

“WELCOMING THE ORPHANS OF GLOBALISATION” The Case for Seafarers’ Ministry

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Résumé de l'article

Plus de 90 % des produits et marchandises que nous consommons quotidiennement nous sont acheminés principalement par voie maritime. Pourtant, les zones portuaires et les navires qui les desservent ne sont généralement pas fréquentés ou bien connus. Les quelque 1,75 million de marins qui naviguent sur ces navires sont, quant à eux, totalement inconnus. Bien qu'ils nous permettent l'accès aux biens du monde, ces marins vivent déconnectés de leur famille et de leur culture d'origine. Conscient de cette déconnexion, un réseau oecuménique d'aumôneries chrétiennes existe à travers le monde pour offrir un accueil dans les ports étrangers. Après avoir exposé les fondements, le travail et l'histoire de la poursuite du bien-être des gens de la mer, cet essai signale comme exemples de soins bien concrets apportés à ces derniers l'accès à Internet et le ministère de l'accueil et de la présence. À eux seuls, toutefois, la passion et le tempérament de l'aumônier ou la compréhension théologique qu'il peut avoir de son rôle ne suffisent pas. Plus de coopération, de formation et de cohérence dans le travail s'avèrent nécessaires pour assurer, comme dans toute autre forme de ministère, une efficacité à long terme dans l'intervention pastorale auprès des gens de la mer.

“WELCOMING THE ORPHANS OF GLOBALISATION” The Case for Seafarers’ Ministry

JASON ZUIDEMA – KEVIN WALKER

1. Introduction

The transport of goods by sea has been and continues to be the overlooked driver of globalization. More than 90% of the products and goods we consume on a daily basis made their way to us principally by sea. Yet, increasingly, port areas and the ships that serve them are not commonly frequented or understood, even by those who live near them. All the more completely unknown are the seafarers who sail those ships. Though they connect us to the goods of the world, seafarers live disconnected from everyday life and from their families and home cultures.

Recognizing this disconnection in the lives of seafarers, an ecumenical network of Christian chaplaincies around the world exists to provide a welcome in foreign ports. Representing more than 40 different denominations in more than 400 ports, the members of this network seek to show hospitality to those who are far from home. The chaplaincy missions often have drop-in centres for seafarers and provide some kind of transportation and internet access, but they especially seek to provide a human connection. Seafarers’ chaplaincy ministry tries to integrate into its work deeply biblical ideas of presence and being with those who are alone in this world. Understanding ministry to seafarers can help us not only better understand a world on the move, but also appreciate the value of structured hospitality in any context.

Workplace chaplaincy ministry is not always well understood, even by those who practice it. There are many ministry organizations that serve in chaplaincy roles in workplaces, but the function and mission of these ministries have changed over time. Though a person might have the title of “chaplain” in a particular workplace environment, they might have a very different function and self-understanding than a chaplain in another.

An examination of chaplaincy to seafarers is instructive in two ways. First, it reveals how one particular type of chaplaincy has adapted to its particular

environment, providing a point of comparison with other, better-known types of chaplaincy like those in the military or in health care.¹ Further, the examination of seafarers' chaplaincy can help understand how the work of welcoming seafarers can be supported in an era when sufficient financial support is often a challenge.

This essay attempts to frame the experience of chaplains who work with the more than 1.75 million men and women seafarers on the oceans of the world. We hope to give a sense of how those of us on land, especially in the Church, have provided and might provide care. After outlining the basic rationale, work, and history of seafarers' welfare, we will elicit the practical examples of internet access for seafarers and of ministry of presence as examples of care that have shaped seafarers' ministry in the past decade. These examples frame our understanding of the chaplain's work: the chaplain's passion, character or theological understanding alone are not sufficient. Though passionate, well-balanced individuals are always sought for service in ministry, we argue that more cooperation, training, and consistency in work are necessary for long-term effectiveness in seafarers' ministry as in any other workplace chaplaincy.

2. History of the Welfare of Seafarers

Like other workplace chaplaincies, seafarers' ministry does well to understand its setting and history. There are many unknowns, and even an experienced chaplain is likely to meet a new challenge regularly: unusual pastoral situations can arise out at sea, and every seafarer is their own person with all the idiosyncrasy of needs that entails. The shipping industry is competitive and constantly changing. Remembering the history of seafaring, and especially how seafarers have been perceived by religious people, helps to put these challenges in perspective.

