

Townsville MtS News



Sea Sunday
2020

Reflection on Sea Sunday

Gospel of St Matthew Chapter 13: 1-9 [10-17] 18-23.

With the Commemoration of Sea Sunday coming around every year, Gospel stories of the sea, seashore, boats, or seaside barbeques get well used. This year, our international focus for Sea Sunday has been the plight of Seafarers and Fishers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is easy to complain about social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine as we sit in our own homes, or hotel room where meals are cooked and provided, and where the worst thing we have to cope with is boredom. Yes, there are cases of medical conditions and other factors which makes life in shut-down inconvenient; of that there is no doubt.

However, try for a moment to consider yourself on board a vessel, with around 21 others; from various countries, working every day but unable to leave the ship for more than 12 months. Or to be denied access to shore leave when you do eventually berth in a port. During this time, you are in close contact with your work companions and must live side by side with them in the confines of a vessel, day in, day out, through calm weather and turbulent storms. Finally, reflect on the inability to contact home for weeks at a time, where your family is dealing with Covid-19 in the community, and sadly in many places, where members of your family may be dying with no opportunity for you to say good-bye.

This is the situation for the worlds' seafarers!

One has only to scroll through the maritime publications & seafaring magazines to note the growing health problems, physical, psychological and emotional, that are being recorded over these past six months. A seafarer's life has never been an easy one, but the present pandemic and associated economic and travel distress has combined to make the situation one of great concern to international maritime organisations and governments.

What can we do to help? The worldwide Christian maritime ministry through ICMA [International Christian Maritime Association] and its various world membership; the Mission to Seafarers and the Apostleship of the Sea being two major organisations, are working towards alleviating the distress of 'those who go down to the sea in ships'.

The stories of Care Packages around the worlds' ports, as volunteers and chaplains are currently taking boxes and bags of items to the ships; from beanies to foodstuff, toiletries and games, to help those virtually incarcerated on their vessels. The crew are reminded that they are being cared for, remembered and prayed for, during a time when all they can do is wait – and hope – and pray for deliverance.

We have distributed care packages to more than seventy vessels during the past months, and the smiles and thanks have made it all worthwhile.

This has been thanks to a few generous donors, allowing us to buy the necessary goods and games. Sadly, with the pandemic stretching on, we will be seeking further assistance in the months ahead.



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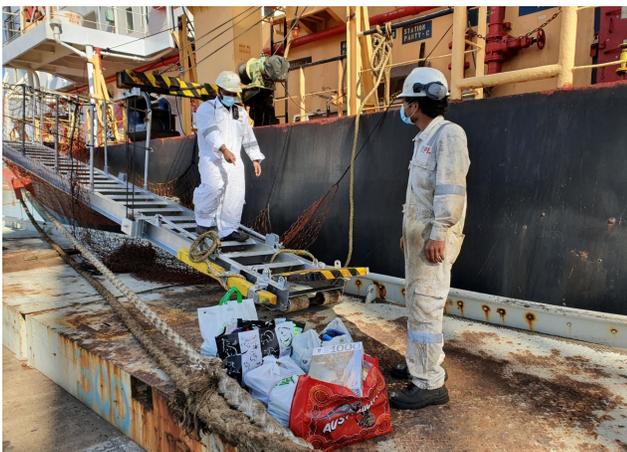
We pray for international labour organisations, national governments and the maritime industry to work together on assisting crew to both return home, and for their replacements to have safe access to ships in foreign ports.

At this time, when so many people are isolated from their loved ones, at sea and on shore, we need workers to keep things moving, volunteers to keep places open, and faithful messengers of God's Love to work and pray for the ongoing work of the maritime ministries.

As noted at the start, this Sea Sunday, there was no gospel story of the sea. Instead, we were given in the Gospel from Matthew, the Parable of the Sower with its rural example of faith. It has something to tell us about the seafaring work of the Mission. At first glance, you could be forgiven for thinking it is a lesson for the agriculturally challenged, but I'm certain Christ's audience knew exactly how to sow their crops.

