



ALLELUJA! CHRIST IS RISEN, ALLELUJA!

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MESSAGE FOR HOLY EASTER 2011

Dear people of the sea,

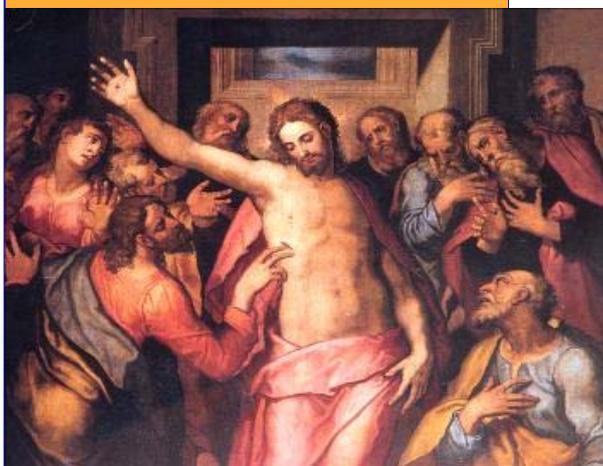
on the Great Vigil of Easter this announcement resonates once again in every Christian community and I would like it to reach all of you wherever you are.

In spite of the dark clouds hovering over the maritime world because of the increasing number of pirates attacks, the dangers of criminalization, the fear of unemployment and many other problems that often are making your life more difficult, the celebration of the resurrection of Christ is a powerful message of encouragement, hope and perseverance which brings joy and new life.

A message of **hope**, brought to you by the hundreds of dedicated AOS chaplains and volunteers who every day, in different ports of the world, visit your ships, open the doors of the *Stella Maris* centers and of their hearts to welcome you as brothers and sisters without any discrimination. With His resurrection, Christ has defeated the forces of division, jealousy and animosity and has brought unity, love and cooperation.

A message of **encouragement**, coming from the people who, in various governmental and non-governmental organizations, are working hard to develop and implement legislations that will guarantee the protection of your dignity as workers and persons. Christ, who suffered and died on the cross for our salvation, has revealed how important is every human being.

A message of **perseverance**, for those who among you feel discouraged, depressed and especially for the almost 800 seafarers in the hands of the pirates, since nothing will separate you from the love of Christ who has conquered the powers of evil. Your hearts should not be filled with fear and uncertainty even after hearing the tragic news of wars, violence and natural calamities around the world, because Christ is walking on your side, giving courage and strength to face the hardships of life.



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Dear people of the sea, look ahead with confidence to the future, accept the life of the Risen Christ as your new life, let the joy of the resurrection fill your hearts, share it with your families and friends and, like the disciples, witness that Christ is risen.

Happy Easter to all!

✠ Antonio Maria Vegliò, President

Fr. Gabriele Bentoglio, Under-Secretary

NEW SECRETARY AT THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL

On the 22nd February, the Holy Father Benedict XVI has appointed Secretary of this Pontifical Council H.E. Msgr. **JOSEPH KALATHIPARAMPIL**, Bishop of Calicut, Kerala, India.

Born Oct. 06, 1952, he was ordained Bishop on May 19, 2002.

The Apostleship of the Sea sector welcomes him aboard and looks forward to cooperate with him for the good of seafarers, fishers and their families.



BLESSED JOHN PAUL II

A GIANT OF THE FAITH

On May 1, 2011, John Paul II has been beatified by Pope Benedict XVI.

Our poor words cannot do justice to such a great man, but we would like to express our recognition for the love he always showed for the Apostleship of the Sea, in particular through his Apostolic Letter "Motu Proprio" Stella Maris, which he bestowed on us in 1997.

John Paul II never missed a chance to express his solidarity with and interest in our ministry. His devotion to Stella Maris was well known. He loved to say that the Star of the Sea was attributed to Mary because she gives us the right course to port, so we are not lost, especially at nights and during storms.

On the day of his funeral, crowds at St. Peter's Square shouted for Pope John Paul II to be made a saint immediately, chanting "Santo Subito!". Now the time has come and we, with great emotion, ask him to continue to watch over the Apostleship of the Sea the world over.





**THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE
OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANTS
ESTABLISHES A SPECIAL FUND TO HELP THE FISHING COMMUNITIES
AFFECTED BY THE TSUNAMI IN JAPAN**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have seen the dramatic images of buildings shaking and collapsing for the most powerful earthquake followed by the devastating tsunami that hit the Northern Japan only a few days ago. It is still early to realize the magnitude of the tragedy, entire cities are destroyed, hundreds of people are dead and ten of thousands are displaced. I do not have words to express my solidarity to all the people affected by this tragedy and I assure them that they are in my thoughts and prayers.

The government emergency and rescue response has been immediate and it will continue for weeks and months. However, I understand that facing this immense catastrophe even a technologically advanced and developed country like Japan needs assistance to rebuild the lives of broken families and communities.

As it happened for the tsunami that struck the coasts of Asia in 2004, I think that the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) as worldwide community should be present as an extraordinary manifestation of solidarity. It should offer its contribution to assist the victims of this calamity. The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, which is responsible for the overall direction of the Apostleship of the Sea, has decided to set up a special "AOS Japan Tsunami Fund" with an initial donation of 3.000 (three thousands) Euros.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO REMIT
DONATIONS FOR AOS JAPAN
TSUNAMI FUND**

IN USA DOLLARS

BANK: JP MORGAN CHASE BANK
**ADDRESS: 4 Chase Metro Teck,
7th Floor 11245 Brooklyn, New York**

COD. SWIFT: CHASUS33XXX
ABA ROUTING NR: 021000021
ACCOUNT NUMBER: 001 – 1 – 975 000

BENEFICIARY:
ISTITUTO PER LE OPERE DI RELIGIONE
(Cod. Swift: IOPRVAVXXX)
00120 Città del Vaticano

Details of payment:
Pontificio Consiglio Migranti
– account no. 22 52 70 14

This fund, with other donations, aside from providing assistance to respond to the immediate needs of the survivors, will sustain a long-term commitment plan for the people who are

IN EUROS

BANK: JP MORGAN CHASE BANK
**ADDRESS: 14, Junghofstrasse,
60311 Frankfurt am Main, BLZ 50110800**

IBAN: DE81501108006231606168
CODICE SWIFT: CHASDEFXXX

BENEFICIARY:
ISTITUTO PER LE OPERE DI RELIGIONE
(IOR)
00120 Città del Vaticano

Details of payment:
Pontificio Consiglio Migranti
– account no. 22 52 70 13

at the heart of our ministry, like seafarers, fishers and their families.

The donations received will be given directly to AOS in Japan. The National Director Soon-Ho Kim, with the supervision of the AOS Bishop Promoter, H.E. Msgr. Michael Goro Matsuura, has taken the responsibility to coordinate this effort by submitting rehabilitation projects and budgets in order to help devastated fishing communities and rebuild their lives.