Recognition that seafaring has its own particular spiritual dimensions is hardly novel. Among the Greeks it was common to make sacrifices before a voyage, because it was understood that one was putting oneself into the hands of gods. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his crew suffer punishments familiar to seafarers – prolonged exile from home, dangerous weather, and deaths

1. The literature on workplace ministry and chaplaincy is wide and varied: Giles LEGOOD, "Chaplaincy," in Hans HILLERBRAND (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, New York NY, Routledge, 2004, pp. 616–621; Miranda THRELFALL-HOLMES and Mark NEWITT, *Being a Chaplain*, London, SPCK, 2011; Giles LEGOOD, (ed.) *Chaplaincy: The Church's Sector Ministries*, London, Cassell, 1999; John W. ROGERSON, *Industrial Mission in a Changing World*, Sheffield UK, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996; Paul BALLARD, "Locating chaplaincy: a theological note," *Crucible*, (July/Sep. 2009), pp. 18–24; Fiona STEWART-DARLING, *Multifaith Chaplaincy in the Workplace: How Chaplains Can Support Organizations and their Employees*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017.

at sea – for their insults done to the sea-god Poseidon.² In the 6th-century BC, Scythian philosopher Anacharsis said of seafarers that they were no further from death than the four finger-widths of their hull. When he was asked whether the living or the dead were more numerous, he replied: ‘Τοὺς οὖν πλεόντας ποῦ τίθης;’ (“Where, then, do you put those at sea?”)³ In the Hebrew Bible, too, the sea is a place of danger and inhuman forces: it is used in Genesis 1:1 to describe the void in which God created heaven and earth, in Job 41 it is the home of Leviathan, who terrorizes merchants and fishers and “stirs the sea like a pot of ointment” (41:31, NIV), and in Jonah and Psalm 107 seafarers are saved from storms by divine intervention.

In 1664, English Puritan clergyman and author John Flavel tied the precarious nature of sailing to the religious life, publishing a pastoral manual for seafarers entitled *Navigation spiritualiz’d*. He approvingly paraphrased Anacharsis: “seamen are, as it were, a third sort of persons, to be numbered neither with the living nor the dead; their lives hanging continually in suspense before them,”⁴ and on this basis compared the hazards of life at sea to the soul’s battle with sin. This sentiment was not uncommon in the 17th to 19th centuries – seafarers were often viewed as beyond the bounds of normal society. It was not just that they were perceived to be immoral, as per the ‘drunken sailor’ or ‘wife-in-every-port’ stereotypes; rather, there was a sense in which they were outside of the generally accepted categories of morality. Think, for example, of the classic saying of that period: “Qui nescit orare, discat navigare” (“He who does not know how to pray, let him learn to be a seafarer”).

Though the image of seafarers as vulgar or lawless still finds its way into popular books and films (e.g. Capt. Haddock in the *Tintin* franchise, or Quint in *Jaws*), it is fading, if only because the whole of seafaring life is less known in our modern world. Yet the decline of this image is not necessarily a solely positive trend. Behind the fading of the negative characterization of seafarers lays something perhaps worse: ignorance.

English journalist Rose George has recently written a book, *Ninety Percent of Everything*, in which she claims that we suffer from a kind of “sea blindness,”⁵

2. HOMER, *Odyssey*, Vol. 1: Books 1-12, trans. Augustus Taber MURRAY, ed. George E. DIMOCK, Cambridge MA, Harvard University, 1919, 1.21, 12-13; 11.130, 408-409.

3. DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Vitae Philosophorum*, Vol.1, ed. Miroslav MARCOVICH and Hans GÄRTNER Stuttgart-Leipzig, B. G. Teubner, 2002, 1.103-105, 76-78.

4. JOHN FLAVEL, *Navigation spiritualiz’d: or A new compass for seamen consisting of XXXII points of pleasant observations, profitable applications, and serious reflections: all concluded with so many spiritual poems*, Rev. ed., London, Fabian, 1698, *Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership*. Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ebo/A39673.0001.001?view=toc>, unnumbered page imprimatur.

5. ROSE GEORGE, *Ninety Percent of Everything: Inside Shipping, the Invisible Industry That Puts Clothes on Your Back, Gas in Your Car, and Food on Your Plate*, New York NY, Metropolitan Books, 2013, p. 4.

that is, that we in developed countries are generally unaware that our oceans, lakes, and rivers are places of commerce and essential for our modern way of life. Despite its size, most of us are unaware of the complexity and shape of world shipping. Although we regularly benefit from seafarers' work, and may even see their ships sailing in and out of our harbours and down our mighty rivers, they themselves remain invisible to most of us. The same invisibility goes for the physical and personal challenges that often confront them.

