



Apostleship of the Sea  
Supporting Seafarers Worldwide

Stella Maris Antwerp Bulletin n° 12

Winter Edition 2023

Dear Sponsor, Dear Reader,

The IMO (International Maritime Organisation) has chosen for its 2023 World Maritime Theme : 'Marpol at 50 : Our commitment goes on'. The International Convention for the 'Prevention of the Pollution from Ships' ( MARPOL) is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2023.

Stella Maris celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2020 and likewise also our 'commitment towards the seafarer' goes on. Stella Maris has indeed a long history of protecting seafarers' interests, in 2023 and beyond. Today the economic context of the shipping and maritime world dramatically changed. Our economy is fully globalised. The world trade, the basis of the maritime trade, doubled since beginning of this century, communication and information networks are spread over the world, and medical care is almost everywhere available.

Since 2020 some fundamentals in the global economic system however have been replaced. The Covid-19 crisis has shown us the weakness of worldwide supply chains. The climate crises will reshape the shipping world still this decade. The geopolitical situation in the world dramatically changed as well with a war on the European continent. All these elements have a severe impact on the position of the individual seafarer. Too often he is left alone in a hostile environment too far from home. This is the reality of every day and the reason why Stella Maris, is more than ever meaningful. Yes we are 'going on' after more than 100 years.



*President Jacques D'Havé*

In this issue we publish some extracts from a survey from the Deutsche Seemannsmission on the effects of Covid-19 and 'shore leave' for seamen one of our main concerns of last year. We also report on some domestic issues and conclude with a short history of the oecumenical organisation of the welfare for seafarers in Antwerp.

Enjoy your reading !

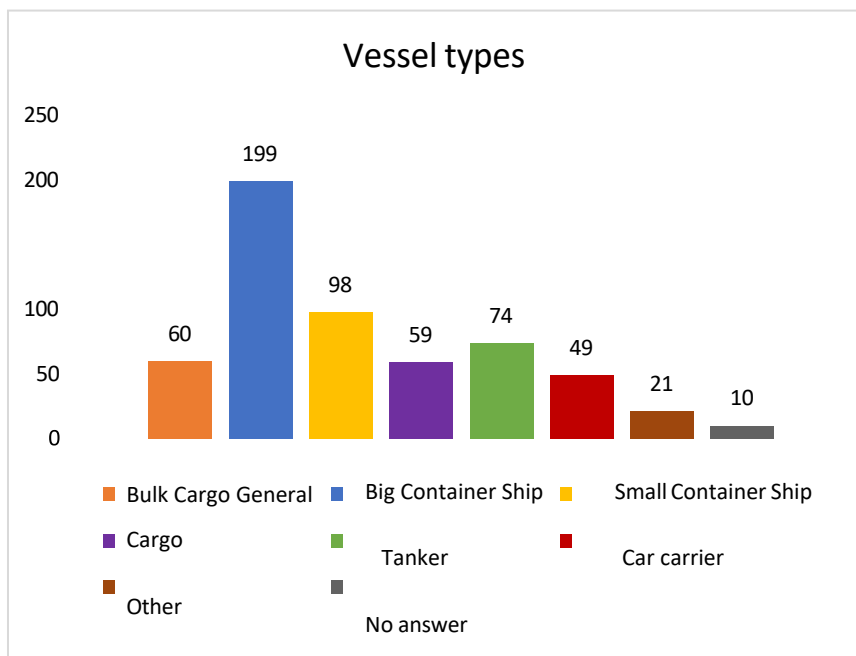
## “Shore leave for Seafarers in Covid-19”

**A**s a result of Covid-19 restrictions life on board and policies of many shipping companies changed with regard to shore leave permissions for the crew. This had serious consequences on the wellbeing of seafarers as we reported already several times. 'Deutsche Seemannsmission' (1) conducted a survey on this subject and we got the permission to report some of these conclusions in our newsletter.

The survey was conducted from 11-25th March last year in the German ports of Bremerhaven, Cuxhaven, Emden and Hamburg, as well as in the ports of Antwerp (Belgium), Le Havre (France) and New York (USA). A total of 570 (=100%) seafarers participated on the survey.

In this article we give an overview of the main results. About half of the questionnaires were done on board during a ship visit, the others in a seaman's club. More than half of the survey respondents (52%) worked on container ships (297 respondents/ 52%). Other vessel categories include tankers (74/ 13%), bulk carriers (60/ 11%), general cargo vessels (59/ 10%) and car carriers (49/ 9%).

