



Apostleship of the Sea  
Supporting Seafarers Worldwide

Stella Maris Antwerp Bulletin n° 9

Spring Edition 2022

Dear Sponsor, Dear Reader,

**W**e all know the three concepts of the French Revolution : liberty, equality and fraternity.

The 19th and 20th century struggled with the first two concepts which were often misunderstood resulting in violence and war. The third concept however, fraternity remained unfortunately somewhat underdeveloped.

But fraternity is as important as the two others in order to build up a tolerant and just society. It is an essential element for peaceful coexistence not only in our daily behaviour but also in our economic system and the organisation of our society .

An important element which is part of this fraternity is the unconditional care for the most vulnerable workers in our economy. Undoubtedly sailors are a vulnerable group in the transport chain. The Corona pandemic has shown what it means when your workplace is far away from home and family and physical contacts are difficult to establish or not existing at all.



*President Jacques D'havé*

Stella Maris together with our partners in the 'Antwerp Seafarers Welfare'<sup>1</sup> is looking after the physical and spiritual needs of the seamen in our port. In this issue we tell you about some of the stories we experienced recently and we give the floor to our volunteers keeping the welfare shop at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel or driving with a van to our sailors. By doing so we bring fraternity amongst seafarers in practice.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Antwerp Seafarers Welfare' is located at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel and consists of Stella Maris, IZA ( Internationaal Zeemanshuis Antwerp), Deutsche Seemannsmission, Mission to Seafarers, Sailors Society, Mediport , and the Swedish Maritime Administration

# Antwerp, Last Port of Call

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Godofredo became increasingly ill on board of a tanker bound to Antwerp. The 52-year-old Filipino marine technician had signs of Covid-19 and was airlifted to the hospital by helicopter but died unfortunately before arrival. A heavy blow for his family and for the crew, who felt



*Stella Maris boarding the tanker*

closely connected as a small community. Their request was to organize a memorial service on board of the ship as soon as the vessel came out of quarantine. The shipowner agreed and instructed his agent to organize this service. The agent of the vessel had a good contact with Stella Maris and one phone was sufficient to start making the necessary arrangements.

A few days later, Padre Jorgedy Bago our Philippine harbour pastor and Padre Jos

Van Hoof our chief chaplain boarded a dinghy in the port of Antwerp. The memorial service on board of the tanker was also 'streamed' to the family of Godofredo in the Philippines so that they could say farewell to their beloved family member in a dignified way together with the crew.



*Memory service for Godofredo on board of the tanker*

This is just one testimony out of the many interventions our pastors and volunteers undertake every day.

## Volunteers at work

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*Geert De Vriese volunteer at Stella Maris*

.In this article we give the floor to Geert and Edwin two retired pilots working as volunteers. If not working in the shop they are at the steering wheel of the 'rolling store' or on board of a vessel.



*Edwin De Coninck volunteer*



Volunteer Edwin De Coninck ( standing in the back) with crew members and the rolling store on board

Just as in our previous location at the Italiëlei in Antwerp we run a small shop with some essential articles for seamen. Due to the Corona pandemic many seamen have no 'shore leave' so we drive to them with our 'rolling store'

### Stella Maris :Please explain

#### briefly your work as a volunteer for Stella Maris

**Geert :** On Thursday evenings I keep the shop open in the Antwerp Harbour Hotel from 19:00 to 22:00, so that sailors who are arriving by bus from their ship and the seamen staying in the hotel can come and buy something. The shop has a stock of sweets (Belgian chocolates ), toilet articles, towels, a limited amount of clothing (new and second-hand), useful things such as adapter plugs for their computer and shaver, souvenirs, etc. at reasonable prices. We can also exchange their dollars and pounds for Euros. So we are also a bit of an exchange office. And we try to answer their questions to our best. We as ex-sailors understand very well some questions that seem a bit strange to other people, because we understand life on board better.



