

The Master's Mariner

Summer, 2004.



Caring for seafarers
around the world

A Message from The Principal Chaplain

It has been a very eventful season for the Mission, with some significant changes taking place as we seek to minister more effectively to the seafarers visiting Sydney. Perhaps the most important of these changes is our presence in the new Sydney Seafarers' Centre that has now begun operating at Matraville, in the near vicinity of Port Botany.



The new Sydney Seafarers' Centre at Matraville

The Centre is owned and operated by the ITF Seafarers' Trust, and the Mission is leasing a significant amount of the Centre's floor space, so as to provide a separate, quieter area for seafarers to enjoy the unique blessings of the Mission's ministry. The area incorporates a chapel, a large lounge, and private room /

office in which seafarers can speak with our chaplains in confidence.



The Centre has been a long time in its planning and construction, and is a most impressive facility. We are certain that it will provide us with a wonderful opportunity to minister to those seafarers whose schedules do not allow them sufficient time ashore to come into the City, where Flying Angel House remains very much as our ministry centre.

The commencement of our ministry at the new Centre will necessitate the employment of at least one new chaplain, whose ministry will be focussed on the work at Port Botany, complementing the ministries of Harvey & Gabriella Burcher who are so faithful in their labours there. The cost of employing a new chaplain is significant, and will place a considerable burden on our financial means. Are you able to help us?

One of my 'hats' as Senior Chaplain is that of Chaplain to the Merchant Navy Association. So it was that, in October I travelled to Canberra to lead the Annual Merchant Navy Memorial Service, which takes place at the Merchant Navy Memorial situated beside Lake Burley-Griffin. The service is held outdoors and has often felt the force of the strong winds that often gust across the Lake, but this year

the weather was ideal. The only hitch was when the rope jammed in pulley on the flagpole, but this was soon rectified by a very agile Sea-Scout, who shimmied up the pole and released the jam 'without a hitch'!



The Merchant Navy Memorial in King's Park, Canberra

The Annual Shipping Service was held at St Andrew's Cathedral on the following Sunday (24th October), and was a very happy occasion. The Archbishop of Sydney, Dr. Peter Jensen spoke on the subject of 'Mutiny'. He addressed the fearful fact that each of us has mutinied against God's authority and claims over our lives and therefore fully deserved God's punishment for our rebellion. However, in confronting us with our problem, he also emphasised God's provision of Jesus Christ as His unique and perfect solution to our problem – when Jesus died, He suffered our punishment for us. Jesus' death fully expressed God's perfect love and fully satisfied His perfect justice: His justice, because the penalty for our rebellion had not been avoided, but had now been paid in full; His love, because in Jesus Christ, God Himself (not someone else) was paying that dreadful price – as the Bible says *'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself'* (2Corinthians 5:19)



Following the service, the Mission hosted a

barbecue lunch at 'Flying Angel House', which was, if I might be so immodest as to say, a social and culinary triumph! We have the happy concern that word will surely get around and that we will be overrun with visitors following next year's service!

It has been many years since I last had an opportunity to become seasick, and the Board of the Mission felt that I needed to be able to identify more effectively with the seafarers in this significant aspect of their perilous occupation!

And so it was arranged for me to spend some time at sea. Origin Energy very generously agreed to accommodate me on their LPG Carrier 'Boral Gas' for a voyage from Fiji to Tonga and on to New Zealand.

Although, at 84.7 metres in length, 'Boral Gas' is not the world's biggest ship, it is very well maintained and operated, and throughout the voyage I was extremely impressed with the dedication and skill of all on board.



M.V. 'Boral Gas' in New Plymouth, NZ.

I was also extremely appreciative of the way the crew welcomed me into their 'home', and did so much to help me understand what it really means to be at sea. Although I was away from my family for only two weeks, I most definitely missed them, and was up on the bridge with quite a few others when we thought that we might be coming into mobile phone range! What would it be like to be away from my family for months at a time? I felt what it might be like when, in a very kind farewell speech, the Captain spoke of me returning 'to the love of (my) family'. I felt that

I was the envy of everyone aboard, and that each one was suddenly and keenly aware of how long it would be before they would be able to return to the love of their own families.

It was also difficult for me to gauge what it might be like – physically - to be at sea for months at a time. My 'supernumerary' status and insurance / safety considerations meant I could not do any crew work while on board, so it was hard for me to develop a routine and a role that would help the days at sea to pass more quickly and purposefully (I remember the happiness I felt at helping the Captain to relocate a kettle in the Bridge – I was being useful!) This sense of 'inability' was increased by the feelings of seasickness that were with me for the first five or so days, during which time I was not able to do much more than look at the horizon from the Bridge!