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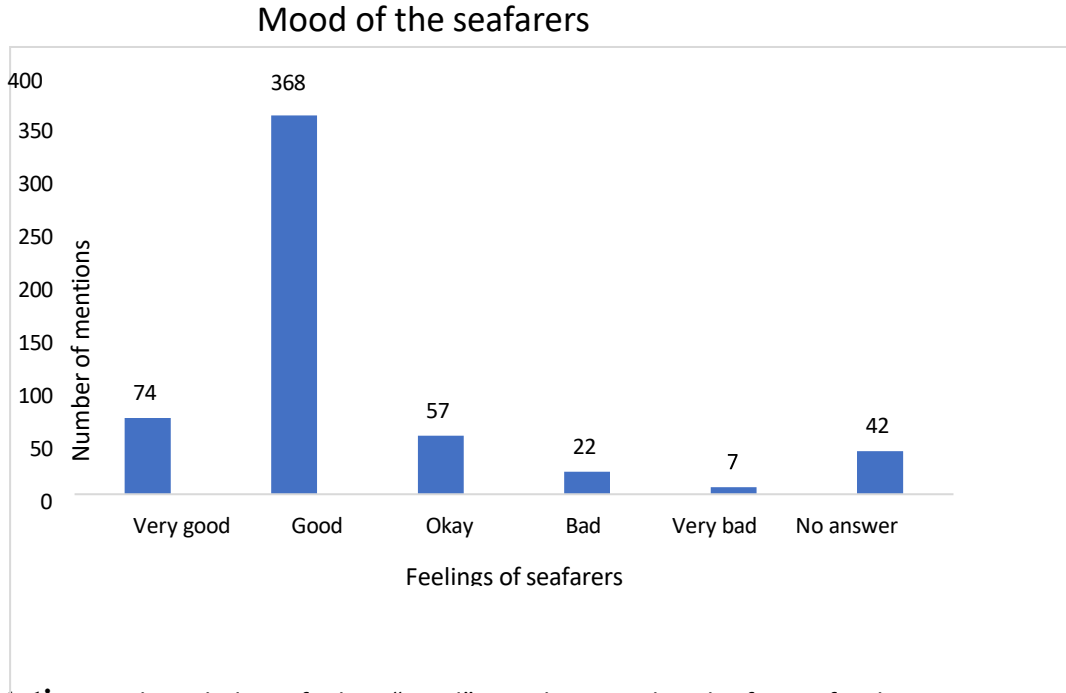


(1) The survey was conducted by Jörn Hille, Philipp M. Manthey, Sören Wichmann for Deutsche Seemannsmission.

As to the different functions on board which were questioned, 189 (1/3th) were officers ( including 19 Chief Engineers and 17 Masters) and 359 (2/3th) ratings. 22 seafarers did not mention their ranking. Regarding the different nationalities 63 % were Filipinos, 15 % Indians and 6 % Ukrainian. The remaining nationalities were of Asian or East European origin.

## Wellbeing of the seafarer ( How are you feeling ?)

**Description:** (442/ 77%) of the respondents described their well-being as “very good” or “good”. (57/ 10%) of the seafarers described their situation as “average”, (29/ 5%) as “bad” or “very bad”. (42/ 7%) of the seafarers did not reply to the question.



**Interpretation:** Acknowledging feeling “good” may be considered a form of polite communication – especially for seafarers from Asia making 82% of the respondents. Furthermore, the positive feelings may also have been influenced by the circumstances of being in a Seaman’s Club after a longer period with no shore leave and a possible ongoing vaccination in the seaman's club.