Geert with the rolling store



The shop at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel

Next to that, I sometimes join the rolling store team. I also express my great admiration for the German volunteers. They are still young volunteers and take a sabbatical year after their secondary education. Some have only recently obtained their driver's license and are already driving smoothly with the rolling store van through the busy port traffic.

**Edwin :** As I'm living in Beernem near Bruges I come two consecutive days to Antwerp and I sleep then at Stella Maris. I help with purchases, loading & unloading, put prices on products,

and accompany the rolling store. When going on board I'm back with my family : the sailors. For me it feels like 'coming home'

**Stella Maris : How is the reaction on board ?**

**Geert** : Always positive and friendly. Some ships that are on a liner service return to Antwerp and they phone us days in advance to order the rolling store. Often they cannot disembark as the port stay is too short, or they have work to do on board. Then the rolling store, is the perfect solution.

**Edwin** : Oh they are they friendly and happy to see us. They appreciate that there are people doing all that work for them. When they hear I was a pilot before, they want me to join them on a picture.

**Stella Maris : In what way is life for a sailor affected by the Corona pandemic?**



*The rolling store on board of a RoRo vessel*

**Geert** ( furiously) : A complete disaster! Boarding or disembarking is often impossible. Seamen are used to stay on board for several months, but now it has become extremely long. Tensions are building up while there is a great need to relax. On top of that the uncertainty is difficult to live with. The crew never knows when or where to disembark. You hear terrible stories such

as a while ago. A captain died on board of Corona and the body was not allowed by the authorities be to disembarked for repatriation. The ship sailed from South Africa to Singapore. Finally, after a journey of several months the ship returned to Italy. Can you imagine how terrible it was for the family !!!

I also hear that some shipping companies dismiss sailors if they test positive for corona. Some shipowners argue it is their own fault being infected. They should have protected themselves better. This is the world upside down.

**Edwin** : I agree ! The pandemic has a terrible influence on their lives. Many even stopped

sailing or will do so because it becomes unbearable. Their greatest joy is to contact the family and social media are a great help to them. Without regular contact with their families, some would get mad. It is a pity that we can't visit all the ships. In a large port like Antwerp this is impossible of course.

Sadly, the rolling store is not allowed at many terminals. Our rolling store is not allowed on container, petroleum and chemical terminals for safety reasons. Often those crews could use more contact with the outside world because live on board is extremely hectic .

**Stella Maris : How did you come in contact with Stella Maris ?**

**Edwin :** Via the newsletter and Geert, Good communication is important !

**Geert :** I've always known Stella Maris. As a river pilot, I was the first person the sailors had contact with upon arrival in a foreign port. I always carried a Stella Maris brochure in my bag with telephone numbers and practical information how to reach the Seamen's Mission.



*Seamen at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel*

**Stella Maris : We are an international organisation with many branches abroad. Have you been in contact with one of them during your career as a sailor ?**

**Geert :** Of course ! In other ports I had contact with similar Seamen's Missions and clubs. I got in contact with my future wife when she volunteered in the Leningrad Seamen's Club as it was called at that time. It wasn't exactly the same setting as in Antwerp, but the service was certainly as good or even slightly better for me personally ! ( smiling).

**Edwin :** If I remember correctly I went to the Stella Maris of Manila a few times in 1979. I have been there with my wife. We went there for relaxation and for swimming.

**Stella Maris :Is a welfare organization like Stella Maris still necessary in the 21st century ?**

**Edwin and Geert ( without hesitation) :** YES ! and Edwin to complement : A sailor lives on a floating island and islanders are very dependent on the mainland for anything and everything This is exactly what Stella Maris is offering.

## Stella Maris : How do you see the Welfare for Seafarers in the future ?

**Edwin** : Services are changing just like people. The Rolling Store is one example of such a change. The sailor no longer has to go TO the shop ashore but the shop is coming to him. Despite all the problems with Corona this is a positive evolution.

