



APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

Supporting Seafarers Worldwide

Stella Maris Antwerp Bulletin n° 6

Winter Edition 2020

Dear Sponsor, Dear Reader,

Friday October 16<sup>th</sup> was a historic day for the non-profit organisation Apostolatus Maris in Antwerp. That day the 'deed of sale' was signed at a notary's office for the buildings at Italiëlei 72 and 74. Since 1951 they were the property and the home of Stella Maris. It constitutes the end of an era but also the beginning of a new and promising one. In this edition we tell you about the move and our plans for the future.

Following the 100<sup>th</sup> centenary of our organisation we present you in this issue also our new logo and brand name.

Also our port chaplains and volunteers had a very busy period. Not only they had to prepare the removal to the new premises but due to the pandemic they had to cope with an overflow of work and mental and physical problems with seamen. Being detained for more than a year and far away from home, many seamen were especially vulnerable during the corona crisis. In this newsletter we give you some testimonials.



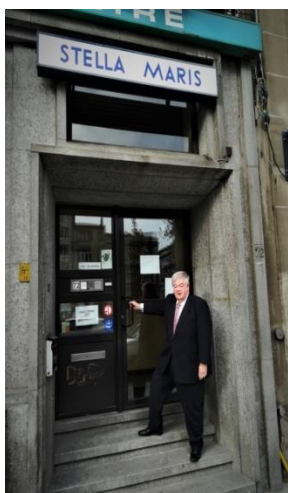
We do hope that you and your families remain in good health, and we wish you and all your beloved ones a more promising new year !

Capt. Jacques D'Havé  
Chairman

## 1. From Italiëlei 72/74 to Noorderlaan 100

### Historic date

**A**fter recording, the energy and water meters the keys were handed over to the new owners on October 16<sup>th</sup> and the board closed the doors of building 72/74 at the Italiëlei.



*Chairman Jacques D'Havé leaving the former premises...*

A series of hectic days had preceded this. All tenants, residing students and associations having their permanent residence at Apostolatus Maris had to move and clean up the rooms. The students were allowed to take the furniture with them, what some of them did.

All other objects ended up on various 'internet sales sites' or were donated to "charities" preferably having a link with the maritime world. Several hundreds of books, fiction and non-fiction, but all with nautical / technical subjects, were also transferred to the Maritime Center in Ostend, where initiator Willy Versluys is aiming to set up a maritime library.

### Move

The moving manoeuvres had started Monday, October 12, when three moving vans with specialized equipment parked in front of 72/74. They were manned by a dozen of movers who, apparently inspired by the Antwerp port system: "fini/fini"



*...and entering the new ones.*

(finish and ready), cleared floor after floor at an impressive speed. Some precious objects such as a piano, a billiards table, a ping-pong table, refrigerators etc. were already sold. Very soon, the few board members who were present had neither a glass to drink from, nor a chair to sit on. But Apostolatus Maris or Stella Maris as the charity organisation from now is named is not homeless at all. Stella Maris moved to the Antwerp Harbour Hotel (AHH) where we joined the other Christian-inspired missions



*The new entrance of Stella Maris*

( see 2. Antwerp Seafarers' Welfare). Out of our new base, we will continue to operate as before. The Antwerp Harbour Hotel is from now on our official registered office address.

### **Accommodation**

The welfare wing was fully furnished by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and occupies a large office space. According to the landscape concept each representative (chaplain) has his own desk where he can plug in his laptop. Supporting services such as printer and photocopier kitchenette etc. are used jointly. A meeting room and a lounge for private conversations with sailors are shared as well. The reception area is directly connected to the foyer with a bar.

### **Future plans**

The proceeds of the real estate will go entirely to the welfare of the mariners. A first step has already been taken with the design and construction of a bar in the foyer of the Antwerp Harbour Hotel. As soon as the Corona restrictions are lifted the bar will be open daily from 17:00 hrs. – 23:00 hrs.

At a later stage, in about two to three years, we hope to develop the infrastructure further in order to provide sailors in Antwerp with an even larger range of modern leisure facilities such as a fitness center. Also the renovation of about one hundred hotel rooms with e.g. air conditioning is planned and meanwhile in execution.