This Pontifical Council has created two different bank accounts, one in US\$ and the other one in Euros, where you can send donations. Please let us now about any transfer of funds.

I would be grateful if you could forward this message to your collaborators and colleagues and give all the publicity that you think fit.

I thank you in advance for your support and generosity and pray for the blessing of Mary, Star of the Sea, for this endeavor.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

✠ Antonio Maria Vegliò, President

Fr. Gabriele Bentoglio, Under-Secretary

MICHAEL GORO MATSUURA, Auxiliary Bishop of Osaka and AOS Episcopal Promoter:

“WE WILL HELP THE FISHERS WHO DON'T RECEIVE GOVERNMENT AID”

The Japanese Bishops and the Apostolate of the Sea are concentrating on helping the fishers and those people, who, for diverse reasons do not qualify for government aid: so says Bishop **Michael Goro Matsuura**, Auxiliary Bishop of Osaka and promoter of the work of the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) in Japan.

The Bishop tells Fides that he is shocked and worried by the large scales damages caused by the tsunami: “Many fishing communities have been completely washed away. Others have lost their



boats and their homes, and remain with nothing. It will take many programs and projects to rebuild the human, social and working environments of these people. It will be a long-term process, because still today people look at the sea with extreme fear,” notes the Bishop. “As the Apostolate of the Sea and the Catholic Church,” he adds, “we will try to make our contribution, especially aimed at the communities and individuals who fail to qualify for aid from the Government.”

Bishop Matsuura wishes to thank the Catholic Church at the universal level, but also all the Japanese Catholic faithful for their great expression of solidarity that they are offering to the people: “We invite everyone to contribute donations to our collection to help develop projects that will benefit these communities. But we also ask for prayers, that people do not get discouraged and that they find new strength to rebuild their lives.” For the Catholic Church “this disaster represents a great opportunity to show solidarity and love of neighbour,” said the Auxiliary Bishop of Osaka.

Responding to calls by the Holy Father, the AOS - which has already intervened in Asia following the tsunami of 2004 and therefore has experience in this type of situation - has sparked its network at both regional and international levels, establishing a special fund to meet the losses incurred by Japanese fishers. The Apostolate of the Sea, also known as 'Stella Maris' is the official society of the Catholic Church for the pastoral care of seafarers. To carry out this responsibility, the society operates within the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People.

(PA) (Agenzia Fides 28/3/2011)

A Korean missionary, “hand from the Pope” to help fishers hit by the tsunami

Sendai – The Holy See hopes to help the fishers hit by the tsunami to rebuild their livelihoods: the person responsible for realising this intention in Japan is Soon-Ho Kim, a St Columban lay missionary who has worked in Japan for many years and is currently the Director of the Apostolate of the Sea in Japan. Interviewed by Fides, **Soon-Ho Kim** reports that there are about 260 ports adversely affected by the tsunami and more than 20,000 boats destroyed: this has devastated the lives of thousands of families who now lack the basic means for their livelihood, with serious damage to the local economy in the three prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. Fides interviewed Soon-Ho Kim.

Can you give us an idea of the damages sustained by the fishers?

Conditions are very difficult. The roads are destroyed and it is difficult to reach the areas hit by the tsunami. Efforts first need to be made to reach the victims with humanitarian aid. Fishers are amongst those hit hardest. A number of deaths has not yet been certified, but, according to official data, they have suffered serious damages, losing 111 ports in the Prefecture of Iwate, 142 in that of Miyagi and 10 ports in that of Fukushima. It seems that more than 20,000 fishing boats and vessels have been destroyed, an absolute catastrophe for these people for whom fishing is the main form of subsistence.

What can you do to help them, in keeping with the wishes of the Holy Father?

First of all we are trying to stabilise an efficient network of communication, which is not easy in these conditions. For the first few weeks emergency aid will continue. Then we will try to estimate and understand the extent to which coastal communities have been affected by focusing our attention on fishers. We will begin reconstruction projects, which may be much larger than the funds at our disposal. We will act in concert with our government agencies to avoid the risk of duplication of aid.



(PA) (Agenzia Fides 28/3/2011)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People thanks all those who sent their contributions to the Fund established to help fishers tsunami victims and their families.

In due time, an account of how donations were used will be sent.

The people of the sea and the piracy emergency

by ANTONIO MARIA VEGLIÒ



*President of the Pontifical Council
for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People*

The maritime world is an unknown to most of us. This slice of humanity comprising 1.2M people sailing on thousands of ships navigating the world's oceans far out of our sight is largely ignored by society, even when they come into our ports.

According to International Labour Office some 27 million people were employed globally in the fishing sector in the year 2000, including those working on a full, part-time or occasional basis. Eighty-two percent of these fishers were located in Asia.

Seafarers, who we can define as "sea nomads" are involved in an activity which forces them to be far from the mainland, from their families and their countries for extended periods, even months at a time. The relationships on board are hierarchical and shifts are arduous. Living together in confined spaces with people of different nationalities, languages and religious beliefs is not easy.

Sometimes seafarers have been left abandoned by the ship-owners in distant ports, or captured by pirates in the increasingly frequent attacks on the high seas. It is not easy to lead a normal Christian life, participate in Mass on holy days, receive the Eucharist or other Sacraments, given that this depends on the services offered in the country where their ship is docked and on their work shifts.

All these factors add considerable psychological stress to an already physically demanding occupation. The work of the Apostleship of the Sea (founded in Glasgow, Scotland on October 4, 1920 by a group of lay persons and which has recently celebrated its 90th anniversary) is the pastoral response to the range of needs felt by seafaring people. While ports have become mechanized and ships more modern, seafarers' needs have essentially remained the same: maintaining contact with their families, getting from the port to the city centre, purchasing personal necessities. Despite the economic crisis, the Stella Maris Centres in numerous ports the world over, including those recently opened in Rio Grande (Brazil), Saldanha Bay (South Africa) and Taichung (Taiwan), offer these and other services to seafarers no matter what their nationality, language or religion.

In order to "plot the course" for the next few years, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants, which is the coordinating body for the Apostleship of the Sea, convened the **eight regional coordinators** (North America & Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, Atlantic Africa, Indian Ocean, South Asia, Far East and Australia) in February 2011.

They discussed the major issues regarding the maritime industry with particular attention to the spiritual and material wellbeing of seafarers, fisherfolk and their families.

This year, the principal question examined was the piracy emergency, which is no longer solely affecting the coasts of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. In his presentation, the Scalabrinian Father Gabriele Bentoglio, under-secretary of this department, highlighted data from the Report on the World's Piracy prepared by the International Maritime Bureau: in 2010, 445 ships were attacked, 53 hijacked and 1,181 seafarers captured, of whom eight were killed in various circumstances. The Apostleship of the Sea's concern is espe-

Annual Meeting of AOS Regional Coordinators (14th-16th February 2011)



cially focused on seafarers and their families who often much endure this situation on their own, paying a terrible price in terms of psychological trauma and its consequences.