We have gained a deeper sense of certain aspects of modern shipping life, like the scourge of piracy via popular films such as *Captain Philips* (2013) with Tom Hanks as the title character. However, the experience of the average seafarer, especially loneliness, boredom, isolation, and intense sacrifice for family, is something we hardly appreciate. A seafarer's isolation from landed society is a double-edged sword, not only depriving them of community they need, but also hiding that need from many of the people who benefit from them. Ironically, as the world is pulled together by the increased network of global trade, seafarers are, one might say, pulled apart from family and society. As we build a global family, they are increasingly orphaned.⁶

These dedicated men and women work long and often lonely contracts to build better lives for families that might otherwise have few resources. In her 2013 monograph on seafarers, Helen Sampson, director of the Seafarers International Research Center at Cardiff University, writes:

Aboard ship, life is isolated. Sometimes, in the peace of a sunset, watching a school of spinner dolphins on the horizon, such isolation can be welcome. Traversing empty expanses of ocean there are some magical experiences to be had. (...) More often than not, however, life aboard a merchant cargo vessel is noisy, lonely and dangerous. Seafarers are vulnerable workers.⁷

She alerts us to the fact that seafarers "can experience extreme marginalization."⁸ How aware are we that their marginalization contributes to the comfort of our modern life? It is in this context that seafarers' ministry and chaplaincy finds its place.

6. On the social isolation of seafarers see Helen SAMPSON and Michelle THOMAS, "The Social Isolation of seafarers: causes, effects, and remedies," *International Maritime Health*, 54 (2003), pp. 1-4; Olivia SWIFT, "Social Isolation of Seafarers," *International Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network*, 2015; accessed May 7, 2020. seafarerswelfare.org/assets/documents/resources/Social-Isolation-Article-PDF.pdf; Helen SAMPSON and Neil ELLIS, *Seafarers' Mental Health and Wellbeing*, Cardiff, Seafarers International Research Center, 2019; accessed May 7, 2020. <https://www.iosh.com/seafarerswellbeing>.

7. Helen SAMPSON, *Seafarers and Transnationalism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 28.

8. Helen SAMPSON, *Seafarers and Transnationalism*, p. 22.

3. Why Seafarers' Chaplaincy?

An analogy helps us situate workplace ministry. In 1526, the Wittenberg reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) published a little book, *Whether soldiers, too, can be saved*.⁹ Written in the context of the Peasants' War (1524-1525), this book deals with the problem of insurrection or just war, but especially with the troubled consciences of soldiers involved in wars. Early in the Christian tradition, before the conversion of Constantine, it was argued that fighting in the Roman army was contrary to Christian faith. At the time of the Reformation such arguments were again raised. Luther had heard and now was responding to the question: was life as a soldier not contrary to the new reading of Scripture? Luther's answer carefully distinguished between the calling and authority of ordinary Christians and that of those called to particular offices, such as princes, judges, executioners, or, in this case, soldiers. Using texts of Romans 13:1, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established” (NIV), and 1 Peter 2:13, “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority” (NIV), Luther argued that the right to take up the sword was not based on the individual's authority, but on the authority of the office instituted by God.¹⁰ The conclusion: if the soldiers were representing a legitimate ruler, then, yes, they could serve in good conscience.

Whatever we think of just war, the analogy here is instructive, for it addresses the question of occupational morality evoked above. Though it sounds awkward, a foundational question of seafarers' ministry might be, “Can seafarers, too, be saved?” We might dismiss the question out of hand. Of course, seafarers are ordinary human beings. Yet dig a little deeper and the questions still might invite debate. Are seafarers responsible for the spiritual struggles to which their chosen line of work may give rise? Is ministry and chaplaincy among seafarers to “save” those who have made a morally questionable career choice, or is a life at sea something that a committed Christian could choose in good conscience? If we believe that our need for the goods and connectivity that seafarers provide is legitimate, then the answer is surely “yes.” In a similar manner to soldiers, seafarers can serve in good conscience and should be supported in any way possible. In past centuries they might have been forgotten by wider society, but it is important to recognize that the Church has a responsibility towards them.

