



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



1920 – 4th October - 2020

Dear Bishops Promoters, Regional Coordinators, National Directors, chaplains and volunteers,

Since March 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is no longer the same.

As it was previously announced, I would have liked very much to welcome you personally in Glasgow, Scotland on this October 4th for the XXV World Congress and the Centennial Celebration of Stella Maris. Instead, we are all “confined” in our countries, with limited freedom of movement not knowing if and when we shall have a definitive solution to this crisis.

In spite of the limitations imposed on us by the pandemic of COVID-19, we still would like to celebrate the humble beginning of Stella Maris. I would like to invite everyone to remember and highlight this day in the country with different activities. For suggestions, you can revisit my letter with the announcement of the XXV World Congress of the Stella Maris/Apostleship of the Sea and the Centenary Celebration dated 14th July 2019.

Our origins

One hundred years ago, few lay people gathered at Catholic Institute, in Cochrane Street, Glasgow – Scotland with the intention to reorganize the Sailor's Branch of the Apostleship of Prayer into the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS).

These people felt they were “Apostles” entrusted with a mission from the Church “to reveal Christ to those who go down the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, with the object of bringing them to a deeper knowledge of Christ and his Church”.

On the April 17, 1922 through a letter signed by Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State they received “the approval and encouragement” of Pope Pius XI, wishing that, “with the certain knowledge that so noble an enterprise, ably seconded by the zeal of priestly souls both secular and regular, will spread more and more along the shores of both hemispheres...”.

Our reality today

Hundred years later, we can say without doubt that the desire of Pope Pius XI, supported and sustained by the all-succeeding Pontiffs, is a wonderful reality, with hundreds of chaplains and many more volunteers present in around 300 ports, carrying out at least 70,000 ship visits a year and reaching out to more than a million seafarers.

In this centenary year, while we look back at our history we would like to give thanks for the countless “Apostles” of all nationalities who with dedication and commitment in different parts of the world, since the beginning of this ministry, have spent their lives at the service of the people of the sea and now have reached the safe harbor of heaven.

We should continue our services rooted in their tradition, inspired by their examples and guided by the Church that “...wish today to renew the ecclesial mandate that places you, in communion with your local Churches, in the front line in the evangelization of so many men and women from different nations who pass through your ports. Be apostles faithful to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, show the loving face of the Church which also welcomes and makes herself close to this portion of the People of God; respond without hesitation to maritime people who wait for you on board to appease the deep longing of their soul and make them feel active members of the community¹”.

The challenges ahead

Throughout the years, the maritime industry has changed enormously with the building of new larger and computerized ships, manned by smaller multinational, multicultural and multireligious crew, docking in ports far away from cities. These circumstances together with piracy, criminalization, abandonment and lastly the COVID-19 have increased the stress, the fatigue and the isolation of the crew. Looking at the present we recognized how also our ministry has evolved adopting new technology to respond to the material and spiritual needs of the seafarers, fishers and their families.

However, today more than before in charting the future of our Apostolate we are called to be open to the Spirit of renewal and find new ways and means to be the Church sailing with the people of the sea.

The new logo

After one hundred years, the familiar logo of the Stella Maris has been redesigned to respond to the signs of the time. The new Stella Maris logo has been designed by affirming our Catholic roots and maintaining the distinctive symbolism of the past. The logo is not only a nice sticker but it represents our unity and common identity, it should be our guide and source of our inspiration for our commitment at the service of the maritime world:

- The anchor is the symbol of Hope. We are called to bring Hope, in a world of despair of isolation.
- The lifesaver is the symbol of Faith. We have to announce the Christian Faith, to nourish and strengthen the trust in the Lord, of many Catholic crewmembers.
- The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the symbol of Charity. We should show Charity to welcome everyone without prejudice for their nationality, race, gender, religious or cultural background, always respecting the person’s culture and religion.
- The rays of light is the symbol of the Light of Christ. We must shine the light of Christ to denounce a world of injustices, abuses and the exploitation.

¹ Benedict XVI, To the participants in the XXIII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea (23 November 2012)

- And a new element: the waves of the sea, highlighting the new conscience of caring for the sea, as the environment in which the people of the sea live and work.