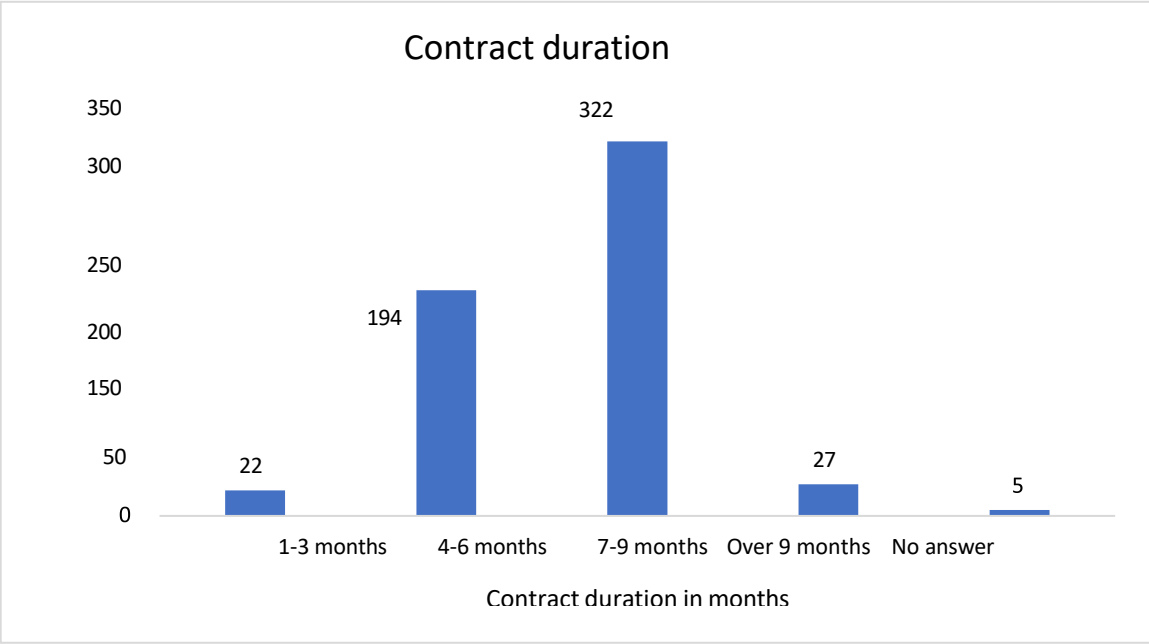
Even though most respondents claimed that they feel “good” or “very good,” some of their detailed answers are concerning: “I am feeling way better now because we are allowed to go ashore unlike the previous months.”

However, that still leaves (86/ 15%) of seafarers who state that their well-being is not good. The following three quotations come from seafarers from that group ; “Alienated from outside world. Isolated, stressed due to work and no shore leave” (“Ship has become floating prison”)

## Duration of the Contract

About two thirds of crew members (322/ 61%) remain on board for a long period of time. As regards the

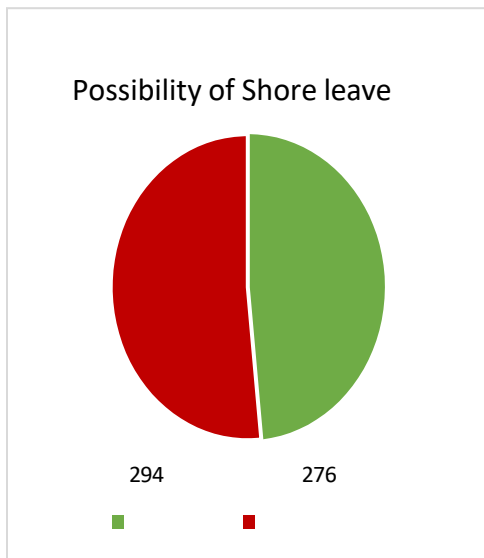
seafarers who are staying less than six months onboard (216/ 38%), we assume these are mainly officers and engineers.



**Interpretation:** Ongoing contracts lasting longer than six months (322/ 61%) are especially problematic. The longer a seafarer stays on board, the higher the chances that he or she experiences fatigue or other form of “burnout”, stress and exhaustion - either physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. It does no human being good to be on board a vessel that long.

## Shore Leave possibility

The possibility of shore leave shows that the shipping industry is not united. (294/ 52%) of the questioned seafarers did not have the possibility of shore leave, whilst (276/ 48%) of the respondents were allowed to go ashore. Every single seafarer who completed the survey answered this question (570/ 100%)! That gives us the impression that this was clearly the most important question in the entire survey. Shore leave is truly a matter of fundamental importance to the seafarers. Nobody avoided the question!