9. “Whether soldiers, too, can be saved (1526),” in *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, ed. Robert C. SCHULTZ and Helmut T. LEHMANN, Minneapolis MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1967, pp. 89-137.

10. A general introduction to Luther's argument is in Bernhard LOHSE, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. SCHULTZ, Philadelphia PA, Fortress Press, 1986, pp. 59-62.

The status and respect we give seafarers has actually been a live debate in the past century. In North America, for example, there has been a change in perception about whether merchant seafarers were part of the armed forces. It is a relatively recent development that merchant seafarers have been considered another arm of the US Armed Forces, for which they have particular honor in Washington on National Maritime Day, May 22.¹¹ We are used to seeing USO offices in airports – indeed, there is a small network of similar offices for US seafarers around the world (United Seamen's Service).¹² But what about foreign seafarers? Over the 20th and into the 21st century, the shipping industry has come to involve crews recruited not from the country in which the ship was owned, but from all over the world. There again, some honor has been rendered by the international community. By virtue of the United Nations' *Day of the Seafarer* (June 25) and *World Maritime Day* (24 September), a similar honor befits the whole maritime community that serves to keep the lines of trade open and make our modern way of life possible. But such a declaration has implications for ministry – if we collectively say their decision to serve as seafarers is honorable and necessary for our lives, what does that mean for chaplains who wish to serve them?

4. The Activity of Serving Seafarers

Though various individual efforts for seafarers stretch back centuries previous, real organized seafarers' welfare work and ministry stretches back only into the late 18th century. Since its beginnings, it has been delivered by a broad spectrum of faith-based and secular groups in many different ways.¹³ Still,

11. <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/education/national-maritime-day/national-maritime-day> (Accessed May 7, 2020)

12. <https://unitedseamensservice.org/> (Accessed May 7, 2020)

13. Literature on the history and theology of maritime ministry has grown in the last generation: Paul G. MOONEY, *A History of ICMA*, London, ICMA, 2019; Paul G. Mooney, *Maritime Mission: History, Developments. A New Perspective*, Zoetermeer, Uitgeverij Boeken-centrum, 2005; Paul G. MOONEY, "Serving Seafarers Under Sail and Steam: A Missiological Reflection on the Development of Maritime Missions from 1779 to 1945," *Occasional Papers of the International Association for the Study of Maritime Mission* (June 2000); Roald KVERNDAL, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origins and Early Growth*, Pasadena CA, William Carey Library, 1986; ID., *The Way of the Sea*, Pasadena CA, William Carey Library, 2008; ID., *George Charles Smith of Penzance: From Nelson Sailor to Mission Pioneer*, Pasadena CA, William Carey Library, 2012; Robert W.H. MILLER, *The Church and the Merchant Seafarer: An Introductory History*, Cambridge, Lutterworth, 2012; Jan ØRNER, "Missions to Seamen," *International Review of Mission*, 60 (1971), pp. 395-400; Bill DOWN, "Seafarers," in Giles LEGOOD (ed.), *Chaplaincy: The Church's Sector Ministries*, London, Cassell, 1999; Ted MALL, *Developing Ministry to Seafarers*, Beach Park IL, Maritime Library, 2002; Kaarlo KALLIALA, *Strangership: A Theological Étude on Strangers Aboard and Abroad.*, trans. Hal MARTIN, Helsinki, The Finnish Seamen's Mission, 1997; Vincent A. YZERMANS, *American Catholic Seafarers' Church: A Narrative History of the Apostleship of Sea and the National Catholic Conference for Seafarers in the United States*, Washington DC, The National Catholic Conference for Seafarers in the United States, 1995. See

today, most people in the network of formal seafarers' centers are energized by Christian conviction.

Being a merchant seafarer is still a dangerous and demanding profession in the 21st century. While international standards and technology in the shipping world have improved a great deal in the last generation, life onboard a modern ship continues to move back and forth between periods of incessant tedium and intense stress.¹⁴ With faster ship turnaround times and augmented paperwork, many crews find the hours in port to be where the demands are most concentrated. The few hours they do have to get ashore are precious: there is no time to waste waiting for a lost taxi driver or searching in vain for a public internet signal.

To respond to the welfare needs of seafarers, seafarers' ministries around the world provide transportation, communication services and, especially, a friendly welcome. Most of these seafarers' centers are Christian non-profits, many with histories stretching back into the 19th century.¹⁵ The finances and volunteers it takes to get the work done come in part from the maritime industry groups, but especially from many churches and individuals who want to thank seafarers for the work they do. Whether foreign or domestic, and without regard to language, religion, or culture, these seafarers' centers seek to be a 'home away from home' for visiting mariners.

