

**SPEAKER: Anne McLaren, Apostleship of the Sea: Meeting Christ Each and Every Day** Anne focussed in her talk and slide presentation on the working conditions and lives of seafarers. She referred to an article by Rose George: 'Sea No Evil' which can be found at [www.rosegeorge.com](http://www.rosegeorge.com). Seafaring today is a truly globalised industry. Most crews are international, mostly sought from poorer countries, and sailing under flags of other countries. The life of seafarers is characterised by invisibility, poverty, exploitation, chronic fatigue, overwork, boredom, danger from the sea itself and increasingly from piracy. A recent shipwreck in which 40 lives were lost received no headlines. And yet 90% of all goods that we consume are transported by sea, a reality which is usually forgotten when thinking about Fair trade. Containerisation has also had a great impact on the lives of seafarers. Container ports are isolated from local communities, and turnaround times in ports of around 12 hours means that seafarers often do not have time to get off the ship. The average time away from home for seafarers is 9 months.

The Apostleship of the Sea was founded in Glasgow in 1922 as a lay led organisation and is part of an international network known as Stella Maris. In 1958 it became part of the pastoral care of the Church for migrants and itinerants. In Britain there are 13 port chaplains, but they also rely heavily on volunteers. There are 4 aspects to their work: **Mission** – so for example they will arrange for Mass to be said on board ship or in a local parish; **Solidarity** – campaigning for workers' rights, working with the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) for example to ensure seafarers get their pay – although it was pointed out that AoS can only help seafarers to contact ITF if they wish to do so, and many are afraid to pursue their rights; **Welfare** – looking after those who are abandoned or sick; and **Hospitality** – making seafarers feel welcome. There are seafarers' centres in most ports where they can find a welcome and be helped to make contact with their families.

Some issues for seafarers:

**Flags of Convenience:** Many ships are registered in countries which have minimum regulation of labour standards, in order to avoid the obligations of their owner's country. The ITF has been working on this and now has collective agreements with 1/3 of FOC vessels. Also, the Marine Coastguard Agency (MCA), which is responsible for the safety at sea of any ships in British ports, has inspectors who can board any ship and can prevent them from sailing if they are considered unsafe. AoS will then support the seafarers, sometimes helping them to get back to their home countries.

**Seafarers' Rights:** In 2006 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the Consolidated Maritime Labour Convention which give the MCA enhanced powers. It has to be ratified by 30 countries to come into force; the UK is due to ratify it in 2012.

**Piracy:** Around 500 seafarers are currently held by pirates.

What can we do?

-AoS Parish Volunteers co-ordinate the Sea Sunday collection in their parishes;

-Woolly hat knitting! – a variation on Christmas shoe-boxes, knit a woolly hat which can then be filled with gifts such as toiletries etc for seafarers;

-Those living near ports can volunteer as ships' visitors, or provide lifts for seafarers to centres or just to give them an outing (the request of one group of seafarers was to go somewhere where there was grass...).

-Speaking up and campaigning for seafarers' rights: Raising awareness of seafarers' conditions and the need to implement the Maritime Labour Convention: [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org); campaigning against Flags of Convenience: [www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org); there is also House of Commons Committee on Somali piracy: [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) .

### Some comments from Evaluation Forms

Of Anne McLaren: - fluent, dedicated, enthusiastic and joyous.

Good mixture of information, action and faith

Learnt: the importance of the maritime industry to Britain, a need to provide for mariners and campaign against, for example, flags of convenience.

Excellent opportunities to listen and share, network

Stimulating, useful and productive discussion.