As referred by Admiral Pierluigi Cacioppo (see page 8), Vice Inspector of the Italian Port Authorities & Coast Guard (who participated in the place of the this body's Commander, Admiral Marco Brusco), there are two types of piracy, 1) "occasional", which is aimed at the theft of cargo, and 2) "large scale", linked to organized crime or terrorist groups, which is aimed at hijacking vessels and demanding the payment of ransom for cargo and persons. The objective of "providing assistance to those who have been attacked or kidnapped by pirates, and their families" identified in the recent action plan of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) gave the Admiral the basis to present three specific suggestions for the Apostleship of the Sea's action: 1) define a set of guidelines for practical action for seafarers and their families in the event of such incidents, including preparedness; 2) establish special lines of communications with government authorities in charge of these cases; 3) provide spiritual, psychological, material and social care for families, including creating solidarity networks involving local civil society and religious organisations.

Regional coordinators' reports highlighted the ongoing and day-to-day engagement in visits to vessels in order to promote closer relations between seafarers and their families, contact with seamen's home countries by cell phone, low-cost calling cards, Wi-Fi internet connections and e-news bulletins in the twelve most popular languages used by crews globally. The reports also emphasized the importance that chaplains are acquiring on cruise ships where they are not only involved in responding to the spiritual needs of passengers and crew, but also concerned with the latter's general wellbeing. Of note here is the Italian Apostleship of the Sea's long tradition of service, which began in 1935 and continues today. The Regional Coordinators emphasized the need to increase national Church leaders' awareness and attention to seafarers and their families, by assigning priests and deacons, encouraging lay involvement and allocating greater financial resources to this Apostleship.

Fr. Giacomo Martino, the Director of the Fondazione Migrantes' Office for the Pastoral Care of Marine and Air Transport Workers, gave a presentation on the use of various technological tools and programmes which have opened new horizons and offered new possibilities to strengthen communications and information exchange among seafarers, their families and concerned institutions, such as Stella Maris Centres. There was special interest in the registration programme for vessels coming into port, which could form the basis for a database that could be used to assess the real state of welfare on the seas.



Father Dirk Damaeght shared his long experience as a chaplain for fishers in Brugges, Belgium, (see page 13) showing how his engagement with these people led him to intervene both socially and politically in order bring about structural and legislative changes geared to offering better security and protection to this category of workers, who are so often ignored. The greatest challenge to fishing – apart from the ratification of the ILO's Convention 188 on Working in Fishing Sector and its recommendations – is the transformation of the spiritual and moral approach to a more sustainable and responsible fishing into a subject for education and training for new generations of fishers.

Great encouragement was received from Pope Benedict XVI at the General Audience on Wednesday, February 16, when he directly appealed to the Regional Coordinators to "identify satisfactory pastoral responses to the problems faced by seafarers and their families", a sign of the Church's concern and support for their mission.

At the end of the meeting, the Regional Coordinators set the date for the **XXIII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea in Rome in 2012**, where they will commemorate the 90th anniversary of Pius XI's approval of the AOS first Constitution and Rules, which contained the invitation for "such a noble initiative to increasingly expand in the maritime zones of the two hemispheres and harvest abundant fruits of Salvation".

(L'Osservatore Romano, 18 March 2011)

Annual Meeting of AOS Regional Coordinators (14th -16th February 2011)

**Admiral PIERLUIGI CACIOPPO
reads the paper of Adm. Marco Brusco,
General Commander
of the Italian Coast Guard,
at the annual Meeting
of AOS Regional Coordinators**



Piracy has represented a phenomenon which all peoples have had to cope with ever since the sea became the instrument for carrying out most commercial trade.

Technological progress, the “war-like” preparation of the new pirates, and the advanced operational instruments have changed the ways in which the phenomenon is manifested that cannot be compared to the often romanticized ways of the past centuries. However, economic interest as the basis of the “piracy” phenomenon and all the acts of aggression remains unchanged.

Today we distinguish two types of piracy that vary according to the means available, the procedures adopted, and the reason that drives the predators to this crime: on the one hand, occasional piracy, which aims at stealing the cargo and valuables on board the victimized ship; on the other, large-scale piracy linked to organized economic crime or terror groups, which aims instead at hijacking and seizing ships and the subsequent request for ransom or the resale of the captured ship or its cargo.

One element that is common to all the cases that fall under piracy in the strict sense is the possibility for the pirates to get organized on safe territorial bases and to act in bodies of water that represent a hub of maritime traffic.

For this reason, the phenomenon of piracy is only manifested in particular areas: the Strait of Malacca (a vital *choke point* for the routes that bring goods and oil from and to China, South Korea and Japan); Somalia (a State that “failed” in 1991 after the civil war, with its 3,300 kilometers of coast, represents the largest area uncontrolled by any governmental

authority); Nigeria and Iraq (large exporters of oil respectively from the African Sub-Saharan area and the Middle East

with difficulties in controlling the bodies of water under their jurisdiction), and the Caribbean Sea (at the center of the route for the Americas and affected by the need to give an outlet to the drug traffic).

The attempts and instruments prepared to combat the phenomenon in question are many, but they are often hindered by problems of a various nature, particularly a legal and operational nature.

From the legal viewpoint, the phenomenon of piracy is adequately defined on the international level by article 100 and the following ones of the 1982 Convention of Montego Bay. However, many States, particularly those closer geographically to the places where the criminal phenomenon takes place, do not expressly regulate the crime of piracy in their respective systems or provide an express definition of the term *piracy* but make direct reference to the definition given by the international conventions. This circumstance can constitute an obstacle to action to curb the phenomenon.

For these reasons, the Secretariat of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), with express reference to the problem of piracy off the Somalian coasts, recently began a study to find out about the progress made in the national laws to oppose this criminal phenomenon and expressed its hope for better harmonization between the different national laws in force. In fact, uniform legal instruments would make it possible to confront piracy better, at least from the standpoint of legal action.

Within the scope of the situation outlined, the Port Authority – Coast Guard plays an important role. Its field of action is surely training support and the more typical technical-operational support.

Chapter XI of the SOLAS Convention regarding “*Special measures to enhance maritime security*” entrusts the General Headquarters of the Port Authorities Corps – Coast Guard with competence regarding maritime navigation safety. The Port Authorities (on the peripheral level) and the General Headquarters (on the central level) approve the security plans and the security certificates of every national ship and keep copies of them precisely to allow the competent authorities to adopt every necessary measure in the event of an alert, while at the same time maintaining the necessary contacts with the person in charge of security from the shipping company.

With specific reference to piracy, the updating of the SOLAS has made it possible – from the operational viewpoint – to have the electronic apparatus called *Ship Security Alert System* (SSAS) installed on board ships. This traces the ship's position and allows a hidden alarm to be sent in the event of danger in order to enable the ships to transmit an alert signal if their safety is threatened.

The Operational Station of the General Headquarters of the Port Authorities receives the alert generated by the SSAS apparatuses installed on board the national merchant ships. When it receives the alert, the Operational Station takes every necessary step and, among other things, informs the other competent administrations (diplomatic, military and police authorities) and supplies all the data available about the vessel (position, ports of departure and destination, cargo, the ship's complete file, communications systems).