Seafarers' centers provide different kinds of care, but there are recurring themes. Typical days for seafarers' centers start by checking out the incoming ship list for the port and planning ship visits. If they get a call from a crew or know it is a convenient time to board a ship (usually after the initial rush), seafarers' center staff will head over to the ship in the seafarers' center van, pass through security, and climb up the gangway to welcome the crew and provide information on services. The gangway watchman might be wary about another visitor on board, thinking that the person is yet one more official bringing paperwork. Yet seafarers' center staff are almost always welcomed.

The seafarer will then lead the visitor to the duty officer, who confirms times for pick-up and drop off for the crew, either immediately or later in the

also the annual publication of North American Maritime Ministry Association, *The MARE Report*, <http://marereport.namma.org/>, which was first published in 2015.

14. Rose GEORGE, *Ninety Percent of Everything* is a great introduction to modern shipping; see also the fascinating book on the development of container shipping: Marc LEVINSON, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2006. For an easy overview of ideas and terms, see the website of The Maritime Industry Knowledge Center: <http://www.maritimeinfo.org/> (Accessed May 7, 2020).

15. A directory of most of these seafarers' welfare organizations is found on the website of the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN): <https://www.seafarerhelp.org/en/seafarers-directory> (Accessed May 7, 2020). Of those listed in the ISWAN directory, the great majority are affiliated with the International Christian Maritime Association, <http://icma.as/> (Accessed May 7, 2020).

day – typically one group in the afternoon and another in the evening. Before taking a group out, the visitor might stop in the crew mess room for a bit of conversation, especially with crew members who welcome a chat with someone who has local knowledge or the time to hear about their family joys and concerns back home.

The trip off the ship usually includes a ride to the shopping center or grocery store and then on to the seamen's club for free high-speed Wifi and friendly staff. Crews might have a cold drink, play a game of pool or ping-pong, or visit the chapel, but most often they spend time on their computers chatting with their families on Skype and catching up with the goings-on of friends far and wide on Facebook. The outing ends with the seafarers' center van bringing the crew back to their ships – each seafarer often carrying bags with their new electronic gadgets or a few snacks to brighten the long weeks at sea in front of them.

Like shipping, the work of seafarers, welfare does not take a break – some of the busiest days are those on which others in the port are on holiday. The busiest time is Christmas time. Not only do seafarers' centers offer the regular services, but almost all seafarers' centers pass out Christmas presents to each visiting seafarer. As most seafarers come from countries with warmer climates, these gifts typically are warm hats, scarves or socks, but can also be chocolate or a personal Christmas card. This past year, approximately 70,000 gifts were given across seafarers' centers in North America alone.

5. An Ecumenical Network

As seafarers' work is often unseen by most North Americans, so too the ministries that serve them are less visible in public than other organizations the average parishioner might pass on the way to work. Some denominational or regional support networks exist to help promote the work, but these local ministries long ago saw the benefit and need of working together on a national and international level to build their public profile and think about strategies to confront changes in the industry. For this reason – and even though from an atypical cross-section of Christian traditions – these ministries have banded together in professional associations to bring mutual support and encouragement.

Largely off the radar screen of typical church society, the men and women who sail on ships hunger after a kind of hospitality, a care for soul and body, that Christian ministries have so much experience in giving. Others might forget to welcome seafarers, but this diverse network of Christian ministries – some founded in the 19th century, others more recently – exists in ports across North America and around the world to meet their needs. As ports evolve, with turn-around times for ships ever diminishing, these ministries

consider themselves at the forefront of helping seafarers. To avoid an unfortunate kind of 'competitive' chaplaincy or, more commonly, a poor coordination of resources in a local port, Canadian and American chaplains from a diverse range of Christian traditions – Catholic, Episcopalian (Anglican), Lutheran, Baptist, Reformed and others besides – came together in an ecumenical network, now called the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA), which is in turn a region of the worldwide network called the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA).¹⁶