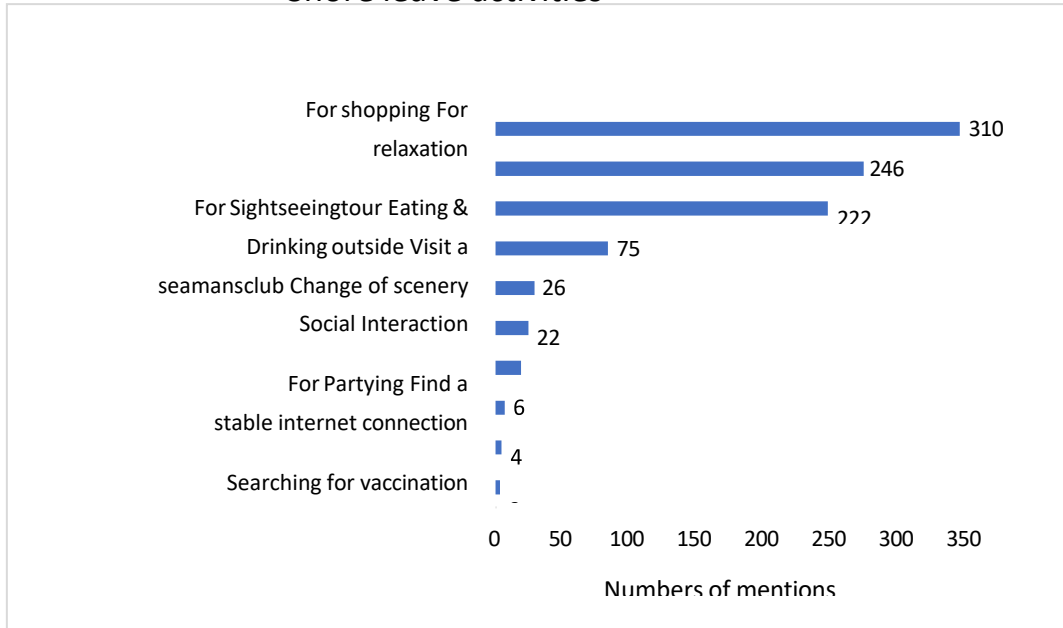
The seamen who were not able to go on shore leave (294/ 52%) were also asked about the reasons for the lack of shore leave.

(175/ 60%) of the respondents who were not allowed to go ashore say that their company prohibits shore leave in general (“company policy”), and (33/ 11%) said the prohibition came from the master. (73/ 25%) claimed that the authorities were responsible for their not receiving shore leave (n=294).

## Activities During Shore Leave

Over half (310 /54%) of seafarers claimed that they would use shore leave to go shopping. Relaxation from the daily work routine follows in second place with (246 /43%) mentions. (222/38%) seafarers would use shore leave for a sightseeing tour of the respective country or port. (75/ 13%) seafarers claimed that they would like to go out to eat and drink, and (26/ 5%) seafarers would like to visit a Seamen's Club. Other responses included a change of scenery (22/ 4%) mentions and social interaction with others (17/ 3%) mentions. (6/ 1%) of the respondents would like to go out partying and (4/ 1%) would seek a stable Internet connection during their shore leave. (3/ 0.5%) of respondents would like to be vaccinated during their shore leave.

## Shore leave activities



**Interpretation:** These replies illustrate the relevance of shore leave for seafarers. The first three activities show how important it is to grant shore leave to give seafarers the opportunity to organise their free time independently and do something good for themselves and their loved ones. The following quotes come from the first three categories:

1. “Buy some presents for family & to experience the good ambiance ashore” and “Buying personal products for hygiene for example”
2. “Keep your mind outside of job at least for a few hours” is good for my mental health”
3. “To eat other stuff, to see some place different other than ship, to meet and greet new people”

## When was your last shore leave?

**Description:** The next question is aimed to determine the time of the respondent’s last shore leave. One third (203/ 36%) of seafarers had this possibility during the last three months. (56/ 10%) of seafarers had their last shore leave 4-9 months ago, and (15/ 3%) 10-12 months ago. The (274/ 48%) seafarers who stated that they actually went ashore in the last 12 months corresponds to the (276/ 48%) of seafarers who said in Question 8 that they are allowed shore leave.

Of concern is the high number of seafarers (173 /30%) whose last shore leave was more than 12 months ago. Additionally, in this question as well, several seafarers indicated that they do not have a shore leave possibility. The high number of (94/ 16%) of seafarers who did not (want to) answer this question is also striking. The (294/ 52%) who did not receive shore leave matches the (296/ 52%) of seafarers who claimed that their last shore leave was longer than 12 months ago or was taken before their current contract.



Because of the high number of seafarers whose last shore leave was longer than 12 months ago, we examined their answers more closely.