### **Our new address:**

**Stella Maris c/o Apostolatus Maris**

**Noorderlaan 100**

**2030 Antwerpen**

**Telephone: +32 (0) 3 233 34 75**

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

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



*The Antwerp Harbour hotel is a landmark in the city and the port*

## 2. Antwerp Seafarers' Welfare ( ASW)

**T**he Christian-inspired missions adopted also a new name. From now on they will be operating under the name Antwerp Seafarers' Welfare. The current location of the Antwerp Seafarers' Welfare is the Antwerp Harbour Hotel, the former Antwerp Dockx Hotel. The hotel was for years a landmark in Antwerp with a pink painted Cadillac on the roof. Some referred to it as the pink bastard "parked" on the roof. It is our ultimate intention to create a Maritime Centre and a new city landmark that will express a nautical and maritime atmosphere and a home for seafarers. The expansion of the AHH will be accompanied by a complete redesign of the neighbourhood.

### New Logo and brand name



As announced at the International Congress of Apostolatus Maris in Taiwan in June 2019, the logo and brand name Stella Maris will be adopted worldwide from now on. Apostolatus Maris will continue formally to exist in the statutes as the official designation but Stella

Maris is now used as a brand name. In order not to create confusion both will use the new logo in all their publications, letters, banners etc.

### The new address:



**Stella Maris c/o Apostolatus Maris**  
**Noorderlaan 100**  
**2030 Antwerp.**  
**Telephone: +32 (0) 3 233 34 75**  
**www.aposmar.be**  
**E-mail: [contact@aposmar.be](mailto:contact@aposmar.be)**

**The Antwerp Harbour Hotel is the official address for following seamen missions:**

**-Deutsche Seemannsmission**

E-mail: [J.pfautsch@scarlet.be](mailto:J.pfautsch@scarlet.be)

**-Sailors' Society**

E-mail: [MSchippers@sailors-society.org](mailto:MSchippers@sailors-society.org)

**-Finnish Seamen's Church**

E-mail: [karri.salo@merimieskirkko.fi](mailto:karri.salo@merimieskirkko.fi)

**-Swedish Maritime Administration**

E-mail: [antwerpen@svenskakyrkan.se](mailto:antwerpen@svenskakyrkan.se)

**Apostolatus Maris**

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

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

**-Internationaal Zeemanshuis Antwerpen (IZA)**

E-mail: [welfare@antwerpharbourhotel](mailto:welfare@antwerpharbourhotel)

**- Mediport,**

E-mail: [info@mediport.be](mailto:info@mediport.be)

### **3.Ship visits in corona times**

#### **Christmas 2020 in a minor key**

**S**ince the outbreak of the corona pandemic, sailors' houses have been closed in most ports by order of the government. This is also the case in the ports of Antwerp, Ghent and Zeebrugge.

In the summer, the measures were relaxed and the Antwerp Seafarers' Center opened its doors again on 17 July. But success was limited. The virus is still around and the shipping companies or agencies advised against shore leave for the crews out of fear for contamination. As no one wanted to take any chances the gangway was locked.



In the second wave, the catering industry was again closed, including the sailors' houses. Most ships therefore became floating prisons for the sailors who could not be relieved at the end of the contract because many airports also went into lockdown. Repatriation not being possible, seamen were forced to stay on board for more than a year; having a serious impact on the morale.

## Gangway as a meeting place

In addition, ship visits by the harbour chaplains were also restricted. On most ships, they were soon forbidden to enter the accommodations any longer. At best, they were allowed to climb up the gangway to have a chat on deck with the sailors. But sometimes that was still



too much. Then the crew was allowed to descend the gangway to exchange a few words with the port chaplain on the quay.

Many people on board were short of the most basic toiletries due to the unexpected renewal of their contracts. In normal times this is not a big problem because they buy their necessities in a shop belonging to the seaman's house. The Antwerp welfare officer Ann Van der Sypt found a solution however. She runs the shop in the Antwerp Harbour Hotel, which is now inaccessible to sailors. Knowing from experience the products that are in demand, she loads the most popular items in her van, and sells them to the crew on the gangway. Guaranteed success !

