

The Master's Mariner

Winter 2009



Caring for seafarers
around the world

Secretary-General Announces His Retirement

The Secretary-General of The Mission to Seafarers, the Rev. Canon Bill Christianson, has announced his retirement at the end of June. Canon Christianson, who first began working with the Society as a volunteer in the 1960s, has served as Secretary General since 2001. He joined the then Missions to Seamen in 1976, serving initially in Gravesend.



In 1982 he moved to Richards Bay, South Africa, to build a seafarers centre, before becoming the Mission's Chaplain in Hull, UK. In 1993 he was appointed Ministry Secretary at Central Office, with responsibility for recruitment, appointment, and pastoral care of the Society's ministry staff.

In 1993 Bill was made an honorary Canon of Bloemfontein Cathedral in his native South Africa.

Bill is an accomplished artist, and is hoping to devote more time to commissioned art works, as well as continuing a wide range of pastoral duties.

And His Successor is ..



The Mission to Seafarers has announced that the Rev. Tom Heffer, Director of Chaplaincy, The Mission to Seafarers, will succeed the Rev. Canon Bill Christianson as the Society's Secretary-General from 1st July 2009.

Speaking on his appointment, Mr Heffer said: "It is a tremendous privilege to be asked to serve The Mission to Seafarers as successor to the Rev. Canon Bill Christianson. As Secretary General he has led the Society over the last eight years through an important period of change in its history. It is a tribute to him that he leaves the organization in such good shape as it continues to serve seafarers in more than 230 ports around the world.

Since the middle of the 19th Century the Flying Angel logo of The Mission to Seafarers has symbolised a safe haven of hope and support to seafarers and their families worldwide. I have seen at first hand the difference that our ministry makes to their lives, so when I assume the role of Secretary General I will work to ensure that the Society remains true to its aim and vocation of caring for those who call upon its services in their hour of need."

Tom Heffer was born in 1969 and educated at Aylesbury Grammar and King's College, London. After graduating with an Honours degree in Divinity, Tom worked for The Mission to Seafarers as a Chaplain's Assistant

in New Orleans and Singapore. Following his ordination as a priest in 1996, he held a number of appointments within the Church of England including chaplain to the Bishop of Norwich. In 2001 he rejoined The Mission to Seafarers as its Ministry Secretary.

The Chairman of The Mission to Seafarers, Mr Robert Woods CBE, welcomed Mr Heffer's appointment and added: "I am delighted that Tom has accepted the role of Secretary General of The Mission to Seafarers. We had many impressive applicants for the role, but Tom's vast knowledge of the shipping world and experience of the challenges of maritime ministry made him the outstanding candidate. Tom takes on the position at a difficult time in the shipping community but I am confident that he will build on the magnificent work done by Bill Christianson who has been a figure of international stature within the shipping world and highly respected by both seafarers and shipowners alike."

Mission to Seafarers' Consultative Forum

From 11th – 15th May, some forty delegates from MtS Councils around the world met in Belfast, Ireland, to consider how The Mission's ministry to seafarers might be made even more effective. In the months preceding the Forum, delegates were asked to suggest topics for discussion, so that the Forum might really 'scratch' where our ministry 'itched'. As part of the Australian delegation, I was pleasantly surprised to see that most of the Australian Council's suggestions had been made Agenda items. The downside was that the organisers adopted the 'he who gets the vision gets the job' principle, so we had a lot of work to do preparing papers for distribution to other delegates well before the Forum!



(L-R) Bishop Garry Weatherill (MtS Aust. Chairman), The Rev. Graham Miller (Townsville), The Rev. Tom Heffer, Canon Bill Christianson, Mr Colin Brown (Liaison & Support Officer), The Rev. Ian Porter (Sydney).