But what we are meant to get out of this parable, is not how to produce a decent harvest of wheat or sugar cane, but an understanding of faith and how to practise it. One of the hardest lessons to learn in life is that we cannot be all things to all people, no matter how hard we try. And the parable of the sower helps to put things into perspective. We can go around zealously sprinkling seeds of faith in our workplace, especially when we have 1.5 million seafarers around the world, but we need to remember that we are only one part of the process.

Many have told stories of being on board ship for over six months without leave because of security imposed on them. Not many among us would choose a job where our lives were exposed to danger – not just from the whims of nature, but from an unseen virus.



In our ministry of hospitality among the diverse seafarers of the world, we present a smiling welcome and where possible, a 'home away from home' for all. What happens after that, we leave to the Holy Spirit.

In Townsville, we give thanks that the Mission to Seafarers is within the secure precinct of the Port, thanks to the cooperation of the Port of Townsville Limited giving us access to all berths and ships. Our closest ships are only 50 metres away, allowing us the chance to meet and greet right from the doors of our canteen...even now, as we yell across the berth and the associated industrial noises.

So, what do we do to respond to the story of the sower in situations such as these? What does Jesus ask of us in our daily life as we tend the patch in which we work?

First, he asks us to pray for the seafarers and for their concerned families. He asks us to talk to visiting crews about their present life, to let them see that we care. To offer them a gift package to show they are part of the human family, to listen as they speak about problems that they cannot share with their companions on board ship, because of cultural taboos or political differences. These are not huge demands – they are simple acts of hospitality and caring.

We introduce them to the hospitality of God, a place in which they feel safe, welcome and cared for. This is the seed of the sower! This is the grain from which may spring a desire to take nourishment from others down the track. Just this week, we received a request for phone cards and Bibles...not one but several Bibles, as the crew were in need of calm and peace. It was a joy to be able to hand them over at the gangway.

Ours is a community taken from nearly every nation on earth; some share our faith, some have others, some have none. The MtS family performs '*an invisible ministry among an invisible community*'.

We cannot rely upon long term contact but instead upon continuing care from unseen volunteers and chaplains around the world – all of whom are called today to show Christ's love, plant the seed of faith, to water, to feed, to nurture and to care. Some will fall by the wayside, some will be constantly needing attention, others will spring forth abundantly.

If our worldwide Mission has any gauge by which to measure success, it is in the reaction by people of good will who respond to an inner desire to care for others by volunteering their time; it is in the response by groups in the community to support the work of hospitality we offer; and most especially it is in the hearts of the intrepid seafarers, who come back to us time and time again, smiling in the knowledge that they are welcomed as the children of the one God.

The rest we confidently leave to the Creator.

MISSION TO SEAFARERS GOLF DAY 2020

The Mission is again very grateful for the Sponsorships from -

- ◆Glencore Port Operations,
- ◆Southern Cross Marine Supplies
- ◆Townsville Shipping Agencies



Sixty golfers turned up for the 12th Annual MtS Golf Day [according to our trophy]; which is a great effort considering the current pandemic restrictions. Two teams were unable to play due to company policy during Covid-19. This was a test case for the Rowes Bay Golf Club, being the first Corporate Golf Day since the pandemic began.

As usual all participants vowed to return for another crack at the title in 2021.

The day was a brilliant Townsville Winter's day, with sun shining, greens refreshed after recent rains and cheery faces, replenished by a drinks cart and morning and afternoon barbeques.

Mission thanks are extended to Denise Beldan who has been organising the event for as long as we have hosted the event. We thank Ian and Jeanette Eadie for their stalwart efforts in cooking for the day and Mary Harris doing the raffles. Volunteers John and Bev Smith-Trim, Avril Plath from Glencore and Beryl Dyer assisted in the afternoon with the presentation barbeque. New food handling restrictions meant having extra helpers.