*Welfare officer Ann Van der Sypt waiting in her van*

## Winter relief

The distribution of woolen hats and scarves during the year knitted by volunteers in the UK and Belgium is a welcome gift, especially with winter just around the corner. The chaplains and volunteer ship visitors have a supply of clothes, sweaters, anoraks, shirt and trousers distributed to the sailors. Many crewmembers come from warm, southern countries and are not always prepared for winter temperatures in the north.



*Distribution of gift packages on the gangway*

This year, Christmas will be different at home and on board. Usually Christmas is celebrated in the Antwerp Seafarers' Center with an oecumenical mass, followed by a snack buffet with accompanying drinks and the distribution of Christmas gifts. Not this year however. It is also unlikely that the captains will allow shore leave. Therefore the missions prepare for a Christmas in a minor key with visits on Christmas Eve and distribution of gift packages on the gangway.

## 4. Testimonials on the gangway

### Stuck on board for fifteen months and sixteen days

**W**e also noted some testimonials, including from Gerard Favre the French ship visitor based in Antwerp:

*During the first months of corona crisis, there were a lot of seafarers, especially Philipinos stuck on board.*

*As I visited one ship at BASF, a seafarer in the mess room explained he was stuck on board for more than 16 months and sending an e-mail every morning to the company asking information about repatriation, but he never received any answer.*

*The sim card was the only opportunity to connect with his family.*

*Two weeks later, also at BASF, as I climbed the gangway, a seafarer shouted me "Fifteen months and sixteen days on board "... it was like a "cri du coeur".*

*During this period, we were the only guys visiting ships, as all shipchandlers stopped their job. Seafarers were really happy to be visited and to be able to speak with someone. They were also very pleased with the newspapers we brought on board.*



Gerard Favre  
Ship visitor

### Afraid for the virus

**Jörg Pfautsch, port chaplain of the Deutsche Seemannsmission, notes that the corona epidemic affects everyone worldwide, but especially the sailors. Lockdown or not; they continue their job and ensure that we have our favorite goods for sale in the shops.**



Jörg Pfautsch, port chaplain

*Unfortunately, we are not allowed to go ashore! After all, the virus may not come on board! Their thoughts are at home with family and friends. They keep contact through social media with the home front. The chaplains and ship visitors these days are stopped at the gangway. They bring news, toothpaste, chips, chocolate and warm clothing on board. For some sailors also the necessary medication in consultation with the harbour doctor.*

*We met sailors from the Philippines, India, Ukraine, Russia, Myanmar and also from Europe. Many of these men have been on board for far too long! A young sailor of 23 years old from Myanmar said he has been on board for 14 months and has not been for 9 months more on land. They simply cannot get home because Myanmar is no longer served by airplanes these days.*

*Some men become depressed because they miss their family. Crew changes and returning home is no longer possible.*

*The ship's visit has changed during these times and is limited to conversations on deck or on the gangway. No more pleasant encounters in the messroom. But most are very happy to see us! This way they can forget their worries and tell about their family, about the challenge of working on a ship in corona times, about their "captivity" on board...*

*It is important that chaplains and ship visitors are daily in the port and at the gangway. By doing so the crews feel that they are not forgotten. The missions are the only party to listen to their concerns and problems. They show that the Love of God is made visible.*

Jörg Pfautsch,  
port chaplain Deutsche Seemannsmission

### **No permission for shore leave**

Jos Vanhoof, chief chaplain Apostolatus Maris, was at the beginning of August on board the m/v Adori, sailing with a full Venezuelan crew.

*Although our club Stella Maris was open at the time, they did not show up in the evening because none of the crew members had a shore leave permission. I made it possible for them to make phone calls and also brought apple pie at the request of an officer.*

*On a ship with an Indian crew, the crew was not allowed to go ashore either, although our club was open. They also asked for sim cards. On a second visit they offered us lunch on board, served in a separate room to respect the corona restrictions.*

*In mid-August, Stella Maris welcomed the 'Zuidvliet crew' into their bubble. They were happy that after a few months on board they finally had solid ground under their feet. Both the Russian officers and the Dutch cadet felt at home in our foyer. They returned several times because their ship stayed for some time in the port as she was waiting for orders.*



*For the chaplains of Stella Maris, the corona period was by no means a holiday time, quite to the contrary. It was a busy period because of the special covid-19 situation, the many ship visits and the definitive closure of the club.*

Jos Vanhoof,  
Chief chaplain.



