

The Master's Mariner

Spring 2010



Caring for seafarers
around the world

Turbulent Seas Ahead

Few of us have been immune to the impact of the Global Financial Crisis. Many of you will have had your investments slashed as its effects swept across the world's financial markets like a tsunami, wreaking havoc and destruction wherever it went.

Even the most conservative of bodies has been hit, including the Sydney Bethel Union, who have been The Mission's chief benefactor since 1851. The seafarers of the world owe them an incalculable debt, although very few of them would ever have heard their name.

Because they are a body who go about their labours very quietly, seeking no acclaim or fanfare, I wanted to let you know about their work and wrote about them in an earlier edition of this newsletter – you can update your awareness of their ministry by visiting their website (<http://sydneybethelunion.com.au>).

The impact upon the SBU's assets has been such that they have been unable to maintain their previous levels of support for our ministry, and our budget for 2011 will reflect a reduction of about 23% from their 2009 level of support.

Added to the problem is the sad fact that Flying Angel House is likely to be put up for sale, as the costs of maintaining such an old

building have become very high over the past few years, with little prospect of easing.

A search is about to begin for a new Flying Angel House.

Although I will use it as a metaphor, Psalm 107's references to the perils of seafarers are relevant to our situation:

*"Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. **Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men! Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.**" (Psalms 107:23–32 [emphasis mine])*

The Father of Jesus is a faithful, sovereign God who has promised to meet the needs of those who 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness'. Therefore Jesus directed us 'do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.' (Matthew 6:33,34).

I have been a Christian for 35 years and can testify that God always honours His promises! So, although turbulent seas await us, we go forward trusting that He will continue to keep His word and work even this situation 'for the good of those who love Him' (Romans 8:28).

In the meantime, I hope that you will benefit from reading a few snippets from our Chaplains' about their recent ministries.

Chaplain George Gayagay



While visiting crew at Sydney's PATRICK Terminal I learned of a fatal accident involving a young stevedore who was crushed while lashing containers on board a vessel. He was 49 years of age with a young wife and two small children. The

accident suspended the operation of Patrick Terminal. As soon as possible I visited the (Filipino) crew to see how they were faring in the wake of this tragedy. I met with them in the mess hall at 3.00pm and encouraged them to share their feelings about the incident and its effects on them. As I expected, they readily identified with the victim and the loss to his wife and young children, quite aware that such a freak accident could happen to anyone of them. It made us all realise afresh just how precarious their jobs can be, in addition to the constant stress of being away from their loved ones who wait for them to come home. As one said, "I'd never go so far away from my family if I could earn enough at home to support them." However, their Chief Officer interrupted saying, "*Well, that's the life we've chosen, so let's get back to work. No-one's going ashore because we sail at 2100 when the investigation is done*". Although our time together was cut short, they welcomed my prayers for them and the dead man's family before they dispersed. Despite the officer's words, their sailing was delayed for few days while the investigation was completed, and we were able to minister to them again.

A little while ago, five Filipino Seafarers asked my help with money transfers to their families. This was especially urgent because of a prolonged drought in the Philippines which has seen the prices of provisions skyrocket. Although we cannot provide money transfer facilities here at the Mission, I accompanied them to a late-closing Western Union. I introduced them to the manager and let him know that The Mission would check

with the seafarers to ensure that the money had really been sent. The reasons for my 'cynicism' were the perpetual problem of seafarers' vulnerability to exploitation and a recent experience of that vulnerability – for, just a few months ago, a seafarer complained to me that the money he had deposited at another 'money transfer office' had not been sent to his family. I went with him to that 'office' and, after persistent questioning of the manager, finally gained an admission from him that the money had not been sent, the given reason being 'a breakdown of the computer at that time'. Hmm. The money was sent to the seafarers' family.

Chaplain Jong Nam Jo

One evening when I was on duty driving the Mission bus, I met a man who was looking for a copy of the New Testament. I gave him a copy and when the time came for us to go back to ship he sat in the front passenger's seat to talk about Christianity. Some of his friends also participated in the conversation. He shared some very personal issues in his life and wanted to know God's mind on these things. I was able to advise him on these things and urged him to pray and read the Bible every day for himself and enjoy the positive changes in his life that God will bring to him.

At the end of the trip his four friends told me how much they appreciated our ministry and that they were delighted that we'd had our



conversation.

Jack & Jong with the Master of OOCL Yokohama

Chaplain Jack Starmans

The Constitution of The Mission to Seafarers, Sydney commits us to seeking seafarers' welfare. One of the welfare ministries we provide for seafarers is a free bus service to and from the port. I drive our bus at least twice a week, helping to fulfil this important welfare role. Now and then seafarers will speak to me about this ministry and when they do it's always positive. Recently, as we arrived at the Patrick Terminal, a cadet officer from 'Maersk Gaerlock' expressed to me his appreciation of our bus service. He said that it was a terrific benefit and that he was very thankful that we provided it.

Without this ministry, seafarers would have to find their own way into the city. When you're new to a city, have only limited (if any) English, have only three to five hours ashore and no local currency, the prospect of catching a bus or paying (\$47.00) for a taxi can be overwhelming. Thus the Mission comes to the rescue by meeting this need. Seafarers thank God for us but we thank God for you - our supporters and benefactors - who make it possible for us to maintain this much-appreciated ministry.