If the vessel's seizure by hostile forces is confirmed, the Operational Station immediately informs the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Minister for Infrastructures and Transportation, the Crisis Unit of the Foreign Ministry, the Defense Chief of Staff, the Navy Chief of Staff and the Commander in Chief of the Naval Fleet for the appropriate decisions regarding the line of action to adopt. In the event that the decisions foresee the option of military intervention, the Operational Station, thanks to a constantly updated database, can make the security plans of

the national vessels available rapidly to the Special Forces, including the various ship designs, which provide essential information for planning eventual actions to take back control of the hijacked vessel.

The Operational Station of the General Headquarters of the Port Authorities also sees to the constant updating of national shipping, with the timely distribution of information regarding the situation in progress, the necessary precautions to adopt in order to reduce risks to a minimum during the transit, and actions to be undertaken in the event of possible threats or attacks.

The fact remains that despite the efforts to combat the phenomenon and the progress achieved, piracy still exists today and, consequently, kidnapped ships and crews continue to exist.

Piracy, in fact, is a risk that is added to the risks inherent in nature and the seafarer's living condition. He finds himself on the open sea for months, far away from any form of organized society, at the mercy of waves that are not always kind, concerned about what is happening ashore about which he often gets no news for a long time. If this were not enough, seafarers also run the risk of being taken hostage by unscrupulous pirates, forced to face precarious situations of extreme hardship, often suffering from hunger, with no economic support for themselves or their families, filled with anguish by the uncertainty of what will happen, desperate or resigned, while waiting for someone to pay an unjust ransom for them of millions of Euros, and with the hope that they will return home to their loved ones as soon as possible.

In this context, all of us have the duty to prevent the phenomenon of piracy in every way as well as its repercussions on crews, and to limit the consequences of the hostile acts both from the economic viewpoint and the no less important viewpoint of the psychological and moral damage suffered by the crews.

The Port Authorities Corps – Coast Guard will make a maximum effort to make the prevention and opposition instruments ever more effective which the system puts at our disposal today, as

well as to carry out an awareness-building activity among the crews so that they will implement all the necessary precautionary measures to prevent any harmful events.

In fulfilling its task of religious assistance to the people of the sea, both Italian and foreign, the Apostleship of the Sea can also carry out an important task of preparing the seafarers and their families to face a possible kidnapping, not only by outlining this possibility, but above all by providing them during and after the kidnapping with psychological support and real spiritual, social and material assistance, instilling confidence and showing understanding, increasing the necessary strength in them to face such a difficult situation, and promoting in the Christian communities attitudes and works of fraternal hospitality.

Indeed, it is of fundamental importance both

for the seafarers and their worried families to get comfort from someone who understands the difficulties which the situation entails. This can only come from “Apostles of the Sea” who have always been close to the seafarers and deeply attentive to their problems. In this regard, I take on the commitment as of now, within the limits allowed by each circumstance, to provide the Apostleship of the Sea with all the informational support needed to carry out this very important and delicate support action.

In light of the above, I hope that this criminal phenomenon with such disturbing proportions can finally be crushed by the common action of all, both States and simple citizens, who care deeply about the safety of navigation and maritime transportation.



LAUNCH OF WORLD MARITIME DAY THEME FOR 2011

February 3, 2011

by Efthimios E. Mitropoulos, Secretary-General, IMO

In the past 12 months alone, there have been 286 piracy-related incidents off the coast of Somalia. They have resulted in 67 hijacked ships, with 1130 seafarers on board – whilst, at present, 714 seafarers are being held for ransom on board 30 ships scattered at various points of the country’s extensive coastline.

Piracy and kidnapping have blighted the maritime community for too long and it is seafarers who bear the brunt. And while we condemn and deplore any act of piracy, as the Security Council has done in several resolutions, we were appalled by yesterday’s news that pirates had executed, apparently in cold blood, a seafarer on the “Beluga Nomination”, a ship which had been attacked and hijacked last month, 390 miles off the Seychelles. And so it was very much with seafarers in mind that, last year, the IMO Council decided that the 2011 World Maritime Day theme should be “Piracy: orchestrating the response”.

Today marks the formal launch of this theme, along with the action plan we have devised to help achieve the objectives we have set. And we are honoured that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, has come to do just that. The fact that this is the second time in three years that the Secretary-General is visiting IMO is confirmation of his interest in maritime affairs and his concern over the unacceptable incidence of modern-day piracy – an unlawful act, which, further to the trauma it causes to seafarers and their families, is estimated, in accordance with a recent study reported by Chatham House, to cost the world economy between 7bn and 12bn US dollars per year, as a result of the dis-

ruption it effects on shipping services and international trade.

IMO has been dealing with piracy issues for the last thirty years. In the early 1980s, it was the Gulf of Guinea that first attracted our attention while, in the late 1990s and the early part of this century, the focus was on the then hot-spots of the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. Through a series of measures, developed and implemented by, and with the co-operation and support of, the littoral States, States using the Straits and the industry, we have been able to help significantly reduce piracy in those regions.

However, the problem has lately manifested itself in other parts of the world, most notably – but not exclusively – off the coast of Somalia, in the Gulf of Aden and the wider Indian Ocean. We believe that we can use the experience gained and the successes achieved in reducing piracy elsewhere to good effect in the current arena as well, but to do so requires a well orchestrated response.

We have, therefore, developed, in co-operation with the shipping industry, seafaring representative organizations and other stakeholders, an action plan to maintain and, indeed, strengthen our focus on anti-piracy endeavours of all kinds and to facilitate a broader, global effort. We have identified six prime objectives that we hope all stakeholders will espouse during 2011 and beyond, if necessary. They are:

1) to increase pressure at the political level to secure the release of all hostages being held by pirates; 2) to review and improve the IMO guidelines to Administrations and seafarers and promote compliance with industry best management practices and the recommended preventive, evasive and defensive measures ships should follow; 3) to promote greater levels of support from, and coordination with, navies; 4) to promote anti-piracy coordination and co-operation procedures between and among States, regions, organizations and industry; 5) to assist States to build capacity in piracy-infested regions of the world, and elsewhere, to deter, interdict and bring to justice those who commit acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships; and 6) to provide care, during the post traumatic period, for those attacked or hijacked by pirates and for their families.

Underlying our efforts to achieve these objectives will be the need to engage at the political level to bring about a solution to the Somali problem and thus facilitate and expedite the release of seafarers and any other persons held hostage by pirates.

While the process to solve Somalia's political problem and create conditions of stability in the country may be long and the solution may not be around the corner, this is a matter for the United Nations to pursue and neither IMO nor the maritime community have any substantive role to play in it. Calling, however, the world's attention to the unacceptable plight of the innocent victims of pirates can help to create the momentum necessary for action to be taken to hasten their release.