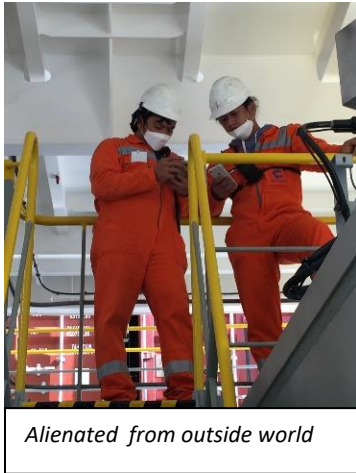
The graph shows that (118 /20%) of seafarers had their last shore leave between 12-24 months ago. For about (55 /10%) of the respondents, the last shore leave was more than two years /two contracts or longer ago.



**Interpretation:** We assume that a large proportion of these seafarers have been under contract with the same shipping company or different companies with comparable policies for several contract terms, and that the shipping companies have not allowed shore leave since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, many seafarers are still not able to receive shore leave as a compensation for the daily routine on board.

Especially those seafarers who had no shore leave in their current and last contracts (173/ 30%) are a group that gives reason for concern. The (67/ 11%) of respondents who had shore leave during the last month are in an enviable situation that should be available to all and is necessary for the well-being of the seafarers. (136/23%) come close with shore leave during the last 1-3 months, but (367 /64%) of the participants have not been ashore in a time frame that is acceptable (n=570).

## CONCLUSION



interview survey might be more productive.

One clear result of this survey is that seafarer's life was hard, and since the outbreak of COVID-19 it has become even harder. (477/ 84%) of the seafarers want shore leave and describe it as a relief from their stressful life on board. As fully (294/ 52%) of the seafarers, however, do not currently receive shore leave, they are in a precarious situation.

Disturbing is that over one third (208/ 36%) of the seafarers named their employers as the reason for their present situation. We are quite concerned that these employers/ companies might restrict the personal freedom of their seafarers even further and use the Covid-19 pandemic and related fears as an vehicle to generally change life on board and ashore to the disadvantage of the seafarers.

The legal basis for temporarily suspending shore leave is the safeguarding ship's safety. But the safety aspect of the vessel was not mentioned even once in the entire survey (not even by officers). Is the safety of a ship endangered as soon as a seafarer leaves the ship? Or is this just a pretext to establish an illegal application of shore leave prohibition? Or is the vague and abstract possibility of a threat to the safety of the vessel a good enough reason to limit the individual freedom of seafarers? This report concludes with a comment from a seafarer:

“Seamen are always ignored. Covid made the situation even worse. It is easy to deny us our basic rights as there is no one bothered to stand for us.”

**It is up to us all to change this situation.**

*From a survey by the Deutsche Seemannsmission*

In general, with n=570 questionnaires, answered within two weeks, a high overall response rate was achieved. This is based, among other things, on a high mutual appreciation between the seafarers and the work of the Deutsche Seemannsmission.

Since the questioned seafarers are all from vessels that operated at least partly in Europe and/ or North America, we assume that the overall results of a worldwide survey might even be worse.

The number of returns and the results show that a questionnaire-based survey can certainly be suitable for knowledge-creating surveys in the future, but for greater in-depth evaluation and interpretation a qualitative

One very positive result was that the contract length and adherence thereto seems to be back on track. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic we had cases of seafarers being on board for more than 15 months. Things apparently have now normalised. (565/ 99%) of the questioned seafarers answered this question and described a situation according to their contracts.



# Focus on our Port Chaplains

**Chaplains fulfil many functions in our modern society. They work in a variety of organisations such as the army, prisons, hospitals and of course also in the port. Much of their work remains ‘under the waterline’ unless you come in a situation, intentionally or unintentionally to make it desirable to make use of their services. A reality program from VRT Canvas will very soon focus on their work.**



CHAPLAIN KIRAN WELCOMES A VISITOR



OUR CHAPLAINS WELCOMED ON BOARD MSC AMSTERDAM



PHARA DE AGUIRE AND CHAPLAIN KIRAN IN DISCUSSION WITH THE MASTER

This year the VRT channel Canvas will dedicate a number of programs to chaplains in various functions in our society. For this the VRT came to Stella Maris to ask our cooperation. VRT journalist Phara De Aguire followed during several of our days head chaplain father Vanhoof presently training our new chaplain Kiran Joy in his daily work in the port and on board of the ships.

