van Hoof of Stella Maris celebrated his first mass at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel in one of the meeting rooms. Present were some ten crew members of two ships in the harbour. Volunteer and ship visitor Ben Van den Akker added a musical touch to the service with his guitar playing. As customary in the Stella Maris chapel on Italiëlei, those present took an active part in the prayers. From now on every Sunday at 19:30 hrs a mass will be celebrated at the AHH.

## Belgium takes the lead in the vaccination of seamen

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to put a substantial burden on health-care systems and a massive global effort is underway to protect the population through vaccination. Seafarers



*Belgian Captain Luc Plomteux-Vekemans from Euronav vaccinated as first Belgian Captain by Mediport ( photo Mediport)*

are a particular vulnerable group and need special care as they are 'essential workers'. After all, these men and women are instrumental in keeping global trade afloat. Already early June, Belgium started vaccinating Belgian seamen.

However as they are working in close contact with other nationalities on board, it is essential that the whole crew is vaccinated in order

to prevent outbreaks.

Belgium was thus the first country in the world to tackle the vaccination of seafarers in this way. In the port of Antwerp, GZA Hospitals (Antwerp hospital organisation), together with maritime doctors and nurses from MediPort (Maritime Medical Service), provided the crew vaccinations with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.



*MSC crew vaccinated by Mediport in Antwerp ( photo Mediport)*

This vaccine was chosen as only one vaccination is required to offer a suitable protection.

According to data from Mediport, in the course of July/August 2021, a total of approximately 5,000 seamen were vaccinated against COVID-19 in all Belgian Ports.

## Changing of the guard at Deutsche Seemannsmission

The Deutsche Seemannsmission (DSM) in Antwerp, led by Pastor Jörg Pfautsch, has a strong tradition of volunteers. They are boys and girls from all over Germany who, after their Abitur (humaniora) take a sabbatical year to do voluntary work abroad for a charitable organization. One of the options is to work as a volunteer in a charitable aid organization like DSM in one of the ports in the Hamburg to Antwerp range. After that year they return to their 'Heimat' and start their higher education. Hannah and Pauline whom we interviewed in our last newsletter have chosen respectively architecture and communication & design. The DSM in Antwerp, an initiative of the Lutheran church, can count yearly on some three volunteers. DSM is our partner in the Antwerp Seafarers' Center. Like Stella Maris they visit ships in the port, irrespective of flag or the nationality of the crew.



From left to right : Lars Linnenburger, Hanna Rottmann (beiden nieuw), Hannah Seegers, Paulina Ramos en Peter zu Altenschildesche (zwaaien af) en uiterst rechts is de nieuweling Sophia Nachtigal. (Foto DSM)

Pastor Jörg Pfautsch of DSM: ' If the volunteers are given a choice, Amsterdam is initially on top of the list followed by Rotterdam while Antwerp comes on the third place. However at the end of their term Antwerp stands head and shoulders above other ports'.

The newcomers for this year are : Lars Linnenbürger from Tübingen, Sophia Nachtigal from Eckernförde and Hanna Rottmann from Nürnberg. Currently, a Berlin pastor has joined this new trio: Gabi Melchior, who in Antwerp is doing an internship but has already been assigned a permanent position at the DSM in the port from London.

## Father Ghislain Toussé to return to Cameroon next year.

Father Ghislain Toussé, one of our port chaplains belonging to the congregation of 'Scheut' arrived in Antwerp in 2015 and was assigned with various pastoral tasks, including the parish pastoral in Boom and the harbour pastoral. End of this year he will return to Cameroon with

a new assignment as Provincial Head of the Congregation of Scheut. So it was time to meet him and talk about his work in Antwerp.

**Stella Maris : Can you tell us how you experienced your time in Antwerp ?**

My work in the parish pastoral in Boom and in the port of Antwerp was like a gift to me. 'For a priest this is a big and rich experience and also an instructive one. I'm grateful for the confidence that Antwerp bishop Mgr. Bonny gave me, this is broadening my horizon considerably as a priest. I consider his commitment to the many sailors in the harbour as an example'.



*Father Ghislain Toussé*

**Stella Maris: What will you remember from your ship visits?**

For me it was a gift to see every day new faces and meet new people which I can help. 'Everything we do is in the spirit of the gospel'. Boarding a ship every day is an exciting event and I always make new discoveries. Some sailors want

to confess, others want just to talking about the ordinary things of every day.

**Stella Maris : How was your relationship with the different nationalities and religions on board ?**

It is very important to be available to everyone as a port pastor; for the believers as well as for the non-believers. There must be more fraternity between all populations and between all layers of the population. Like the Pope describes it in his encyclic Fratelli tutti, we make no difference between origin, skin color or faith. Everyone is a sign of the Lord's mercy. My job as harbour chaplain is completely different from my task as a parish priest. The parishioners in my church are all believers. But during my the daily ship visits I have to adapt myself to the my 'audience'. Occasionally I also visit ships with one or more sailors belonging to the Muslim faith. Then I talk to them not about the gospel but about general things. Sometimes they just want a chat about general politics, about the current affairs of the day, sometimes also about their personal problems etc... It should not always be about faith. My task as a harbour chaplain is to be present and to listen.

**Stella Maris: What experience do you take with you to Cameroon ?**

First of all 'A smile can do wonders,' and secondly :whatever the destination of your ship may be; remember : God is always on board !Father Toussé will certainly take this experience of the port of Antwerp with him to Cameroon.





## *Call for Volunteers*

*Are you interested in our  
organization ?*

*Do you want to participate?*

*We have vacancies for:*

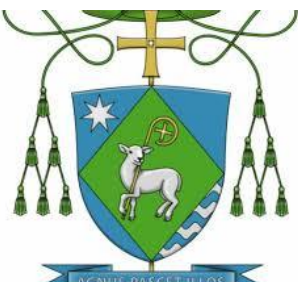
- *Ship visitors*
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*Please contact our secretariat*

*T. 03/233 34 75*

*E. [contact@aposmar.be](mailto:contact@aposmar.be)*

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Please contact Apostolatus Maris  
c/o Tony Vuylsteke

Public relations officer ApM;  
antoine.vuylsteke@gmail.com /

Mob.: +32 473 92 73 51

Bank account Apostolatus Maris vzw  
to which donations may be paid

IBAN BE20 3630 5928 8056

BIC : BBRUBEBB

**Editors :**

Responsible Editor : Jacques D'Havé

Editors : Jorgedy Bago, Justin Gleissner,  
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