## **Crews physicaly and mentaly exhausted**

The 17 crewmembers on board of the Nord Annapolis stayed longer than the terms in their contract due to the pandemic, which is the common problem of the Seafarers today. The crew stayed for more than a year and all are exhausted for they don't have the opportunity to go ashore to relax. It is really difficult for them to work because of their mental and physical health problems

But of course it is also a big help for their families in the Philippines as they receive money from them. It is a big sacrifice to be away for a long time and they miss their family so much, but with the help of new technology they can see them through video chat. But this is not enough; they must go home after finishing their contract

I visited them to let them know that we are there for them. One of the seamen who want to remain incognito talked to me and shared his life on board of the ship almost crying to see me. I just listened to him and told him to pray that everything will be OK, and that the new crew will arrive in Antwerp very soon.



He also asked for the sacrament of confession and we did pray together. Afterwards he was so thankful that a chaplain from Stella Maris listened to him.

During my next visit a seaman raised his "thumbs up" saying that there was good news: the company was doing something for the crew change. Then after 3 days I received a message that they arrived in the Philippines safely.

They were very thankful and realized that there are chaplains from Stella Maris everywhere in the world.

Father Jorgedy Bago

## **5. Hospitalisation after accident on board**

**O**ur Filipino port chaplain Jorgedy Bago reports on a dramatic accident on board of m/v Eemshorn, berthed in Antwerp. His story:

An agent informed me that a Filipino seaman, Mr. Sarmiento from the m/v Eemshorn, had an accident on board of his ship. The crane touched the seaman who fell in the hold, causing serious injuries and he was brought to the hospital. His condition was critical. It happened August 18th, 2020. The agent gave me the number of the UZA Edegem so that I could get in

contact with him in his own language as he did not understand the doctors. At first he couldn't make a full sentence. With some difficulty I understood however my fellow countryman and translated to the medical staff. As a result of to the operation he was finally put in an artificial coma but his situation remained very serious. During this time I came also in contact with his family.

On October 17, the doctor told his wife on the phone that her husband had a severe infection with several complications and the treatment did not seem to help. There was a serious risk that he would not survive his accident. His wife on the phone was crying but I told her to pray and suggested not to exclude a miracle.



Mr. Sarmiento with family at the hospital

His wife and his son were then given the chance to come to Belgium with the help of the shipping company, the agency in the Philippines and with the assistance of the Philippine Embassy in Belgium. All this which was not so easy due to Corona.

We prayed and the miracle happened: Mr. Sarmiento survived!

On November 19th, Mrs Sarmiento and her son returned home. Due to complications her husband returned later as he was still for some time in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital.

Stella Maris is always trying to help the seamen by giving assistance wherever possible. Giving local Filipino food, phone cards and keeping every day contact with the seamen they feel they are not left alone. Stella Maris is there to help especially when they experience a difficult time in their life.

Because of this pandemic, we mostly talk via video chat and let them join our online Sunday mass. That gives strength and assures them of the support of the Filipino community in Antwerp.



**Jorgedy Bago,**  
**Filipino chaplain Port of Antwerp.**

## Our Sponsors :



**You or your company/organization want to support the Seafarers Center?**

**Go for it!**

Your support is greatly appreciated. Any amount is welcome. We worked out some special sponsorship formulas:

Bronze: 2.500 €

Silver: 5.000 €

Gold: > 5.000 € up to your discretion

More information?

Please contact Apostolatus Maris c/o Tony Vuylsteke  
Public relations officer ApM;  
antoine.vuylsteke@gmail.com /  
Mob.: +32 473 92 73 51

Bank account Apostolatus Maris vzw to which  
donations may be paid

IBAN BE20 3630 5928 8056

BIC : BRUBR333

**Editors :**

Responsible Editor : Jacques D'Havé

Editors : Jorgedy Bago, Justin Gleissner,  
Yvette Vandelde, Jos Vanhoof,  
Tony Vuylsteke