The involvement of the local church

Though our service is a global one and is constituted by a worldwide network of Centers, the practical implementation of maritime pastoral ministry in any region, nation, diocese or port, is the responsibility of the local Church. On the occasion of the centennial celebration, we would like to invite every Bishop's Conference to appoint a Bishop Promoter responsible to foster the care for the people of the sea in the country, while we call on the bishops of a maritime dioceses to appoint chaplains and consider the seafaring ministry an integral part of the pastoral responsibilities of the diocese and the parishes located near the ports to "*see that people of the sea are provided abundantly with whatever is required to lead holy life*²".

The ships visit and personal contact with the people of the sea

One of the distinctive characteristic of the work done by the pioneers of the Stella Maris, was ships visit carried out with dedication and enthusiasm, first along the banks of the River Clyde and after according to the development of the apostolate all over the world. Since then the structures and designs of the ports have changed but not the needs of the seafarers and fishers, who every time they dock are yearning to contact their families, to seek advice for a contractual problems or simply they would like to talk. Because of the many restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, our practical way of ministering has changed dramatically, but what should not change is the substance of our service that is a "*ministry of presence*". Let us make use of all the instruments that the technology offers us to be present in the lives of the people of the sea offering friendship, support, encouragement and continuous prayers.

Prayers

At the International Conference held in Rome in 1958, Mr. A. Gannon, the General Secretary of AOS, observed: "*I would like to add here that without the prayers, offerings and the individual assistance of many thousands of members (especially religious in a great number of convents) the wonderful development of AOS in such a short time would not have been possible*". Prayers were an essential part of the development of our apostolate. Looking at the future, if we would like to continue grow, as a maritime welfare organization, is vital to rediscover the significance of prayers and the creation of support groups to strengthen the commitment and dedication of our chaplains and volunteers.

A renewed appeal

The travel restrictions, borders closure and quarantine measures imposed by many governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has triggered a humanitarian emergency crisis at sea. It is estimated that more than 300,000 seafarers and marine personnel are currently stranded at sea, their contracts extended far more than the 11-

² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio "*Stella Maris*" on Maritime Apostolate, 1997

months limit set out in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), away from their loved ones, under mental stress and physical fatigue.

Unfortunately, the appeals from international organizations, industry, unions and faith based NGO's to considered the seafarers "key workers" and as such to create "special channels" to facilitate the crew change until now remained unheard.

Once again, as Stella Maris has done since its origins, we would like to express our solidarity to the people of the sea and raise our voice to request the governments together with international, national organizations and port authorities to cooperate to solve this dramatic situation by implementing the IMO-approved Protocols to allow for safe and secure crew changes.

We would like to see the seafarers stranded at sea back in their countries and reunited with their love ones!

Centenary prayer to Mary Star of the Sea

Let us entrust our work to the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Stella Maris* with the special prayer composed for the Centenary. Personally or with the people of the sea let us pray that in the maritime world, our Apostolate will continue to be a beacon of hope and a secure port for seafarers, fishers and their families, for many years more.

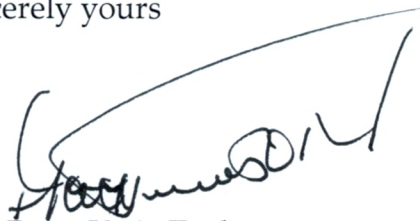
O Mary, Star of the Sea, as we celebrate with prayer and devotion the Centenary of this apostolate of silent service with the greatest of compassion and love, we humbly ask you, O holy Mother of God, to guide always and everywhere all people of the sea and those who care and minister to them.

O Virgin most powerful, as we sail upon the stormy seas of life, we pray, come to our aide, help us to remain steadfast, and be for all seafarers and fishers across the waters of this earth, and their families, the Ark of the covenant gently navigating the Ship of Faith, the Church, to a port of safe haven in Jesus Christ.

O Mary of the morning star, continue to be the consolation and sure hope to enlighten our hearts and minds so that we may never lose or stumble in our Faith in keeping a firm and fixed compass bearing on your Son, Our Lord, who is, who was and will ever be our true and only salvation for all eternity without end. Amen.

Our Lady Star of the Sea, Pray for us.

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Turkson', written over a horizontal line.

Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson
Prefect