In the meantime, there should be no respite in our efforts to strengthen the protection of persons, ships and cargoes in piracy-infested areas (at the same time preserving the integrity of shipping lanes of strategic importance and significance, such as the Gulf of Aden) through rigorous implementation of the International Safety Management Code and the International Ships and Port Facility Code; through improvements to, and wider promulgation of, the IMO and industry best management practice guidance; through advice to ships' crews about how to access naval vessels deployed in the region and also how to best implement the preventive, evasive and defensive measures recommended by IMO and the industry; and through promoting even greater levels of coordination among navies, above and beyond the one that characterizes the co-operation among the naval vessels from so many countries that have assembled in the



same region in a strong demonstration of solidarity for the same good cause. In achieving this, the United Nations could be instrumental and we turn to you, Secretary-General, for endorsement, leadership and guidance.

During 2011, we intend to promote further co-operation between and among States, regions and organizations to prevent and reduce attacks on ships through information-sharing; coordination of military and civil efforts; and the development and implementation of regional initiatives, such as the IMO-led Djibouti Code of Conduct.

We will also help infrastructure and capacity building in States lying in regions of the world affected by pirates to deter, interdict and bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts, thereby enhancing maritime law enforcement and the safety of life at sea. This will also help tackle the root causes of piracy, through the provision of assistance to States for the development of their maritime law enforcement capabilities and the protection of their marine resources.

Specifically, in the case of Somalia, we intend to contribute, in any way possible (including through the establishment of a coastal monitoring and law-enforcement force) to the creation of a state of stability at



both sides of the Horn of Africa coastline that will, in due course, have a beneficial impact on the overall situation piracy-wise. And we will work with Governments and the industry to ensure that released seafarers and their families receive care during the post-traumatic period.

There is already good progress on which to build. The establishment, within the context of a UN Security Council resolution, of the Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia has done much to promote our shared agenda for improved coordination amongst States, industry and organizations. And, through the Djibouti Code of Conduct, we are establishing information-sharing centres in Yemen, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as a regional training centre in Djibouti. In partnership with the UNODC, we are helping regional States to develop the legal framework necessary to prosecute pirates – an objective also pursued by the Contact Group. We will continue to give this initiative the highest priority with the aim of assisting States in the region to build and develop an adequate infrastructure, which, in turn, will enable them to conduct effective counter-piracy operations.

However, as the statistics so bleakly indicate, piracy and armed robbery against ships remain real and ever-present dangers to those who use the seas for peaceful purposes – and, as long as pirates continue harassing shipping; endangering the critical delivery of humanitarian aid carried by ships chartered by the World Food Programme; and hijacking ships and seafarers, we are neither proud of, nor content with, the results achieved so far. This year, we are resolved to redouble our efforts and, in so doing, generate and galvanize a broader, global response to modern-day piracy. More needs to be done, including the tracing of money and the imposition of sanctions on the proceeds derived from hijacked ships, if the ultimate goal of consigning piracy to the realms of history is to be achieved. We hope that our choice of the theme for 2011 will provide an appropriate rallying point around which all those who can make a difference can focus their efforts.

Your presence here this morning provides encouragement and support for what we are doing and what we intend to do – and I thank you for that.

In the meantime, our thoughts and prayers are with those seafarers, who, at present, are in the hands of pirates. May they all be released unharmed and returned to their families soon.

AOS Directory

Angola – new National Director

Fr. Felix Roberto Cubola Kinyumba tiopairoberto@hotmail.com

Madagascar – new Episcopal Promoter

H.E. Msgr, Marcellin RANDRIAMAMONJ, Bishop of Fénérive Atsinanana ramarcelli@moov.mg

THE AOS COMMITMENT TO FISHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

(Excerpts)
Fr. Dirk Demaeght

Fr. Dirk Demaeght is the only chaplain working with fishers and in Belgium the bishop proposes a name to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Minister nominates de chaplain by Royal Decree. He works under the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Flemish Community and have a mandate in the *Federal Ministry of Mobility* that is responsible for all regulations regard to the crews, the fishing vessels and the safety on board. And he also a teacher in religion in the Maritime Institute in Ostend, this will offer him the opportunity to know most fishers and former students.

During the Regional Coordinators Meeting, Fr. Demaeght gave a brief description of the Belgian Sea fishery. The Belgian Fishery fleet has currently 89 vessels with approximately 2200 persons employed among them 480 active fishers. In 2009, the total value of the catch by the fleet was 68,5 million euro.

Talking about the fishing families spread along the Belgian coast, he defined them as "*a parish without its own church*" because he does not have any center and usually visits them in their homes.

Pastoral care for fishers and their families

To be appreciated as chaplain by fishers, they have to feel your interest for all their problems and especially feel that you have empathy for their concerns. Fishers call for a religious foundation at the decisive moments of their lives, they are massively present in the celebrations for fishing families and the blessings of the sea, at funerals of colleagues and friends. For the rest, they do not participate in the church. As ministers of the Church we have to sit beside them and with them to grow as Christians, as Jesus, who often got in the boat with his disciples.

Educate young people to live as fisherman

Fishers' wives are usually alone in the education when their husbands are at sea for 2-3 weeks. Often these women are called 'accordion women'. When the man is at sea, the woman has to do eve-

AOS Regional Coordinators Annual Meeting (14th -16th February 2011)

rything. But once back at home, she has to shrink, and he is the boss again.

In his long years of ministry to the fishers Fr. Dirk was able to implement many projects covering different aspects of theirs life:



Observation trips for 13-14 years old boys

With the cooperation of various governments agencies Fr. Dirck succeeded in organizing "observation trips" with young people (13/14 years old) so they can see and feel what life on board is and from the practical experience they can rapidly feel and decide if they can handle the profession or not.

Training vessel

Young people have to develop sea legs as soon as possible for that the Belgian fishers have an important instrument: the training vessel *De broodwinner (bred earner)*, a polyvalent vessel where most of the fishing techniques can be learned.

The training periods on board are a real test for handling and caring for each other. It concerns their notion of responsibility, their sense for security, their care for the environment, their social behaviour and their ability to discover each other's character and endurance in bad weather and dangerous situations.

Roadmap by accidents with fishers

Immediately after his appointment as chaplain Fr. Dirck was confronted with a ship disaster where the all crew was lost at sea. He realized that coordination between rescue services was lacking and from that tragic experience bringing together all the concerned services a guidebook was publish to serves as a support for the surviving relatives, from the reporting of the misfortune to the settlement trough the heritage of the notary.

During these tragedies the chaplain has very important tasks: communicate the bad news to the concerned families. Bringing the families together and be present at the autopsies for the identification of the victim/s. Staying near the families, day and night in their mourning process is of the greatest importance to discover the vigour of faith.

National emergency fund for fishing families

When fishers are missing, it's important to support the family socially and financially for this an emergency fund was established. In the statutes of this emergency fund it is very clear that the aim is to give support to all the families linked to Belgian Shipping Companies.