Yet, for all that NAMMA and ICMA do to coordinate the work of members from a variety of backgrounds, they are aware that a network should not squeeze its members into a one-size-fits-all type of chaplaincy. We are not "cookie-cutter" associations that form people, willingly or not, into one mold. It is important to recognize that each member ministry brings with it a long and distinctive history of thinking about the care of seafarers in body and soul, and that each chaplain, administrator and volunteer has differing abilities and experience. This network, then, does not try to force agreement between the members, but instead creates a space for dialogue, disagreement even, and especially for learning something profound and practical from someone whose tradition is quite different from our own. This flexibility of associations in seafarers' ministry can engender confusion, but also creates a practical basis to continue faithful work.¹⁷

6. Key Challenges in Serving Seafarers: Internet Access

This specialized chaplaincy also requires tailored answers to needs. A warm welcome, transportation to seafarers' center, and gifts at Christmas have been staples of seafarers' welfare for several generations. However, like the rest of modern society, one key need that has changed the face of seafarers' ministry is access to phones and the internet. For many reasons (cost being chief), seafarers lag far behind what those of us on land would consider normal access to the telephone or the internet on land. Further, the perverse result of the growth in the number of cellular phones is that public telephone booths, often a lifeline for seafarers to contact their families when arriving in port, have all but disappeared.

While on board, seafarers' access to reliable high-speed internet connections lags about a decade behind. Director of the Seafarers and International

16. NAMMA: <http://www.namma.org/> and ICMA: <http://icma.as/>. Reflection on ecumenical relationships in maritime ministry is found in Jason ZUIDEMA, "Seafarers' Ministry in Ecumenical Perspective," *Studi Emigrazione: International Journal of Migration Studies*, 198 (April-June 2015), pp. 249-260 and Paul MOONEY, *A History of ICMA*.

17. A great overview of the work of these associations is the article of Paul MOONEY, "History of the Maritime Faith Welfare Organizations," *Studi Emigrazione: International Journal of Migration Studies*, 198 (April-June 2015), pp. 227-248.

Research Center of Cardiff University Helen Sampson, drawing on 2012 research¹⁸, estimated in 2014 that a full 60% of seafarers still did not have regular availability of high-speed internet.¹⁹ Since then the industry has made a significant amount of progress, but still perhaps a third of seafarers lack regular access to high-speed internet: a 2018 report by Futureonautics found that, while internet access had increased since the previous study in 2015, the majority of seafarers' access to communication was limited to text-only email and satellite calls, and no communication technology was accessible to the majority of seafarers for free.²⁰ If the company does not provide internet access, most seafarers need to purchase an expensive international SIM card or wait until they are in port to visit the local seafarers' center. Both of these options are cumbersome and can still incur high cost. Just as it is for any land-based person travelling away from home, not having internet for the weeks or months they are at sea is a great burden for seafarers. As Roger Harris, Executive Director of the International Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network, said, "Communications at sea and in port are the number one welfare concern of seafarers around the world, with loneliness cited as their worst enemy."²¹

While some shipping companies have provided regular high-speed access, most are slow in providing it, citing both problems of cost and the potential for hackers to get into sensitive data. Also, though there are notable exceptions, most ports do not provide anything like this kind of service for visiting seafarers.

The problem is that the kind of infrastructure we enjoy on land to bring us cheap, high-speed internet is still expensive at sea. But progress on this front also puts seafarers' ministries in a direct bind, because the provision of cheap wifi for visiting seafarers may put their centers with free wifi out of business. The model of ministry that has focused on meeting one particular material need of seafarers – in this case, the overwhelming majority of seafarers' express desire for a reasonably-priced high-speed internet connection to communicate with friends and family – might soon be eclipsed by advances in technology. If seafarers equate seafarers' ministry foremost with the provision of high-speed internet connections, what happens when high-speed internet connections are available on board the ship at all times? The irony is

18. Neil ELLIS, Helen SAMPSON, Iris ACEJO, Nelson TURGO and Zhimei ZHAO, "Seafarer Accommodation on Contemporary Cargo Ships," Cardiff, Seafarers and International Research Center, 2012. <https://orca.cf.ac.uk/64728/1/Seafarer%20Accommodation.pdf>, 57-60.

19. North American Maritime Ministry Association, "Life Aboard a Modern Cargo Ship," YouTube video, 40:07, October 13, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-5kbN78DIA>.

20. Futureonautics. *Crew Connectivity 2018 Survey Report*, London, Futureonautics, 2018; accessed May 7, 2020. <http://www.crewconnectivity.com/?product=2018-crew-connectivity-survey-report>, 23-24.