Discussion Papers covered topics such as 'Models of Ministry', 'Ecumenism', 'Governance*', 'Piracy', 'Communication in Seafarers' Centres', 'Training and Support for Volunteers*', 'Maritime Labour Convention*', and 'The Mission to Seafarers Logo and Copyright*' (an asterix denotes a topic in which Aussies were the chief presenters).

After the Forum's conclusion, Canon Christianson said he believed it to have been the most helpful Forum he had attended.

I include my paper on The Mission's logo, which I hope you will find helpful.

In 1856, the 'Society for Promoting Missions to Seamen Afloat, at Home and Abroad' was established. Lord Shaftesbury, 'the leading Evangelical layman of his day'¹ was enlisted as its first President and Mr William Kingston, who was positively described as a 'consecrated layman' and 'loyal Churchman, unequivocally evangelical'², became the Society's first Secretary.

Its Constitution declared:

1. The object of the Society is the spiritual welfare of the seafaring classes at home and abroad.
2. In pursuance of this Object, the Society will use every means consistent with the principles and received practice of the Church of England.

Later that year, Mr Kingston's wife and sister



sought to design a flag whose emblem clearly depicted the Society's Objects. Their chosen design (pictured, left) depicted the first of the three angels in

Revelation 14, who possessed '*an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.*'"³ The 'Flying Angel' became the official logo of The Society and gained great popularity.

¹ Kverndal, R., 'Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth.' (William Carey Library, Pasadena) 1986 p. 388.

² *ibid.* p. 388.

³ (Rev. 14:6-7, ESV)

The significance of the Flying Angel motif cannot be underestimated in The Revelation and in the history of The Mission to Seafarers. In the face of inevitable judgment, the angel's urgent message (proclaimed 'with a loud voice') is that forgiveness and pardon are available for all those under God's condemnation. This amazing grace, available only through the finished work of Jesus Christ, is the only means by which a person is accounted righteous in God's eyes and is freed from the judgment on all his sins - whether past, present or future.

Throughout the Revelation, the centrality of Jesus Christ as the sacrificial, conquering, Lamb of God remains *the* constant emphasis. The message the first flying angel was charged to proclaim '*to every nation and tribe and language and people*' has, at its very heart, the saving work of Jesus Christ. So much so, that those closest to the centre of God's throne '*sang a new song [to the Lamb] saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'*'⁴.

Although the strongly spiritual goal of the Society's original Constitution remained its 'first object', their awareness that '*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, and the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*'⁵ prompted a strong concern for 'bettering [the seafarer's] temporal position.'⁶

The first angel's commitment to Gospel proclamation was given practical expression in The Society with the employment of 'Scripture Readers' (later called 'Lay Readers'). Such laymen, frequently from a seafaring background, were considered essential 'not only from a manpower standpoint, but also from psychological considerations. Himself frequently a seafarer by background, a lay coadjutor would be able to share the Gospel with even more effect than the regular clergyman.'⁷

However, just as a theological understanding of the seafarer's eternal need to '*fear God and give him glory,... and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water*'

prompted Christians to compassionate evangelism, so an understanding of the seafarer's personal hardships prompted those same Christians to a compassionate, parallel, concern for the seafarer's temporal needs. Eventually the object of the Society was given the wording, 'The spiritual, moral and physical well-being of seafarers of all races at home and overseas'.

Kverndal notes, 'At times, one might wonder whether such social responsibility was viewed only as a means to an end (for example, where maritime social service was made "subservient" to the 'one aim' of evangelising seamen). Nevertheless, there is solid documentation that, for most, diaconal involvement in a widening range of legitimate human needs was, if not a primary aim of mission, at least a natural, integral, indeed essential expression of faith in one and the same Gospel.'⁸

Just as the original, Biblical 'flying angel' was not ashamed of the Gospel, neither were those who were instrumental in the founding of The Mission to Seafarers all those years ago. The Mission to Seafarers' ongoing choice of 'the flying angel' as its logo is a strong encouragement and exhortation for us to continue to embrace his commission to proclaim the '*eternal Gospel ... 'to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people*'.