Fight against drugs

Living and working at sea, away from home and so many other human factors provoke discomfort and stress, drinking and drugs are a temporary means to escape.

Therefore, in the school was initiated a campaign called by the students themselves: *Clean ship! No shit!*

Be vigilant, fishers fish safe!

Although the social partners and the competent inspection services had the best intentions, no real security for sea fishing took off due to lack of funds. The arrival of the external services for prevention and protection at work (Provikmo) within the fishery and the activation of European money from the Sea fishers Fund brought the breakthrough.

Through (compulsory) workshops for fishers all aspects of an incident are discussed, and it demonstrates how security can improve. These safety workshops are a success, resulting in fewer accidents. The result of the accumulated efforts is a safety manual that shows great services in school.

Man overboard

80% of accidents at sea are due to an erroneous human action. Falling overboard is usually fatal for the victim. The search for a drowning person at sea, and then often in the dark, is like a needle in a haystack search. Currently in Belgium are in the process to equip all vessels with individual MOB (man over board) devices.

Full social status

For eleven years (1992 - 2003) Fr. Dirck used his homilies in the celebrations for fishers to stand up for a new social regulation for the fisherman. He insistently contacted politicians from "all" Flemish parties. The result was a Law Governing the Employment Contracts Because of ship service for the Sea Fishery.

The recommendation of Fr. Dirck to the Coordinators is: "...to achieve in realizing all these projects the golden rule for the chaplain is: an attitude of humility, patience and perseverance".

Fr. Dirk continued presenting some challenges that fisheries industry is facing now a days:

Environmental awareness.

Sea fishery is one of the primary sectors providing food to other people but it is necessary that this source of food source will be passed on to future generations, Europe requires a sustained, selective and environmentally responsible fishery: sustainable, selective, ecological.

Task of pastoral care

As chaplains we must give them a listening ear and understanding to fishers and is important to live with them in order to influence their lives. Christianity says how valuable nature is, we must praise the environmental efforts our fishers do. The religious, spiritual and moral approach of sustainable and environmentally responsible fishing should be translated into the training.

All the persons present at the meeting were deeply impressed by the presentation made by Fr. Dirk, his dedication and involvement in the cause of the fishers.



SPANISH NETWORK OF WOMEN IN THE FISHING SECTOR



The Spanish Network of Women in the Fishing Sector is a project implemented by the Ministry of the Environment, Marine and Rural Areas, through the General Secretariat of the Sea, for women in fishing communities in order

to highlight their fundamental role in this sector. This network is aimed at creating a space for relations and sharing of experiences that promotes and enriches the work of member organisations.

The Network was formed with the intention of becoming an interactive space for the exchange of experiences, a means of effective communications among all the people involved or interested in the sector. It aspires to improve its and its members' visibility with the participation of all its members. At the international level, there will be follow-on assistance by the European Union, which is providing support for the consolidation of the women in fishing communities network through the European Fisheries Fund. The Network strengthens communications and experience sharing among its members through seminars, training and research, activities that, while they heighten organisations' visibility and strengthen their performance, aim to contribute to greater equal opportunities for women.

The "Rosa dos Ventos" fishers wives' association joined this network in order to break the silence surrounding the social and working conditions of family life in this sector. The association does this through experience exchange, information dissemination and training and research programmes. Communications among the women in this network is a means of getting to know other people's realities, in this case, of fishers wife, which contributes to greater awareness of challenges that leads to the identification of solutions with regard to equal rights and improvement of living conditions.

Father Celestin IKOMBA has asked for the prayers of the seafarers' ministry fraternity.

The socio-political situation in Ivory Coast is getting worse now. The fighting is intense, and is now concentrated in the capital, Abidjan. We are all confined to our homes. Many people have either fled or have taken up arms.

It is not a religious war between Christians and Muslims. It is due to a political misunderstanding between those who voted for Allassane and those who voted of Gbagbo. There are Muslims and Christians on both sides.

Yesterday, the first of April, the situation was critical. With the grace of God, I worked hard to avoid fighting here in my area. I met all the inhabitants of the area regardless of their religion, their political affiliation, their native origin or their background. I focused on how we could live together, how to re-integrate,

how to again respect one another and to protect the lives of people and their belongings. It was a successful meeting according to the participants from both sides. In the end, we shared hands to show our will to stay and live together. People understood. As from yesterday up to now as I am writing to you, things are calm. But for how long? Anxiety and fear are still present among us all. A number of people are staying in the parish church now, around 30 every night.

Concerning the Apostleship of the Sea Work and the seafarers' ministry in the Port of Abidjan: the port is now closed. Since the 28 th, we have had no access to ships. The club is closed. I do not have information for the Port of San Pedro and the Club. Do not forget us in your prayers.

Celestin Ikomba, AOS Chaplain in Abidjan , IVORY COAST





A MAN WITH A PASSION FOR THE SEA AND FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA

Stella Maris Center, Port Louis - Mauritius—12th March 2011

Dear brothers and sisters, dear friends,

Jean left us peacefully on March 11th, embraced by the love and affection of Josiane, their children Clyde, Carole (in France), Blanche and Julie and their grandchildren here and in France as well as all their family and friends. Along with Msgr. Piat, Fathers Jacques Henri David and Stellio André, Father Wiehe and the staff of the Archdiocese, I would like to express our sympathy and affection for all those who are touched by this loss. Today is a day of mourning for all seafaring people, for the port and all the coast's fishers.

I would like to spare a special thought for all of Jean's friends all over the world, to the big family of the Apostleship of the Sea from the Indian Ocean, Africa, Australia, Europe and especially the Vatican, all the staff of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, our colleagues in the ITF, ICMA and ICSW in London. They are not here physically, but they are in spirit and in prayer. Our consolation is to know that Jean – like the night watch on deck waiting for the first light of dawn - is back in the presence of God, who we know His sweet almighty embrace.

Jean has gone back to the placid waters of which Psalm 22 speaks. He has gone back to the Lord, the Good Shepherd, and the Good Navigator in whom he confided. Death is a part of life, another step on our journey. All of us who have had the good fortune to be born and take part in this life must also die and take leave of this world. This is the cruel law of nature. Nevertheless, Christians know that death does not destroy life but merely transforms it. All of Jean's beauty and goodness has not gone away, but will last forever.

What struck you about Jean was his love for his family. Jean was a patriarch who was never as happy as when he had his whole family around him. We are one in recognising that he was a good husband, father and grandfather. He had a great capacity to being open to others. Whatever he gave he gave well, as in return he received the happiness of the love and affection of Josiane, their children, grandchildren, family and friends.

He was very proud of his family and of Josiane, who was an admirable wife under all circumstances; she was always steadfast at his side with wise counsel. She accepted that her house became a refuge and haven of peace for hundreds of Mauritian and foreign seafarers passing through or stranded, who found in their home, "a home away from home".

The academic and professional successes of their children made Jean very happy. He had a good and full life both with regard to his family and professionally. I think that he lived the life that he had aspired to. We thank God for all the gifts and graces that Jean received during his life but also for all the good that Jean did in the service of others. You cannot help but think that Jean did not get the recognition that he deserved even towards the end of his life.