**Geert** : Do not forget, the smaller the crew, the greater the need for contact. We in our time used to be in a port for several days or even weeks. Now people calculate with hours in the port. Contact with the family has improved through mobile phone and internet. We were



*Our German volunteers in the shop*

isolated in our time only a letter that sometimes took months to arrive. Today contact is almost daily but when the children or parents are sick, they can't help. That makes life on board even more difficult.

**Edwin** : We are there to listen and selling a toothbrush from the rolling store means so much more !

## The tradition is continued

An informal chat with Ann Van der Sypt, social worker.

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The Antwerp Harbour hotel is continuing the tradition of the previous Antwerp Seamen's House in the old city centre.



*The previous Antwerp Seamen's House in the city centre*

Sailors can stay there at a social rate and have some basic accommodation. The previous Seamen's hotel was located in the old City Centre but recently moved to a new location at the Noorderlaan closer to the port.

The hotel is an initiative of the city of Antwerp, the OCMW (social service of the city) and the Port Authority.

Ann Van der Sypt, a social worker, is working for Seamen's Welfare and became a household name for the sailors. She shares a landscape office with chaplains and volunteers from the different Seaman's Missions.

"We work closely together. That is necessary, because the port of Antwerp is very large. I can't possibly handle it on my own," says Ann.



*Ann Van der Sypt*

" Together with the port chaplains and volunteers from Stella Maris and the other missions we divide the terminals among us. Since the sailors often stay in Antwerp for a short time and do not disembark, we go to them."



*Ann is always welcome on board*

"Seamen are the wanderers of the sea" says Ann. They are so anonymous and remain invisible to most people in the city, but they mark their presence in a special way. When you eat a banana or drink a glass of fruit juice you have to ask yourself how it came to us. Only when the supply of goods suddenly stops, we realise how important shipping is in our daily life."

Life at sea has enormous consequences. People sacrifice a lot for it.

I ask the sailors how I can be of help. The biotope in which they live is a hard commercial world without much compassion. They are not used to meet people who take care of them. If they are

lucky they have a caring captain. But we really stand up for them and they know it. Usually it gets around quickly that a welfare worker from the sailor's house has arrived."

At the Antwerp Harbour Hotel we have a small shop with items that are often in demand: shampoo, sweets, souvenirs...

"There are conversations I will never forget in my life. For example, a Spanish sailor told me that he cried every day in his cabin. His wife had passed away and he was saving to start a business with his only daughter. But she too became ill and died. He told me his life felt meaningless. At such a moment you can only listen and share in his grief."

More than language, cultural differences sometimes form a barrier. “It helps that I already have a lot of experience. Before I started here five years ago, I worked as a ship visitor and social worker at a sailor's house in the port of Ghent. Over the years you learn a lot about the different cultures. That fascinates me enormously.”



*Ann with her rolling store*

“We often hand out free calendars. Sailors are like soldiers in that respect: they count the days until they can go home again. When I first came on a ship with a Russian crew and asked if anyone wanted calendars, there was no response. Everyone looked at me uncomfortably. Only after a while I did realise that it is very important to say explicitly that these calendars were for free.”

Saving is very important to them as they work for their families at home.”. Sometimes you are confronted with more serious things. Like how to deal with a person who died on board. Filipino sailors are very superstitious in that regard. A vigil and blessing must take place so that the spirit of the deceased may not follow anyone and no calamity should come upon the ship. Then it is good to have a Pilipino pastor at the Mission. ”



*Checking the bill is important*

In every harbour city you will find people who knit for sailors. That's a tradition. Twelve years ago I also started a hat club with my cousin. That small project developed tremendously. Volunteers are knitting thousands of hats and neck warmers. Together with the sailor's missions in Antwerp and Ghent, we fill them with chocolate, a pen, a lighter, toothpaste, candy... Last Christmas we handed out 1,100 sets.”

“It is a practical gift too, because the Asian sailors have it often cold even in summer. But above all, it's a gesture: we appreciate your work.”



