



The Master's Mariner September 2021

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A Message from Rev Un Tay



The recent lockdown since the end of June has impacted everyone including seafarers and our Mission. If you think that is unbearable, spare a thought for the 1.6 million seafarers at sea. They have been in lockdown since the beginning of the pandemic and are confined on their vessels for more than 12 to 18 months. Their challenges are indeed overwhelming, with no shore leave and delayed crew changes! Yet they face the challenges with such resilience and tenacity! I salute them!

Not only is the pandemic creating such havoc, but the nature of a seafarers' job is also extremely dangerous. On Thursday, 12 August 2021, ABC News reported: **Chinese sailor crushed to death during open sea ship transfer.** Below is the report:

"A man has been fatally crushed between a ship and a hulking cargo vessel off Queensland's Sunshine Coast...The sailor, thought to be a Chinese national, was climbing down a pilot ladder on the side of the Liberian-flagged Formosabulk Clement just before 7:00pm on Monday when the incident occurred. It was the end of his contract, and he was leaving his ship, berthed about five nautical miles off Caloundra, to begin his journey home. Ian Bray from the ITF said the protocols were the reason the crew opted to leave the Formosabulk at sea, despite the risks. That meant those leaving the ship had to scramble down a ladder and those joining the ship had to scramble up. 'It's during this operation that it went horribly wrong,' Mr Bray said.



The sad thing about this was he was actually stepping off the ship to go home to his family, and he's never going to get there. This crew member could have gone down the gangway, gotten into transport and got into hotel quarantine and probably would be laying on a hotel bed. As a result of this, he's lying on a slab in the mortuary."

Please spare a thought for him and prayer for his family. Pray too for our staff and chaplains, as we engage with seafarers every day, to minister to their welfare, their spiritual needs and provide practical support such as "shopping and dropping" at their gangway.

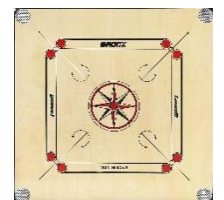
How Much Does God Care for the Seafarers? - Chaplain Jim Watt

More often than not shopping for seafarers involves going to supermarkets or department stores and obtaining everyday goods at everyday prices and at everyday places but sometimes it is more interesting than that.



When asked by one ship to price crocodile and shark tooth necklaces, I was not totally prepared to go to the Northern Territory to make sure I was purchasing the genuine article, even though going the extra mile has quite characterized the MTS for over a century. Rather I decided to search the city souvenir shops. I found some suppliers on the internet including one exotic one on the northern beaches which recycles shark teeth found on the beach, as well as two shops in the city. There is quite a price range involved and sometimes a seafarer will go for the higher, rather than the lower priced objects. Communication is the key and WhatsApp enables photos of the items to be shared as well as prices and eventually sales are made. In the end about 4 necklaces and 3 wristbands were purchased and I learnt a lot about what seafarers want and how far I could go in meeting their requests. The recipients were truly grateful.

Another time an Indian captain requested a specialty product, an International Standard Carrom Board. He had communicated his requests in advance, so I had time to investigate. I knew what it was, because I had played the game in Sri Lanka with a group of kids who were all wanting to have a crack at beating their Aussie visitor. It is quite physical for a board game, and I later realized how many things you forget, when considering the details of a seemingly vivid memory. The internet revealed that Harvey Norman sells them, and they meet international standards. However, they're only available online. Previous purchases for Indian seafarers had revealed the existence of some Indian shops in my local area. The best one had the phone off the hook for 2 days, so I had to visit and ask about the board. I asked the lady who had sold me many Indian delicacies if they had a Carrom board. She smiled at me but said no. Down went my heart, but as I turned away a customer told me he had just bought a Carrom board at Lakemba and they had plenty more. He couldn't tell me the name of the shop, but said it was a shop near the station. For such a coincidence to occur, I figured God was in it. I haven't been to Lakemba for years and I may as well have been in central Asia with all the shops I could see selling Asian products. The only Caucasian activity was the roadworks that blocked off the road. It wasn't easy to find, but by the sixth shop I hit them, and I set about negotiating a price. Do you know what it is like to bargain with Asian businessmen? The board was being purchased by the crew from their own special fund. I wanted to get it at a fair price. The HN price was \$170 so when the seller told me \$250, I had to find out how much the captain was prepared to bargain and in the intervening period the seller morphed into an older gentleman who was unaware of the previous offer. I offered him \$180, which he thought was what I had been quoted and he thought I was complaining. He said \$160, I was thoroughly confused, in fact we were both confused. In the end we agreed to the price of \$180, including the discs, the hitter, and a packet of powder, which the captain advised to use as bargaining tools. I was now the proud temporary owner of this massive board, which was 1.1 metres square and made of thick, heavy wood. My memory of the board size did not include this statistic and I wondered how I would ever get it to the bus. The workmen refused my requests to park outside, and I considered the spinal damage from carting it myself. God had given me the fair price and now the thought came of there potentially being a rear lane. Sure enough, winding my way through the confusion of the shop there was the gate, which enabled me to load it onto the bus later on. Mission almost accomplished.



Next day I reflected on how God had led me through it all and marvelled at how much He loves the seafarers. This game is part of their culture and during these dark days of no shore leave, it will provide many memories of their loved ones and homeland as well as providing new moments of bonding with their workmates.

“... In fact, seafarers have very few options...” - Wendy King

In the June Master's Mariner, we brought your attention to the number of ships, stranded off the coast of China. Towards the end of last year and early this year, approximately 70 ships & 1500 seafarers were stranded, by May this had reduced to approximately 19, some unloading, whilst others sailed away and delivered their cargo to other nations in SE Asia. As of 02/06/2021, according to Queensland Rail News, 15 vessels remained stranded off the coast of China, a year after the stand-off first began. The economic impact of this is enormous, but the emotional and psychological impact on the seafarers is greater.