The TV team was amazed about the warm reception our chaplains received on board. Behind the hard shell of the seaman there is very often a warm personality and a sincere and surprising openness of a human being. Sometimes our chaplains work more as a ‘social assistant’ when there are problems on board, in other instances they take care of the spiritual needs of seamen in a difficult situation.



HOLY MASS CELEBRATED ON BOARD



CHAPLAINS JORGEDY AND KIRAN IN CONCELEBRATION



PHARA DE AGUIRE IN DISCUSSION WITH CREW

For Phara De Aguire and her crew a new world opened which she will show within short. We will keep you updated when the series will be broadcasted.



# Surprise visits on 6<sup>th</sup> December

The crew of many vessels in the port of Antwerp were very surprised when they met Sinterklaas with his assistants Zwarte Piet and Zwarte Miet distributing chocolates and sweets. A traditional but always very welcome distraction from the daily routine on board and something to remember pleasantly during the long journeys still ahead.



*SINTERKLAAS AND HIS ASSISTANTS FROM THE SEAMEN'S WELFARE DISTRIBUTING PRESENTS ON BOARD*





## The ladies of the ‘knitted hat club ‘

For already several years some very motivated ladies regularly meet in the afternoon in a so called ‘knitting club’. The result of their efforts are woollen hats, a warm and traditional Christmas gift. The woollen hats are highly appreciated by our seamen who often are not properly equipped for our winters .

We congratulate the ladies of the ‘knitting club’ for their devotion and hope that they will continue their ‘hobby’ for many years to come...



*The ladies of the ‘knitted hat club’*

## Christmas and New Year at Stella Maris

A highlight for Stella Maris is the traditional Christmas celebration on Christmas Eve .



*CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AT THE Seamen’s Welfare*



**CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AT ANTWERP HARBOUR HOTEL - FROM LEFT TO RIGHT :**

*REV. PETER IBRAHIM – GERMAN SEAMEN’S MISSION & MISSION TO SEAFARERS, FATHER JOS VANHOOF-STELLA MARIS;  
DEACON JÖRG PFAUTSCH – GERMAN SEAMEN’S MISSION; CHAPLAIN KIRAN JOY STELLA MARIS; REV. MARC SCHIPPERS –  
SAILORS’ SOCIETY; PORT CHAPLAIN ULF RADZIEJEWSKI – CHURCH OF SWEDEN; FATHER JUNE YAÑEZ – MISSION TO SEAFARERS.*

The Christmas celebration took place in the largest room of the Antwerp Harbour Hotel and in traditional oecumenical spirit of the seamen’s mission the various chaplains and pastors of our welfare organisation presided the celebration. Afterwards the Christmas gifts and knitted caps from the knitted cap club were distributed. The evening ended with a Christmas meal with various European and Filipino dishes. In total some 140 seamen and sympathisers took part in the celebrations.



After the Holy Mass, seamen gathered together with the chaplains around the altar to make ‘selfies’ and sent it to their families around the world.

One seaman declared : ‘this is the finest Christmas in years’ !

This is how Antwerp welcomes the seafarers !

*AFTER THE CELEBRATION CHAPLAINS AND SEAMEN GATHERED*



## The Antwerp Harbour Chaplaincy, a historic summary.

**The structure of the port chaplaincy, which has existed in Antwerp for more than fifty years, has proven to be effective and is known worldwide as a model of oecumenical cooperation. In this contribution we will give a brief historic summary about how this cooperation has grown during the previous years and how it is still working today.**

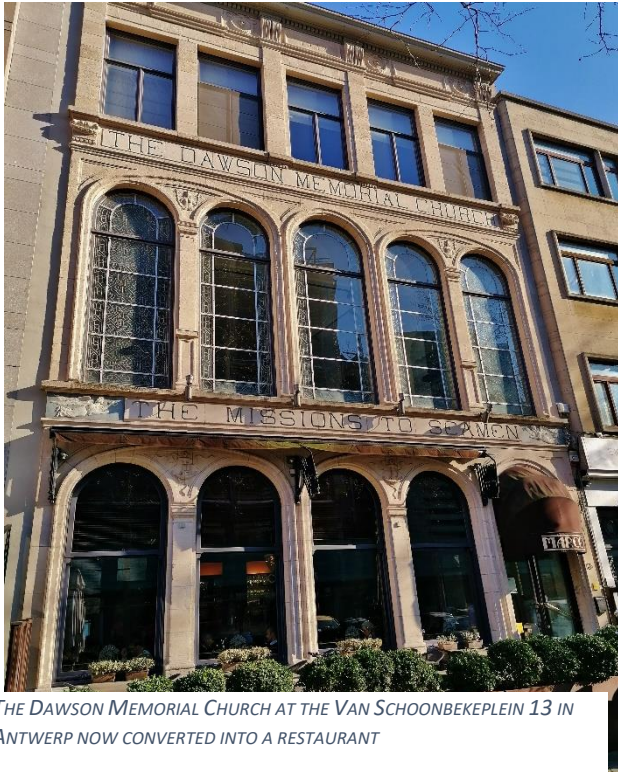
Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 ended a long period of war on the European continent and nearby waters. The great British fleet was no more needed and many seamen lost their jobs. In the winter of 1817-1818 many sailors wandered the streets of London aimlessly. Poverty and alcoholism were rampant. To counter these harrowing conditions, a number of ministers founded in March 1818 the 'Port of London Society' today known as 'Sailors Sociery'.