21. Roger HARRIS, "Tackling the Worst Enemy of the Modern Seafarer," *ISWAN News*, May 18, 2015; accessed May 7, 2020. <https://www.seafarerswelfare.org/news/2015/tackling-the-worst-enemy-of-the-modern-seafarer>

that seafarers’ ministry might very well set itself up to be “obsolete” precisely by advocating for response to a central human need of seafarers, the desire for closer contact with family.

New technology that will make high-speed internet available everywhere on earth is still experimental or expensive, but will likely not always be. What is the future for seafarers chaplaincy if seafarers no longer “need” seafarers’ centers to communicate with their families?

7. Key Challenges in Serving Seafarers: A Ministry of Presence

Chaplaincy ministries, especially workplace chaplaincies, have held a certain attraction for those seeking minimal supervision and professional development requirements. In a chaplain’s day-to-day work, often done in solitude, they may naturally slip into not reflecting on whether their ministry techniques or abilities can be effective in that context. The reality of doing seafarers’ ministry well, however, is that it like any workplace chaplaincy faces many challenges: the special spiritual conditions of seafarers and an often ambiguous relationship with the business side of the port environment, to name just two. It takes work to navigate these challenges well. Therefore, when seafarers’ chaplains gather in bodies like NAMMA and ICMA conferences, we put emphasis on reflecting on our mission and on professional development.

For those involved in seafarers’ chaplaincy, the question remains of the essential mission of their work. It is true, the basic diaconal issues for seafarers are SIM cards, internet, rides to Walmart, and other small needs. As internet provision improves and new technologies are adopted, these basic diaconal concerns could all be taken care of by the likes of Amazon and Uber if rightly organized. This possibility may be theoretical for longer than we expect, as doing them with new technology is actually still very difficult. How can a seafarer order an Uber if he has no internet connection? In most ports, there is no other organization that will provide these services other than the seafarers’ ministry.

However, beyond these physical needs, the fact is that seafarers will still be socially isolated and very far from family. They will not be present in their homes, not able to play with their children, and not able to share a meal or a night out with their friends. For all the connectivity it provides, no amount of internet can solve these problems. And the problem is that humans are meant to be together – we are not meant to float thousands of miles from home 10 months at a time. Sure, seafarers socialize with their fellow crew members, but even crews are shrinking (because of technology), and the nature of their work and size of their workplace means that they see less and less of each other. The *real* need maritime ministries should look to fill – and this is true of any ministry – is to create community for those they serve. The most important thing individuals involved in maritime ministry give when they visit a ship is

not rides or SIM cards, but themselves, in the form of time, compassion, a listening ear, and words of encouragement.

Christians in seafarers' chaplaincy find ample support for the importance of community with others in the Bible – the human race is founded in Genesis 2:18 with the Lord God's words "it is not good for the man to be alone" (NIV). When Jesus describes the scandal of his ministry in Luke 5:29-32 with the words "it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," the 'healing' and 'calling' in question is *eating and drinking with them*. In Acts 2:42, the early Church is described as "devoted to the apostles' teaching *and fellowship*" (NIV). A verse particularly oft-cited among seafarers' chaplains is the words of Jesus from Matthew 25:35-36, "I was a stranger and you invited me in [...]. I was in prison and you came to visit me." (NIV) From a health and productivity perspective, also, social connection in one's workplace has been shown to be a significant positive factor.²² Thus there are clear imperatives not only for providing for seafarers' material needs, but for people making themselves available to them as a friendly presence.

From a perspective of social justice, too, doing something to solve the problem of disconnection for seafarers can be seen as a general responsibility. In globalized markets like North America and Europe, goods delivered by seafarers are ubiquitous and essential, while for the seafarers access to the same is limited. The gifts used by Westerners to reaffirm relationships at Christmas, for example, are delivered by seafarers disrupting *their* relationships with *their* families, likely for multiple holidays. While their compensation is significant by the standards of their own country, it is not by the standards of many of those they serve. Thus giving a warm welcome to the seafarer in one's port and addressing their needs as best as one can, on the personal as well as economic levels, is as much an acknowledgment of debt owed as an act of charity.