Another of our highest priorities is to visit crews on board their vessels. Often the crews are working when we visit, which means we can only leave material letting them know about our bus schedules and the facilities they can enjoy at Flying Angel House. But there are other times when we are able to spend some time with the seafarers and, especially, to answer their questions about Jesus. On such occasions we are always able to leave them with some quality Christian literature.

A couple of weeks ago, having left a ship, I was standing at the bottom of the gangway waiting for the shuttle bus with an agent for a well-known Shipping Company. I introduced myself and we began to talk. As the conversation moved onto spiritual things, I asked him if he had ever read the booklet, *'The Gift of God'*. He hadn't, so I offered him a copy. He happily accepted it and said that he

would read it. The next time I saw him he told me he had read only eight pages of the booklet but that he had been discussing the booklet with one of his Company's Captains. They thought it was so helpful that they agreed it would be good to give a copy to each of the crew! I arranged for him to collect another ten copies of the booklet, and am delighted that all the crew of that vessel are now able to read this treasure.

We owe a great deal of thanks to the 'Seamen's Christian Friend Society' for producing *'The Gift of God'* and for making it available for us to use in our work for the Kingdom of God.

Chaplain Un Hui Tay

From time to time, seafarers ask me, 'What do you do other than picking us up at the port and driving us to the Mission?' I think it is a valid question to ask and many people who are not seafarers ask the same question when I introduce myself as Mission Chaplain!

Let me share some of the things I have been doing as a Mission Chaplain. Firstly, we have our rostered duties to observe. These varied duties include: Ship Chaplain - visiting officers and crew members of vessels berthed at the port; and Receptionist / Shop Keeper at FAH; Day or Night driver; Duty Chaplain in Flying Angel House or at the Sydney Seafarers Centre, Matraville.

As a Day or Night driver, we are the first Mission contact for the seafarers as they come ashore. As they hop in the bus, I'll greet them, "Good morning, afternoon or evening" and welcome them to Sydney. Our journey normally takes about 25 to 35 mins depending on the traffic. I usually strike a conversation with the seafarers, finding out how their family members are faring, their voyage, their tasks on board the ship and we have broad topics for conversation such as sports during the World Cup Soccer, cricket, rugby, political and financial situation and etc.

Seafarers have many questions to ask too, such as, what is the exchange rate; where to send money back to family; what is the best phone card or pre-paid SIM or recharge card; where to buy computers, cameras, hard-disks, USB modems, food and restaurants, souvenirs, health and vitamins products, doonas, groceries and vegetables, etc. I will show them where the shop is on the map. If time permits, I will take them to a specific shop or, if it is along the way, I may drop them off such as at Eastgardens or Supacenta. Occasionally, after duty, I will take them to the shop as well.

At least twice, when I arrived at the port terminal, two seafarers were in urgent need of calling family members, but did not have enough time to come ashore due to shore leave expiring or their ship leaving. On both occasions, I happened to have extra phone cards with me (I often use phone cards to call family in Malaysia) and they bought these from me. They were so appreciative because it saved them time and secondly, they could get in touch with their family members.

As Ship Chaplain, I bring with me some 15 - 18 different brochures, showing places of interest in and around the city, our city maps, bus schedule, gospel booklets, CDs and DVDS, Christian books and magazines, and other useful and informative materials (about 5kg or more). My visits range from 3 minutes at the gangway to 90 minutes on board depending on the needs of the seafarers and the many questions asked. One request often made of me is to activate their pre-paid SIM cards or help them recharge their SIM cards. This takes 3 - 10 mins / person and can take up the bulk of my visiting time. Sometimes the Captain or officers will invite me for lunch and it is a great opportunity to build rapport with them. Once I had lunch with an Indian



Captain and we had a wonderful time together. As I was leaving the ship, I told him that I would like to present him the Gospel of Luke and he happily accepted it from me and said, "I promise to read it."

My ship visiting not only builds rapport with the senior officers but crew members too. One ship, *JRS Brisbane* comes to Sydney about every 7 - 10 days. Their call at port is only about 12 - 16 hours. Neither officers nor crew are able to get ashore and their basic need is for phone recharge cards. One of them will call or text me requesting recharge cards to be brought in for them.

On another occasion, when I was duty Chaplain at Flying Angel House, a seafarer came back late and missed our bus to Port Botany. I could see his anxiety because he would be late for duty at four o'clock in the afternoon. The only way to get back on time is to take a taxi. He checked with me regarding the fare and all he had was \$40, which is not enough for his fare. I flagged a taxi for him and gave him some money for his fare and told the driver not to overcharge him. I could see the relief on his face as he got into the taxi and he expressed his appreciation for assisting him.

Besides our normal duties, I also have opportunities to counsel seafarers and to pray with them. I have visited seafarers in the hospital; picked them up from the airport and have also been called to be an interpreter for the Chinese seafarers.

As a Mission Chaplain, I need to be sensitive to the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs of the seafarers as well as their cultural backgrounds. I need to read widely and be up to date on current world affairs, so that I am able to engage in meaningful conversation with them. I also need to know what types of shops are in our vicinity so that I can direct them to the right shop without confusion. I find it challenging and very meaningful to be able to help, assist, provide, minister, pray and counsel the seafarers from all over the world. Though it can be draining physically, emotionally and spiritually, yet I find it satisfying and well worth the effort to help and assist another person who is in need. I hope in sharing my experiences, it will

enable you to have a clearer picture of what we Mission Chaplains do in this ministry.

The Annual Seafarers' Service is scheduled to take place at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney at 10:30am on Sunday 12th September 2010. It would be wonderful to see you there!

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