Donations came from Townsville Shipping Agencies, Yellow Block Road, Monson Agencies and the Mission for the raffles. This is our largest fundraising event each year and we appreciate all those who assist in any way.



Thank you all.

Left: Well done to the winning team from Townsville Marine Logistics.

Right: Organiser extraordinaire, Denise Beldan who organizes the Golf Day each year, and without whom it would not go ahead.



MISSION NEWS: BEANIES IN CARE PACKS



Thanks to the many wonderful people from the Diocese of North Queensland and beyond who provide knitted beanies that we distribute to the visiting crew. They are well received by the seafarers. Usually, our knitters are part of a group such as Click Clack Knitting here in Townsville or parish groups; but every few months we receive a large box from long distance knitter, Diane James who send us beautiful beanies from Goulburn in NSW.

We are so lucky to have groups and individuals who keep us provided with these warm, lovingly made beanies for our seafarers. As you can see from the photos, the beanies are much appreciated by visiting seafarers.

Thank you.



The Mission is again sponsoring a prize at the **St James' Cathedral Art and Craft Exhibition** being held from 4th to 16th August in the Cathedral.

The Maritime Art Award has a prize of \$250 and is given to the best painting with a "maritime industry or nautical" theme.

The exhibition, as well as encouraging local artists and artisans, is a fundraiser for the Friends of St James' Cathedral who organise the Exhibition.

We encourage you to support this local event and

*"be a part of the art
in the heart of the City."*

On Monday 27th July, we were visited by Kate Pemberton and friend Emily who donated another 60 Cadet Pack for the Care Packages being given to ships crews visiting Townsville Port. Kate and her family run the organisation 'Kate's Campaign for Change' assisting many groups in the community through donations in kind to make lives happier for those in need or at risk in the community. Thank you Kate from our Cadets at sea.

SEAFARER NEWS

‘My children ask me when am I coming home’: stranded seafarers share their frustrations

Hundreds of thousands of seafarers are finding themselves stranded at sea, sometimes for over a year, and with no end in sight, as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions. The uncertainty and long spells away from home are taking a heavy mental toll.

“I am tired, exhausted and hopeless. I have been at sea for 12 months already. And I don’t know when I can see my kids and family. It’s very frustrating.”

Raphael (not his real name) has no idea how long he will be stuck on his ship. A 33 year old seafarer from the Philippines, with two children, he was scheduled to fly home in April, but the pandemic put paid to his plans: airports have been closed, and his company decided not to relieve him, and eight other colleagues, some of whom have spent up to 14 months onboard.

“This is the fourth time my home leave has been cancelled. I don’t know what’s going on. We deliver the cargo and the goods, but they close the borders for us.”

Because of the uncertainty, Raphael says, the atmosphere on the ship is tense, and he fears that there will be an impact on safety, because of the fragile mental health of the crew: “our minds are in different worlds”, he says. “It’s like walking on thin air.” ‘All we want is to come home’

Some 90 per cent of global trade takes place via maritime transport, thanks to the work of around two million seafarers. Like Raphael, Matt, an English Chief Engineer onboard a boat that sails mainly in the Middle East and Asia, feels that the crucial contribution made by seafarers, who ensure that the transportation of key goods continues unimpeded during the pandemic, should be valued more highly.

“I would say that, as seafarers, we have more than played our part during this pandemic. We have kept countries supplied with everything they need, including PPE (personal protective equipment) and medical supplies, oil and gas to keep power stations running, and food and water. All we want in return is to be able to come home and rest”.

As time has gone on, Matt and the crew have gone through a range of emotions, and the mental health burden is growing.

“I think we’ve been through all the emotions. A lot of anger in the beginning as we had to watch all the borders close. We understood the health risk, and we could understand why it was happening. We tried to remain hopeful, but as time has passed it seems like little has changed. We are hanging in here, but we are tired and mentally fatigued.”

UN News

Global perspective : human stories

Human Rights

19 July 2020



AROUND & ABOUT

MTS Townsville was one of only two centres who have stayed open around Australia during the past months of the pandemic.