# From journalist to vendor



*Justin Gleissner*

For those who follow the ins and outs of the maritime news for a while, the name Justin Gleissner will not sound unfamiliar. Justin is a well-known journalist specializing in maritime news from the Antwerp region with a profound knowledge of the transport economy. For some time now Justin is working as a volunteer at Apostolatus Maris. We give him the floor to comment on his new job :

‘Although long after I had reached retirement age, I managed to start a second career: co-driver (convoyeur) at the rolling store of the welfare in the port of Antwerp. Of course I had to master some of the tricks as a quick and clever market vendor.

The rolling store is a van equipped with shelves, compartments and drawers like in public markets. The driver on duty today is a volunteer from the Deutsche Seemannsmission (DSM), Lars Linnenbürger. He is part of a group of young volunteers from Germany taking a sabbatical year after completing their Arbitur (humanities) .

Our destination today is the Waaslandhaven ( Left Bank), where the Grimaldi ro-ro ships dock. The ships sail under different flags. The captain is sometimes Italian but can also be Russian, Indian or Bulgarian. The

The Alfapass of the port of Antwerp opens the doors of a large part of the terminals in the port of Antwerp. After some

formalities we continue to the berth and park our van next to the ramp. Crossing the terminal requires special vigilance and care because of the heavy traffic on the quays.

Once parked we start unpacking. This requires some strategic insight in the display of the goods. As a professional vendor we put the ‘fast sellers’ first : chips in all shapes, flavors and



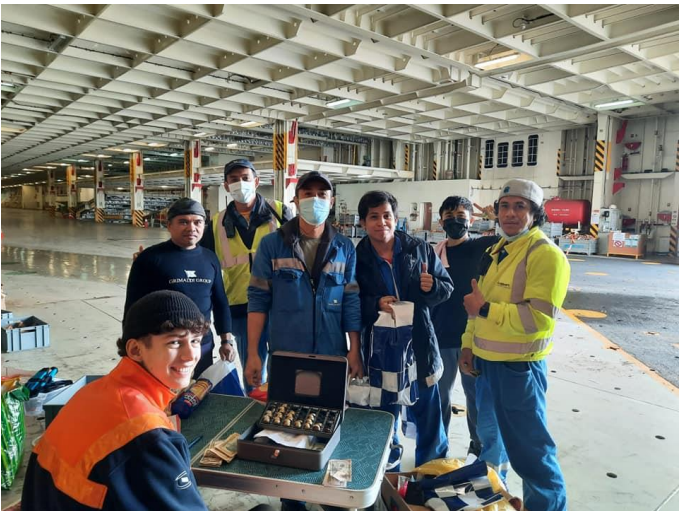
*Arrival of our rolling store at the Waaslandhaven*

packaging. The Philippine sailors love it and hoard several bags. Wafers and chocolate cakes are also in demand. The rear and side doors are wide open to expose the rest of our products.

The arrival of the rolling store is of course noticed by the watchman at the top of the driveway and he immediately informs his colleagues on board via intercom and walkie talkies.

Driver Lars is also a cashier and has already set up his folding table where the customer can display the goods he wants to buy. Lars quickly settles the bill. He knows most prices by heart as well as the most important exchange rates. Euros and dollars are the common currencies.

It is a colourful view, the sailors in their overalls, with a safety helmet. With permission from the boatsman they are queuing in front of the mobile shop , their walkie-talkie around their neck and ready to grab if needed. Every now and then a crackling voice sounds through the loudspeaker in an unknown language. Solidarity is great. If someone is short on cash he will receive a temporary loan from a ship's mate.



*Our German volunteer Lars is also the cashier*

Sailors are used to working in shifts. When the first shoppers have left the “market square”, a new batch of people shows up and the same scenario repeats itself.

If sailors hoard masses of chips, cake, or candy, it doesn't mean the food on board isn't enough. Sailors are like you and me : a snack between shifts comes in handy.