Some have suggested that the current version of the 'Flying Angel' logo (in which there is no longer any 'book' in the angel's hand) implies a lack of confidence in the Gospel by The Mission and reflects a move away from its founding principles.

However, the biblical description of the 'flying angel' mentions neither wings nor Bible! Just as the original logo was designed to communicate the angel's evangelistic message, the continuing depiction of the 'flying angel' is a powerful reminder that our primary charter as a Christian Missionary organisation is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This, and The Mission's public⁹, practiced commitment to the Biblical principle, '*It is not*



⁴ (Rev. 5:9, ESV)

⁵ (James 1:27, ESV)

⁶ Kverndal, R., p. 750 n.144.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 392

⁸ *ibid.* p. 556ff.

⁹ *The Mission to Seafarers Ministry Staff Manual Chapter 1.* CD ROM, January 2006

ourselves that we proclaim, we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake'¹⁰, is sufficient to refute such claims. One could just as easily say that our primary Charter is to 'do the work of God'. Yet this would have led us to the same conclusion, for when Jesus was asked by the crowds, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?', Jesus answered, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'¹¹

Jesus defined 'the work of God' as 'that you believe in him whom he has sent'. If God's 'work' – His 'energies' – are chiefly directed towards bringing people to a saving trust in Jesus as Lord, it follows that any Christian endeavour that claims to do 'the work of God' must share that same desire and goal. It is the desire and goal of the first 'flying angel' and it is inherent in the logo we cherish. Like Luther, the 'Flying Angel' logo declares, 'Here I stand, I can do no other!'

Capt. Jack – Seafarer!

On 5th April, 2009, I (Jack Starmans, MtS Chaplain) boarded the gas tanker, MV Pacific Gas, in Fiji. For the next nine days I was a passenger aboard this super-tanker (it was only 84 metres long!). Its fourteen crew were made up of one Brit (the Captain), one Filipino (the first mate) and twelve Fijians.

Several of the crew met for regular worship / Bible study. I was asked to lead these meetings, while I was on board. It was a great experience to meet with the Church at sea. Their passion for the Lord Jesus Christ was infectious. I would encourage all Chaplains to take a voyage if possible. It is a little taste of what seafarers go through day after day. Relating to the seafarers, in their everyday workplace, was very different from visiting them on their ships when in port.

The weather was good; I only got sick once during the voyage. Sleep was almost a non-event! I was in the owner's cabin, five star luxury! It even had a double bed. Alas, as the ship rolled, I slid from side to side. The ship would pause from its pitching, I'd breathe a sigh of relief, and then it would start all over again (after a few days I found out it was best to lay diagonally in the bed). Go to sleep,

wake up, over and over again. It was a relief to get up and go and have breakfast. Having a shower, while the ship was at sea, was like riding a roller coaster and trying to have a shower at the same time. Hold the shower railing with one hand and use the soap with the other – and don't let go!



MV Boral Gas, sister ship to MV Pacific Gas, in port.

At Norfolk Island I was able to go ashore and visit the Anglican Chaplain (with whom I trained in Church Army) and his wife. It was a real encouragement to them as they don't get many visitors from the mainland.

Finally, after nine long, rolling, sliding days, we arrived in Brisbane where the pilot's launch took me ashore to catch my flight home. I was sad to leave the crew, but happy to be on land again! I have visited 'Pacific Gas' at Port Botany since the voyage and it was wonderful to see the crew again.

The Annual Seafarers' Service will be held at St Andrew's Cathedral at 10:30am on Sunday 13th September, followed by lunch at Flying Angel House.

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Our apologies for the lateness of this issue – my computer was stolen from my office (during morning prayers!) when the newsletter was almost complete. Although I'd backed up most other data, I hadn't backed up the newsletter. Grrr!

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:5

¹¹ John 6:28, 29 ESV