However, these vessels are not the only ones where seafarers remain stranded or confined. Currently, seafarers delivering produce all over the world, are confined to their vessels for months at a time. As reported in Marine Link, July 25th2021, 'The Delta variant devastating parts of Asia - home to many of the world's 1.7 million commercial seafarers - has prompted many nations to cut off land access to visiting crews, in some cases even for medical treatment. Just 2.5% of seafarers... have been vaccinated, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) estimates. The United Nations describes the situation as a humanitarian crisis at sea & says governments should class seafarers as essential workers. Given ships transport around 90% of the world's trade, the deepening crisis also poses a major threat to the supply chains we rely on for everything from oil and iron to food and electronics.'

So, what about vaccinations? Vaccinations are comprising a lot of the news articles in Australia at the moment. Pfizer or Astra Zeneca, availability, numbers vaccinated, target rates etc.... but what about seafarers? An article written by a seafarer from New Zealand, highlights many issues which most of us would not think about, here are some excerpts:

'Many seafarers are stuck on ships with no way to get home, get vaccinated, or even get ashore... through no fault of their own... Shipowners and governments need to work together to vaccinate seafarers.... our lives and livelihoods are on the line and without us, your supply chains would disappear. Radio New Zealand reported that the NZ Maritime Union suggested not allowing ships into NZ unless all seafarers on board are vaccinated... COVID is dangerous — but so are exhausted seafarers driving ships. To protect land crew, maybe ships should refuse to enter ports that aren't vaccinating seafarers and facilitating crew changes... anyone who understands international trade knows that's not practical... We're seeing reports of states requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination for seafarers. If seafarers can't pass through international borders, this will cause delays and disruptions in the supply chain. Soon, unvaccinated people won't be allowed on commercial flights. But what about seafarers stuck on board ships?... Whose problem are they? Several countries are vaccinating seafarers in their ports... but not all seafarers work on ships going to those countries. Some countries only recognise a specific vaccine. Do governments really expect us to have every COVID vaccine so our ships can deliver their goods? Or is that just an inconvenient side effect not to be worried about, as long as orders arrive on time and there's enough toilet paper on shelves?... Since the start of the pandemic, seafarers have died after being refused treatment for non-COVID illnesses and injuries. Ships have had to carry dead crew members' bodies for weeks because countries won't allow the bodies to be repatriated.



We may work at sea, but we're human too... seafarers don't choose to get COVID, don't choose to get stuck on ships, don't choose where their ships go, and don't have any option but to work overseas — that's literally the job description. In fact, seafarers have very few options.'

Some interesting background from our long-term supporter, board member & current treasurer - Jane Fyffe

I have been incredibly fortunate to be involved with the Mission to Seafarers for roughly 40 years. (I started as a teenager!) I became involved as my parents – Joan and Will Fyffe - were long-time supporters. The MTS has been a large part of our family life over the years. The work of the Mission is so important, as seafarers are a forgotten part of the world's economy, being a critical part of how all countries trade the goods that we rely on each day.

My family has had a long connection with the sea. Will was a Chief Engineer and served on ships around the globe. In WWII he was twice on ships that were sunk, once by a U-boat torpedo off the coast of South Africa, and a second time when his ship hit a mine at the mouth of the Humber estuary in the UK. He met Joan at the MTS centre in Auckland



Joan Fyffe



Joan serving on reception

NZ. Joan was a volunteer there from the early 1940's. She was still serving the Mission when she died in 2013, so she was an MTS volunteer for 70 years! After Will became the Marine Superintendent for his company in Australia, he and Joan moved to Sydney in 1957. They continued to support the Mission over the decades. They volunteered on Reception and in the souvenir shop. Joan was the Secretary of the ladies group Harbour Lights Guild for many years. The Guild held many fund-raising events, and spread the word of the work of MTS. Will also served as a member of the Port Committee for 15 years.

I was fortunate to be able to travel with the family by ship around the globe, which provided a first-hand experience of the vastness of the oceans and also the power of storms at sea!

I was introduced early to volunteering at fetes and other fundraising events. Then I worked on reception for a couple of nights a week for 8 years. This was very rewarding – making phone calls for seafarers back to their families - providing one of the few ways they were able to keep in touch and catch up on the news from home. I also volunteered in the young fellowship group – we had discos twice a week (it was the 1980's!) and I drove the bus for many picnics that we held for groups of seafarers at some of our lovely Sydney parks.

A highlight of my association with the MTS was being able to attend the World Conference in Cambridge UK in 1988. This impressed upon me the worldwide coverage of the Mission, and that many people in ports all around the world are part of the Mission family. We may be separated by distance, language or culture, but all share in the same concern for the welfare of the Seafarers that we serve.

It was a privilege to be asked to join the Board of Directors in 2000, as this has enabled me to see another aspect of the volunteer work done to support the work of MTS. I commend the work of the board members to you, as this is largely done behind the scenes. I have also been pleased to use some of the skills developed over many years working in Finance, to serve as Treasurer over the last 3 years.

Just as the shipping industry has changed dramatically over decades, so has the way MTS operates. This of course continues as the industry and MTS faces the immense challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the many years supporting the work of the Mission it is clear to me that the work relies on the whole family! Chaplains and many volunteers who are at the coal face day to day. And also the many other workers and volunteers who diligently work behind the scenes in many different capacities. So I would like to pay tribute to them all. It is so encouraging and rewarding to be part of the MTS family.

Sydney Mission to Seafarers

Tax deductible donations can be made via our **Website**:

missiontoseafarerssydney.org.au/ or directly into our Bank Account:

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