Jean's life was not always easy, but he was a fighter, someone who did not leave you indifferent. He had a passion for the sea, but above all, a passion for the people of the sea. He could not stand injustice or poverty and was always ready to combat these. He had a sincerity and staunchness that stood any test. These were the source of his great credibility, I would say, of his legitimacy, with seafarers, fishers, union leaders, international organizations and the media. He was always on the side of the weakest. Any injustice or discrimination sent him into a rage. He always kept his word, never gave up a cause and was firm in his convictions.

We just read the Gospel about the Last Judgement (Mt 25): *"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me"*.

Is this not what Jean did all of his life? Yes, of course! Jean did this, day in, day out, with his simplicity and modesty. Jean saw in the faces of his brothers he came into contact with the face of Jesus. This is why Jesus says to him now, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world".

Jean VACHER, former Director of the Apostleship of the Sea in Port Louis, Mauritius, at the age of 67. Jean was also Regional Coordinator for the Apostleship of the Sea in the South West Indian Ocean and East Africa Region and also held the same position for the International Transport Federation and the International Collective for Seafarers Welfare which he founded in this region. He retired from these posts some years ago but he was still involved in various projects pertaining to the welfare of seafarers and fishers in Mauritius and the region through the Indian Ocean and South East Africa network for the welfare of people of the sea.

Jean was a strong believer and his love for the Lord and his Church was a big part of his life: he served God and his Church faithfully. His life was a good testimony of commitment to the faith and the Church's Social Teachings. At a certain moment of his life, he was given the choice to continue his struggle through political life and we are fortunate that, after reflection, he chose to continue to remain committed to his work for the Apostleship of the Sea.

It is true that it is sad to leave a person you have loved and shared your life with – the moments of joy, sorrow and struggle. Even Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane in his sadness and distress, or, faced with the death of his friend Lazarus, could not hold back his tears and emotion. Let us not doubt though, that God is against death and for life. The advantage of us believers is that we know that death is not the last word – that the lives of those who have placed their faith in God do not end in nothingness.

As we mourn and go through these moments of trial and grief, a family helps each other and remains united – this is a great consolation. Jean, who dedicated his life to his family, knew this and

it is now up to you to keep this flame burning and pass it on to future generations.

With all the feelings that are alive in our hearts, let us ask God for to strengthen our faith and hope to get us through these hours of separation and grief. Let us thank the Lord for having given us Jean, who was a bright light and source of joy and comfort for many. Let his memory remain alive in our hearts and his example continue to show us the way and keep us on course.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Stella Maris, the Star of the Sea, give this big-hearted sailor entry into the Gate of Salvation and Eternal Rest. Amen.

ICMA WORLD CONFERENCE



The members of the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) will gather from the **19th to the 23rd August 2011** for the Tenth ICMA World Conference in **Hamburg, Germany**.

This Conference meets at a crucial time for ICMA members and seafarers. The economic recession has posed some difficulty for our members. We are all charities, and therefore vulnerable to economic change. ICMA will meet to support its members and to inspire ecumenical working. In sharing both the calling and the burden to serve seafarers we shall together ensure our high standard of professional care.

Life and working conditions of seafarers have not become easier. Fatigue and isolation, health and safety continue to be of concern. The scourge of maritime piracy is set to remain. ICMA will plan on how best support seafarers and their families in response to current challenges, while never neglecting to respond to the everyday needs of seafarers. The conference will consider the best ways to sustainable care.

These are also exciting times: the Maritime Labour Convention, MLC 2006, is soon to be ratified. It is a landmark convention. ICMA is proud to have played a significant part in its formulation. ICMA will celebrate the occasion. Responsible ship owners are increasingly committed to crew retention and are highlighting the human element in their operations. ICMA will show its appreciation for employers who value their workforce and will seek to join forces with welfare departments within shipping companies.

The seafarers' welfare sector is changing and new possibilities emerging. ICMA will respond to these challenges and will renew its relations with international partners, labour unions, owner, agents, crewing companies, the maritime industry and the funders of welfare who share its commitment to a better life for seafarers.

ICMA members will join in ecumenical worship. We shall praise God for the task that unifies us. We shall pray for God's blessing upon all of us, that we may succeed. And we shall intercede for all seafarers and their families.

Rev. Hennie la Grange, ICMA General Secretary

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR SEAFARERS' CENTRE FACILITIES

The TK Foundation, in association with the ICSW, has set aside 250000 USD for the purpose of improving facilities used by seafarers on shore and is inviting eligible organisations to apply for capital improvement and project funding.

We are expecting a high volume of applications for the grants so please read the following information about applying carefully. Please also ensure that your application is relevant and fully answers parts I to VIII.

Eligibility

Established, registered Seafarer Welfare Organisations, Centres, Clubs and Drop In Centres, that intend to improve existing facilities in order to directly benefit seafarers' health, safety and welfare, are invited to **apply for grants ranging from 5000 to 50000 USD.**

Applicant organisations must be registered in the country where they are operating as a public charitable trust, society or a non-profit company.

Applicant organisations must operate without illegal discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin or disability.

If the applicant organisation is a previous or current TK Foundation grantee, all reporting requirements must be current or your agency will not be considered for funding.

Grant Funds may be used for

Capital costs for new facilities

Necessary repairs or improvements to existing facilities

Personnel, supplies, equipment, and other direct expenses essential to the capital project

Grant Funds may not be used for

Organisational capacity building

Community outreach or publicity

Staff or volunteer training

Indirect costs

Lobbying

Fund drives

Underwriting or sponsoring social or special events

Fund-raising activities

Debt retirement or budget deficits

More than 25% of agency annual budget

Endowment campaigns

Vehicles.



Proposals Due

June 1, 2011 – no late entries will be considered.

Grant Decisions and Announcements to be made

August 31, 2011

APPLICATION FORMS COULD BE REQUEST TO THE ICSW AT ICSW@ICSW.ORG.UK

WHEN HOLY WATER IS HARMFUL AND CREATES SERIOUS PROBLEMS...!

I am a very much a creature of habit and lazy in certain ways. Any change from my normal routine annoys me. I've been living in the same city for 20 years. I carry out the same apostleship, I meet the same people and I walk down the same streets. To be honest, I like living in this routine. A short time ago however, I received a telephone call that upset the tranquillity of normal life. The person on the other end of the line told me, "Father, I am an Italian ship-owner and I've purchased a vessel in Korea. With all my heart, I would like a priest to bless the ship and I would like you to come to give this blessing".

I immediately replied, "It is far from where I live and I have lots of work at the centre for the homeless". He responded, "Don't worry, Father, I will pay for your plane ticket, so it will not be such an inconvenience". "Yes, but I have so many commitments with the poor people here." "Father, I will make an nice donation for your pastoral work."