With the expansion of the British empire these missions spread over different countries and continents. For example the Norwegian Seamen's Church was already active in the 1860s Antwerp and still is today well known landmark in the city.



*The Norwegian seamen's church building at the Italiëlei near the Waaslandtunnel dates from 1870.*

The port chaplains and pastors belong to different congregations, such as the Church of England, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, the Roman Catholic Church, Svenska Kyrkan and the United Protestant Church in Belgium but have one goal in common : the moral and physical needs of Seamen



*THE DAWSON MEMORIAL CHURCH AT THE VAN SCHOONBEKEPLEIN 13 IN ANTWERP NOW CONVERTED INTO A RESTAURANT*

At the beginning every seamen's mission in Antwerp had its own building. The Anglican Mission to Seafarers was located at the Van Schoonbekeplein 13 where the beautiful facade of the Dawson Memorial Church can still be admired. The building houses now a well-known restaurant.

The Lutheran Suomen Merimieskirkko had its seaman's center at 67-69 Italiëlei. One of the buildings was painted in alternating white and blue horizontal lines: the colors of the Finnish flag.

In the early 60's of last century a 'working group of port chaplains and pastors' gathered on regular basis in Antwerp. In 1969 they joined forces with the establishment of

the Antwerp Mariners' Club at Noorderlaan 171. In the early 1970's, chief chaplain E.H. Alfons Laureys of Stella Maris and three other missions decided to move ahead and combine the welfare work for seafarers in the 'Antwerp Seafarers' Centre' at the Italiëlei 72-74. Apostolatus Maris (Roman Catholic), Deutsche Seemannsmission (Lutheran), Mission to Seafarers (Anglican) and the Sailors' Society (Protestant), decided from that moment onward to work together. This oecumenical cooperation is now in existence for more than 50 years !

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*SEAMEN IN THE SEAMEN'S SHOP AT THE PREVIOUS ANTWERP SEAFARERS CENTRE FROM APOSTOLATUS MARIS*



*THE PREVIOUS PREMISES OF THE ANTWERP SEAFARERS CENTRE AT THE ITALIËLEI 72-74 IN ANTWERP*





THE NEW LOCATION AT THE ANTWERP HARBOUR HOTEL

moved to their current location : the Harbour Hotel at Noorderlaan 100 Antwerpen.

The cooperation of the four missions, together with the secular International Seamen's House Antwerp and the Mediport port doctor's service, is known as **Antwerp Seafarers' Welfare**.

For many decades, a weekly meeting of the port chaplains and the volunteers takes place, where different practical subjects are discussed, including access problems to terminals, visiting seamen in the hospital and free transportation for sailors. When the Antwerp Seafarers' Center 'Stella Maris' at the Italëlei closed its doors in 2020 after 68 years of operation, the seamen missions



VISITING SEAMEN AT THE HOSPITAL



OECUMENICAL CELEBRATION

Oecumenical cooperation manifests itself in various forms, including aid to distressed sailors, the annual Sea Sunday celebration (second Sunday in July), the communal celebration on Christmas Eve, the joint preparation of



DAY OF THE SAILORS

Christmas packages and the participation of the chaplains in the celebration of the Day of the Sailors in the Antwerp St. Paul's Church.

**The purpose of the port ministry is to show the love of Christ to all sailors in word and deed. We hope to continue this collaboration for many years to come, in an ever changing maritime world.**

Rev. Mark Schippers  
 Port chaplain - Sailors' Society  
 Edited by Tony Vuylsteke - Stella Maris

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