The work of ministry of presence is not as natural as it might first appear, either. The chaplain who performs this ministry correctly walks on a ship with the purpose of attending to the seafarer as a person, without forcing any expectations onto him. The chaplains need to be able to listen carefully and humbly, often across a language and culture barrier, and to be patient and respectful with attitudes to religion and morality that they do not share. More uniquely among chaplaincies, they need to learn how to build relationships of trust through short-term interactions as seafarers enter and leave their ports. These interactions are for better or worse often complicated by the chaplain's also being a provider of material goods like drives and SIM cards. Chaplains

22. Julianne HOLT-LUNSTEDT, "Fostering Social Connection in the Workplace," *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 32 (2018), pp. 1307-1312.

to seafarers thus cultivate patience and openness, make themselves available across the irregular hours on which seafarers and ports function, and learn to manage their expectations about ministry and find as much fulfillment in smaller acts of community as in the deepest. Because there is often only one seafarers’ chaplaincy ministry in a given port, it falls to the regional and ecumenical organizations like NAMMA and ICMA to teach these skills.

8. Conclusion

Reflection on seafarers’ ministry, perhaps even finding and visiting the seafarers’ ministry in one’s local port, is helpful for other ministry practitioners for a number of reasons. First, it helps understand the role of the Church beyond its walls. Those outside the Church are not only those who choose not to come to church, but those involved in honorable and necessary professions who are unable to attend regular gatherings of the faithful. As they are far from home aboard ships that are bringing goods to everyone, the responsibility to minister to seafarers according to their need, to which seafarers’ ministries dedicate themselves, is indeed universal. Second, as workplace dynamics change, so must ministry in those workplaces change itself. Though selling phone cards or helping with wifi connections might on the surface seem to be an inefficient use of pastoral time, when studied more closely, it ought to be seen as a prime strategy for pastoral care – especially since seafarers’ ministries are the only method by which many seafarers can connect with their families. The value of connecting husbands and fathers with wives and children is tremendous. Finally, as in other workplace chaplaincies, resources and support can be found in one’s own church community, but also in ecumenical associations. These associations sometimes provide confessional or theological guidance, but are just as important for their professional development. Chaplains from very diverse denominations can learn from each other the kinds of “best practices” that work in their workplace context.

Despite the massive size of the shipping industry, maritime ministry is not widely known. Nonetheless, it has developed refined structures and support organizations over the past several centuries. Consideration of this ministry is useful in itself, but is also helpful for those in other workplace ministries or chaplaincies who want to reimagine their own work. Above all, the history and future of service to seafarers exemplifies how ministries adapt to the changing perceptions of those whom they wish to serve and the industry in which they work.

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SUMMARY

More than 90% of the products and goods we consume on a daily basis made their way to us principally by sea. Yet, increasingly, port areas and the ships that serve them are not commonly frequented or understood. Completely unknown are the more than 1.75 million seafarers who sail those ships. Though they connect us to the goods of the world, these seafarers live disconnected from their families and home cultures. Recognizing this disconnection in the lives of seafarers, an ecumenical network of Christian chaplaincies around the world exists to provide a welcome in foreign ports. After outlining the basic rationale, work, and history of seafarers' welfare, this essay elicits the practical examples of internet access for seafarers and of ministry of presence as examples of care that have shaped seafarers' ministry. These examples frame our understanding of the chaplain's work: the chaplain's passion, character or theological understanding alone are not sufficient. We argue that more cooperation, training, and consistency in work are necessary for long-term effectiveness in seafarers' ministry as in any other workplace chaplaincy.

SOMMAIRE

Plus de 90 % des produits et marchandises que nous consommons quotidiennement nous sont acheminés principalement par voie maritime. Pourtant, les zones portuaires et les navires qui les desservent ne sont généralement pas fréquentés ou bien connus. Les quelque 1,75 million de marins qui naviguent sur ces navires sont, quant à eux, totalement inconnus. Bien qu'ils nous permettent l'accès aux biens du monde, ces marins vivent déconnectés de leur famille et de leur culture d'origine. Conscient de cette déconnexion, un réseau œcuménique d'aumôneries chrétiennes existe à travers le monde pour offrir un accueil dans les ports étrangers. Après avoir exposé les fondements, le travail et l'histoire de la poursuite du bien-être des gens de la mer, cet essai signale comme exemples de soins bien concrets apportés à ces derniers l'accès à Internet et le ministère de l'accueil et de la présence. À eux seuls, toutefois, la passion et le tempérament de l'aumônier ou la compréhension théologique qu'il peut avoir de son rôle ne suffisent pas. Plus de coopération, de formation et de cohérence dans le travail s'avèrent nécessaires pour assurer, comme dans toute autre forme de ministère, une efficacité à long terme dans l'intervention pastorale auprès des gens de la mer.