We have received donations of \$6,000 from various sources to cover Care Packages for ships.

We also received a donation from ‘Kate’s Campaign for Change’ of \$1000 worth of toiletries which we distributed to the cadets on 50 ships, as were bags of beanies for all crew.

Chaplaincy – Ship Visiting 2020/21: Currently on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions though it can be arranged if necessary. Tele-chaplaincy and online services are available.

Volunteering 2020/21: Due to the current situation, we are unsure if we will get any new volunteers. However, the Bishop made mention of the continuing need at the Sea Sunday Service.

John & Bev Smith-Trim have booked a promotional stall at the Markets at the Strand (Friday evening 7/8) and the Willows (Sunday morning 9/8). A gazebo will be used plus a tarpaulin and frame.

Banners and brochures, a donation box and volunteer forms will be displayed, and souvenirs, t-shirts and caps will be sold.

Thank you to John and Bev for this initiative and their ongoing help.

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Caring for Seafarers
around the world

Prayer Points

*Please pray for all those seafarers who are unable to return home due to the pandemic. Give them courage and hope in a very difficult situation.

*Pray for the families of seafarers who are having to cope at home often with little support.

*Pray for the success of our Golf Day, as this is our major fundraiser for the year. Give thanks for the volunteers who help organise this event.

*Give thanks for the support given to provide care packages.

*Give thanks for people who have been taking time to provide beanies for visiting seafarers.

LOCAL NEWS

The Canteen Manager and Bev Smith-Trim attended the Sea Sunday Service held at St James' Cathedral on Sunday 12th July. Due to Covid-19, it was 'toned-down' for our 93rd birthday. Bishop Keith referred to the mission as 'the Quiet Achiever of the Church'.

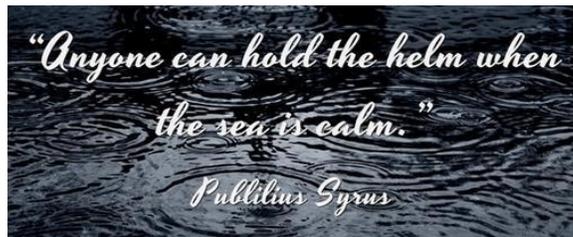
Canteen sales are mostly coming from online orders from crew not allowed off their ships. Sales to port workers have remained fairly constant although working from home caused some decrease in business. However, the Mission is still doing well compared to many other places. We currently received the Jobkeeper Subsidy and this is a great help.

Leprosy Mission Donation: Mr. Ross Waller has been collecting cans from the Mission for some years on behalf of the Leprosy Mission. As we are now recycling cans and bottles through the Containers for Change scheme, it was proposed the Mission contribute a donation to the Leprosy Mission instead. The committee agreed to donate \$400.00 annually to the Leprosy Mission. The two volunteers who have taken on this new money raising venture are Grant and Sue Chandler. We are so grateful for their determined efforts, which sees an average of \$70.00 per week going into the Mission account.

Canteen Opening Times: Due to the current restrictions and decrease in seafarers and local port workers using the Canteen, it has been decided that we will amend our opening times to open at 10.00am and close at 6.00pm for the foreseeable future. Ships can request later hours when crew have shore leave.

Audit & AGM: The financial audit is currently being arranged and the date for the Annual General Meeting will be either Saturday 3rd or 10th October 2020. Details of the AGM will be forwarded in due course.

The next meeting of the MtS Townsville Committee will be held on Saturday 12 September at 10.30am. Could all committee members please note the date and time. Thank you.



We are sometimes asked about Wills/ Bequests from those who might wish to leave part of their estate for Mission work among our seafarers.

A form of wording which could be used is as follows:

I give and bequeath to the Mission to Seafarers Townsville the sum of for the general and charitable purposes of the Mission to Seafarers Townsville, and I direct such a bequest be free of all duties, and I declare the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being shall be sufficient discharge of the same.