However, after the nausea went and I felt 'normal' once more, I was much more able to enjoy the freedom of the ship and speak more meaningfully with the crew. It was also nice to be able to look out at the sea and its horizon for other than 'medicinal' reasons!



Captain Alistair Logan and the 2nd Mate, Ofati

Did my voyage arouse in me a love for the sea? Not really (I think I was too glad to see land!) but it did give me a deeper admiration and burden for the special men and women who crew the world's ships. As I came to better understand and appreciate their unique circumstances, I also realised the magnitude of the need for our Gospel ministry in the lives of seafarers. Although coming into port may provide a respite from the vulnerabilities

inherent in being at sea, there is no substitute for receiving the blessings of authentic Christian ministry when in port: it is then that a harbour truly becomes a haven!

My hope for the voyage was to begin to see the seafarers' situation through a seafarer's eyes. I believe I did begin to gain some 'sea-sight', but something unexpected also happened as I began to see the Mission to Seafarers from a seafarer's perspective. And I have to say that the view of us from the sea is even better than we have from the land!

Ian Porter

Meet Harvey & Gabriella Burcher!



Gabriella grew up in a pretty little Hungarian village named Leanyfalu, which is situated on a bend in the River Danube, 24km from Budapest. In the spring there is a strong scent of acacia, lilac and roses. Behind the family home the land rises to oak forest-covered hills, and nearby is the 300 year-old Serbian town of St André (now a popular market place for tourists) with the Visegard Castle to the north.

Harvey has lived for most of his life in Sydney's inner city areas, where he grew up, and has been a part of the Petersham Baptist Fellowship (PBF) since 1954. He worked as a confectioner's assistant for 14 years, and for 18 years as a wardsman / driver among frail disabled people.

Harvey & Gabriella first met in 1978 at the PBF, while ministering to young people. They married in 1994 (yep, that's 16 years, folks!)

In August 2001, mainly through the vision and energy of the Rev. Tom Hill, a small Seafarers' Centre (with an attached flat) was set up near the northern end of the Brotherson Dock at Port Botany. Tom gave Harvey & Gabriella the opportunity to operate the Centre on a p/t basis and to live in the flat on the same p/t basis. This provided Harvey & Gabriella with wonderful opportunities to form relationships with the local wharf area community, and made driving and ship visiting much easier.

Unfortunately, 9.11 caused the location to be classified as a 'high risk security area' and the consequences of this reclassification, together with other limitations of the site and building, meant that it did not receive the patronage the Burchers' ministry deserved. Nevertheless, they exercised a very faithful ministry of hospitality and help, the benefits of which will one day be fully known. Gabriella's legendary 'green thumb' also produced (to quote a completely neutral Harvey) 'the best looking Garden in Botany' with over 200 beautiful pot plants masking the asphalt, and later providing a handsome cash benefit for the Mission as they were sold at the Sussex St veranda stalls run by the Harbour Lights Guild.

Despite the sale of the Botany 'Branch' in Feb. 2004 to the Sydney Ports Corporation, Harvey & Gabriella still spend a lot of time out at the Port, visiting the ships and retaining the contacts made whilst living at the Port.

Recently Harvey wrote,
"A few weeks ago I was on board a ship, sitting in the ship's office where a few of us were talking about a crewman from another ship who had taken his own life. We wondered what could have led him to do this and who were grieving for him back in his own country. We could only speculate.

As we sat there reflecting, the ship's captain – a happy fellow – joined us and told us his own story, of how he came to faith in Christ through the witness of his mother who, in her youth, had come to faith through the witness of Australian missionaries who lived in her village.

As I thought about these unrelated stories, I thought how our lives can make a difference to others, how kind words and sincere actions make

those lives about us less stressful and perhaps more meaningful.

It is a wonderful experience to go onto a ship where the Captain is seen as a father-figure to his officers and crew, where each person is valued and cares for each other – no matter what his rank – where all share the work that needs to be done.

Taking one's own life, whether on land or ship, is a complex issue, but it is less likely to happen if we are willing to support one another."

On the home front, they adore looking after Luke, their one-year old grandson. In what amounts to a serious understatement, they say that he 'gives us a lot of pleasure.'



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