My ears pricked up at the words "nice donation", given the financial constraints I am working under, but still, waking up early, taking a flight, being away for two days... "No, I am very sorry, I have work that cannot be put off with the young people here – I really do not have time".

He came back, "Father, it is truly important for me that a priest blesses the ship. So you won't waste any time, I'll have a helicopter pick you up as soon as you get off your flight, in this way you can be home that very evening".

A HELICOPTER...me, flying in a helicopter! This was one of my life's dreams. I immediately forgot my reluctance to travel, my work with the young people, the poor, the soup kitchen... everything... "Yes, yes, I'll come" I said, before the entrepreneur could change his mind. It was going to be such a thrill to fly in a helicopter.

On the day set for the blessing, I took the flight and arrived at Busan Airport early in the morning. There a well-dressed man in a double-breasted suit was waiting for me and asked me to follow him. After a couple hundred metres, there was an open space where an AgustaWestland AW139 was waiting for me with its rotors whirling. Before I climbed aboard, I paused for a second. I observed in wonder the shining, colourful fascinating machine I was about to fly in. I touched it gently and I must say with a bit of awe – it's true, I'm really getting into a helicopter. My heart was beating fast.

As if by magic, we took off and went up into the sky: it was so beautiful. I was thrilled. After a twenty-thirty minute flight, we landed in front of a massive super tanker, 220 metres long and weighing 150,000 tonnes. I felt like an Alice in Wonderland... it was so strange, like a fairytale.

The ceremony began with the Italian National Anthem. Hearing those notes a sense of joy and pride filled me to the core. It has been so long that I've been away from my dear Italy. Then came the speeches, the champagne bottle breaking across the bow of the ship as it was launched and fireworks! It was a huge party.

As the first stage of the ceremony was concluded, we went onboard. There, the captain, proud of his jewel, explained all the specifications of the vessel and the various technological devices: satellite dishes, VHF/UHF radiophones, internet... He told us that this floating colossus is controlled by computer, radar, GPS and satellite navigation systems. Only two people are needed to sail this giant vessel. The captain's job is just to make sure that none of these systems malfunctions. This mountain of steel is a perfect robot that can navigate itself in the immense ocean. After this short briefing, the first officer announced to all the guests that the priest would now bless the control room. For me, it seemed like a dream. It was now my turn.

I was proud of what I was about to do; I, Fr. Vincenzo, was about to bless this wondrous flagship in the name of the Lord. I put on my vestments and after reciting the prayers appropriate to this occasion, I sprinkled rivers of Holy Water with such enthusiasm, vigour and faith over the people and things on the bridge.

I felt like a giant, one of the Earth's movers and shakers, a demi-god. I had given life to this cold mass. I was happy and well pleased with myself. As the ceremony concluded, the captain with a stern look in his eye came over to me and said courteously, "Father, all you see here is state of the art electronics worth millions of Euros and with all due respect for your Holy Water, if any drops fell onto any of this equipment, you could have caused millions worth of damage. For Heaven's sake, Holy Water is Holy Water, but personally I place more trust in these computers, radar and electronics than in your blessing. If you ever bless the bridge of another vessel, I would suggest that you are less liberal in your sprinkling of the Holy Water." With his words, I felt the world cave in on me. It was as if a tsunami of devastating strength had knocked me over, flung me about and completely destroyed me. For me, the blessing was a sign of God's almighty

strength being taken on board that ship; for the captain, it was only an act that was a source of worry.

Then, after reflecting on this experience, I realised that the Holy Water was a SIGN. And, that sign is only important if it introduces you to what it is aiming to mean or represent. Or it can be the exact opposite if there is no link - if it does not bring you back to its source. In the case of the blessing of the super tanker, for the captain, the Holy Water was not a tangible sign of God's protection but on the contrary, a symbol of huge anxiety. I think we Catholics are still using the mute, worn-out symbols of centuries past, which are meaningless for so many today in the modern society in which we live. At the same time, we are seeing the signs that our Father is giving us and are important for our fellow women and men. We work day in and day out to organize a beautiful procession for Jesus that will wind triumphantly through the streets of our cities, while pretending not to see the processions of poor souls trudging through our neighbourhoods.

We conduct theological debates and detailed investigations to defend liturgical customs that find their roots in the ancient Roman Empire while we pass unaware of the thousands of people who are stripped of their human and divine dignity every day. We engage in crusades to defend religious symbols hanging here and there while we forget that the most important sign that God gave us is the human person made "in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves" (Gn 1,26). Indeed, perhaps we should spend more money, study more and be even greater crusaders in defence of God's one true symbol on Earth: the living person (Psalm 8). The living person is the most authentic symbol of God in our midst. S/he is the meaningful symbol that can bring any conscious person to God, regardless of her/his beliefs or religion. During my life as a missionary, every time I have met a person, I have come into contact with the God-Man: Jesus. And every time that I've met God in the mystical experience of profound prayer, I've met the God-Man: Jesus.

Fr. Charlie, an Oblate Missionary in Indonesia, a land bloodied by religious conflict, had the courage to start a large reforestation project that on one hand provides work to the poor of the island and on the other contributes to protecting people from the tsunamis that periodically hit the region. Some people would question what this has to do with a missionaries' work of evangelisation.

Nevertheless, this idea has gradually attracted support and participation from Muslims, Hindus, Confucians, Buddhists and Protestants, as well as six government ministries. It has turned out to be a for-

midable initiative for unity, peace and harmony among cultures and faiths where there was hatred and even killings until a short time ago. In other words, this project has become an effective sign that speaks to people of today of God's love for the poor, His preferred ones, and the integrity of Creation, so lovingly cared for by the Lord.

Every time we tend the wounds of a person in pain, we become a symbol of God's healing love for each of us. Every time we struggle to defend the dignity of a person, we become a living symbol of Jesus' saving strength. Every time we give our lives to help innocent people who are exploited and abused, we become a symbol transmitting the vital force of the Holy Spirit that is among us.

I just wanted to share this little experience from my twenty years as a missionary living with the poor. Thank you for your prayers and your financial support.

Happy Easter to everyone.

Fr. Vincenzo, omi

Cameron speaks up for AOS



Ten year old Cameron from Norwich has once again flown the flag for AOS. On the back of his joke machine and computer game he designed to raise funds for AOS, he has been busy designing new ways to raise awareness and funds.



Just recently he created and gave a presentation to his Parish, Our Lady of the Annunciation, Poringland, which highlighted what seafarers do for us. Cameron was given inspiration for his presentation after he was invited by AOS chaplain Sr. Marian Davey to visit the port of Felixstowe.

While at the port Cameron had the opportunity to look around at a working docks and to visit a ship and the seafarers' centre. He commented that 'Seafarer's cabins were tiny, the freight trains were very long' and he decided 'seafarers were like Pringles!' in their tiny cabins.

Cameron has his own website in which he links all the work he does for AOS, and you can see all his different ideas and creations if you go to <http://theoval.cmp.uea.ac.uk/~gcc/family/cameron/aos/>

Alongside, spring 2011