Sometimes with permission from the master, we can drive the rolling store into the hold of the ship via the ramp

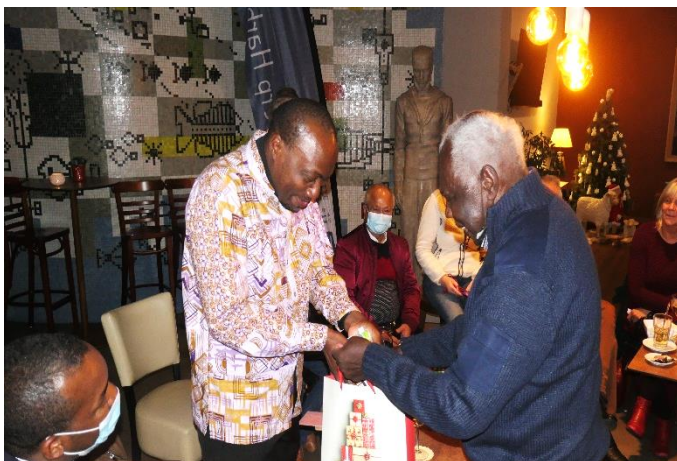
and set up our “commerce” there. We and the sailors appreciate this very much, especially in rainy weather. When we return to Stella Maris we know we made some new friends.

Interested to work as a volunteer in a challenging job in our shop or as a ships visitor ? Contact us :03/233.34.75 or : [contact@aposmar.be](mailto:contact@aposmar.be)



*Volunteers at Stella Maris*

# News from Stella Maris



As we reported in a previous issue, port chaplain Ghislain Toussé left the Stella Maris team to take up a new position as Provincial Head of the Congregation of Scheut in Cameroon. During an informal meeting at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel we said goodbye to Ghislain. We will remember him as a an always good-natured friend who saw the sailors as his brothers.

*Father Ghislain Toussé receiving a present during a farewell party*

# Christmas at Stella Maris

  
**THE ANTWERP SEAFARERS' WELFARE**  
ANTWERP HARBOUR HOTEL  
Noorderlaan 100  
B-2030 Antwerpen  
[www.facebook.com/antwerpseafarerswelfare](http://www.facebook.com/antwerpseafarerswelfare)

**Christmas 2021**  
Friday, 24<sup>TH</sup> December

Christmas Eve Service: 19.30 hrs.  
Christmas Happening : 20.30 hrs.

We cordially invite you to stay with us  
this Christmas Eve.  
Free Bus back at 23hrs.



Although the Covid restrictions did not permit us to celebrate Christmas in the usual way we organised a Christmas celebration at the Antwerp Harbour Hotel.

Also Christmas gifts were packed and distributed by the volunteers. In total some 2000 packages were prepared for distribution to the vessels in the port.



Volunteers preparing the presents



Preparing and distributing the many Christmas presents is always a hectic but joyful moment

Seafarers receiving their Christmas presents



## Celebrating Christmas on board and at Stella Maris



## Thank you and Good Luck Michiel !

Michiel Leen, a well-known journalist for the leading Antwerp internet newspaper FLOWS, changed his job at the end of last year. He left the editorial board of the digital shipping newspaper to become an editor in a publishing house of economics-scientific publications.



Journalist Michiel Leen

As last article for FLOWS, he gave an overview on those contributions which had a special influence on him. His visit to **Apostolatus Maris** was one of those assignments which he will always remember : Michiel Leen: *"I was visiting the volunteers of Apostolatus Maris. You hardly see sailors in the streets, especially in COVID times, but they are there. Far from home, without much support or contact with home. The volunteers of the seaman's mission offer the seamen spiritual support and practical help during their stay in Antwerp. We are warmly welcomed on board. Perhaps the men are happy to see a new face. They make no secret of their homesickness and their anxiety. But they are also very interested in our Belgian beer and Belgian chocolate. I continue to find it appalling that these people have been left to their own during the COVID crisis, despite the efforts of the shipping industry and other organisations to put crew changes on the agenda.*

# Our Sponsors

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Rotary



**You or your company/organization  
wants to support the Seafarers  
Centre ?**

**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?

Please contact Apostolatus Maris

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