

# Caring for Seafarers

**Port chaplains, managers, volunteers and members of the Stella Maris national committee** gathered in Sydney recently for the first national conference of its type in several years for those ministering to seafarers.

Eighteen people attended the event at Mary MacKillop Place, with the theme “Together: United in Caring for Seafarers”.



While there had been joint gatherings with Stella Maris New Zealand and representatives of the Anglican Ministry to Seafarers group in 2019, 2020 and 2022, this was the first Stella Maris Australia conference in many years. As a result, there was significant discussion about the current state of port chaplaincy, which was severely affected by COVID-19.

There was also a session to assist chaplains in identifying mental health issues in the people to whom they minister, and how to seek the right care for them.

A site visit to the Port of Botany Bay introduced participants to the work of Stella Maris at one of the country's largest container ports, showcasing the work of long-time chaplain Sr Mary Leahy RSJ and her collaborators.

Deacon Dileep Athaide, national director of Stella Maris in Canada, was among those who gave presentations during the gathering. He offered insights into the way the ministry works in another large country with thousands of kilometres of coastline.

About half of the conference was dedicated to the spiritual aspects of port chaplaincy, with The Mission of the Seventy from Luke's Gospel the central Scripture passage guiding those reflections.

Bishop Tim Norton SVD, Bishop Promoter of Stella Maris in Australia, and Stella Maris national director Roslyn Rajasingam took time during the conference to participate in an international consultation with representatives of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

“Aside from having an in-person networking event, the conference was an opportunity to review the welfare service provision of Stella Maris Australia in a fast-changing maritime industry and how the Catholic church can practise effective pastoral care in the ports,” Mrs Rajasingam said.

Bishop Norton, who provided the conference’s spiritual input, said the faith dimension is central to the ministry.

“Getting back to basics with Scripture and Tradition is central to what carries this ministry forward,” he said.

“It was significant that almost half of our time together was devoted to recollection sessions and silence, with the images of apostles who worked on the water in the times of Jesus, and the apostles who work with seafarers today in the front of our minds.”

Chair of Stella Maris Australia Ray Collins said it was a joy to be able to bring together almost 20 people from across Australia for the event.

“Port ministry is often a highly collaborative effort on the ground, regularly working alongside other port chaplains and volunteers, but there is something special about gathering with people from around the country who carry out the same ministry,” he said.

Mr Collins paid tribute to the TK Foundation and the Australian Maritime Welfare Society, both of which are key supporters of port chaplaincy across the country.

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