



# APOSTOLATUS MARIS

*The Church in the Maritime World*

## Structuring The Christian Witness Of The Faithful After The Apostolic Letter 'Stella Maris'

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**The 'People of the Sea', as Pope John Paul calls them**, were obviously the main concern of his pastoral heart, when he addressed last year his Apostolic *Letter Motu Proprio Stella Maris* to the Universal Church. Before going further, it may be useful to agree from the start on the Pope's answer to the question: who are these 'people of the sea' who deserve a special pastoral care and who are called to witness to their Christian life in the maritime world.

It is obvious that the seafarers themselves, those actually involved in commercial shipping or fishing are the first whose needs are traditionally the concern of the Apostleship of the Sea. True enough, without them there would be no maritime world, and in this maritime world they are those towards whom we must go in priority, because they are the most invisible physically, through their prolonged absences, and they are those whose spiritual, human and social well being is most at risk. They have a right to this priority in the heart and in the programmes of the Apostleship of the Sea. But already in his introduction, the Holy Father speaks of his pastoral concern not only for the 'seafarers in the shipping or fishing sectors', but also for 'their families, port personnel and all who travel by sea'. And the art. 2 of the Letter which follows the definition of the 'Work of the Maritime Apostolate', he draws a complete list of all the people he sees in the maritime world. He sees the *seafarers* who are part of the *maritime personnel*, themselves part of a greater group, that of the *people of the sea*, which includes also 'the families, those who share a home with them', and the members of Apostolatus Maris 'those who work regularly in the maritime Apostolate'. *Art 2 §1.*

From its origin, the AM developed along a double line: that fixed by the various World-Congresses held in the last seventy years (the first was in 1927) and that of the pronouncements of the Hierarchy of the Church. The year 1997 has been an exceptional year in the history of the Apostleship of the Sea: it started with the Apostolic *Letter Motu Proprio Stella Maris* on the maritime Apostolate, and it finished with the XXth World Congress of Apostolatus Maris which was held in Davao and to which some of us had the privilege of attending.

So we have now two kinds of documents at our disposal: first the Apostolic Letter on the Maritime Apostolate, given us by Pope John Paul II, something really coming from the highest authority in the catholic Church; second, we have in the proceedings of the XXth Congress of Apostleship of the Sea, a programme which, through the participants of the Congress, comes from the People of the Sea themselves and their chaplains in the five continents. In order to explain how complementary I consider these two sources of inspiration for us, I'll take the example of a the railway which is normally made out of two rails and I will now say that with the Pope's Letter and the Congress programme of action, we have in front of us the two rails of the railroad on which the AM. train can travel safely forward and in the right direction, pulled by a locomotive powered by the love of Christ for the people of the sea, and for each one among us.

It is true also to say that, in the world and in the Universal Church, situations may vary. There are variations in the number of national seafarers, it may be stable here, it may grow or diminish elsewhere - the industrialised countries. The maritime traffic also may go diminishing here and growing there - the industrialised countries - where the visiting seafarers become more numerous. Some Local Churches may count 80, 60 or 40% of Catholics in the population but in other areas they are only 10, 5% or even much less! The availability of priests for chaplaincies probably follows the same percentages. We must remember therefore that the Pope is writing for the faithful and the bishops of the 'average local Church'. This 'average church' of course and by definition, does not exist, and therefore he leaves us the responsibility of applying what he says to the local reality of our church. Secondly he gives objectives and directives aiming at the best pastoral care by the bishops and the chaplains, and the best commitment of the faithful in the maritime Apostolate.

It remains to add, last not least, that the Apostleship of the Sea founded 75 years ago, goes traditionally and effectively beyond the 'pastoral care' strictly speaking, of which the Letter speaks here when commenting on the role of the Chaplain, the National Director etc. The AM. wants to 'care for seafarers', not limiting itself to caring of their spiritual needs. It has also addressed other domains as well: the material, social, and sometimes juridical or even just humanitarian needs. But on the range of the apostolic field of Apostolatus Maris, it may be the Pope who goes further than many AM teams in many countries. The Pope has entrusted to the AM the implementation of the mission of the Church throughout *all* the maritime world as he describes it, not only the 'seafaring' people alone. He includes also all those who live and work in the maritime environment, the port personnel and the shipping or fishing industries themselves. He calls on all faithful working and living in the maritime milieu, not to remain content with being 'consumers' of services put at their disposal by the Church, but to commit themselves to being active witnesses of the Gospel which gives them life.

Let us now go to the text of the Letter, looking for the two following points well emphasised in the Pope's Letter, namely:

- ☞ that there is no integral maritime Apostolate without the participation of the lay faithful, and that
- ☞ in order to be effective, it is a specific and necessarily co-ordinated Apostolate of the Church.

## **I. No Apostleship of the Sea WITHOUT the Participation of the Faithful.**

1. This affirmation is already to be found in the very definition of the maritime Apostolate: 'The Work of the Maritime Apostolate is the organisation concerned with the specific pastoral care of the people of the sea and destined to support the work of the faithful who are called to witness to their Christian life in this sphere'. *Art 1*
2. Who are those 'Christian faithful who are called', and where do they come from? The Letter answers that they are those very people who live and work in this maritime milieu, and to whom the Pope wants to guarantee abundant spiritual assistance (cf. *Art.2§2*) The list is to be found in *Art 2§1*: first there are of course the '*Seafarers*, those actually on board merchant ships or fishing vessels, and all who for whatever reason have undertaken a voyage by ship'. They constitute the first category among *maritime personnel*. And this category in turn includes
  - ☞ those whose work normally involves being on board a ship
  - ☞ those who work on oil rigs and platforms,
  - ☞ pensioners retired from aforesaid jobs,
  - ☞ students of nautical institutes
  - ☞ port workers.

The term '*people of the sea*' has even a wider sense still, since it includes

- ☞ seafarers and maritime people already mentioned,
- ☞ their spouses and children as well as those who share a home with them
- ☞ even if they are not actually seafarers (for example pensioned)
- ☞ people, not belonging to any of the above categories, but who work regularly in the Maritime Apostolate. *Art.2 §1*

All the above mentioned people therefore are the object of the solicitude of the Holy Father through Apostolatus Maris, and they are those whom the institution called Apostolatus Maris must 'seek to support because they are called to witness to their Christian life in this sphere' *Art 1*.

3. The people of the sea have therefore their very own and proper place in the Maritime Apostolate. The Pope reminds of this fact the Chaplains and all other authorities of the Work of Apostolatus Maris, when he asks them 'to strive to see that the people of the sea are provided abundantly with whatever is required to lead holy lives; they will also recognise and promote the mission which all the faithful - and in particular the laity - are called to exercise in the Church and in the maritime world in accordance with their specific state.' *Art 2 §2*

The Pope specifies two particular tasks for the seafarers when they are sailing, that of holding and presiding Sunday celebrations and that of carrying and sharing the Eucharist. In *Art.4§4* and *§5* this is what he says: 'The chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea must identify, among local and transient maritime personnel, those who display leadership qualities and help them to deepen their Christian faith, their commitment to Christ and their aptitude for creating and guiding a Christian community on board'. The Pope adds: 'The chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea must identify among maritime personnel those who have a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and train them so that they can be appointed, by the competent authority, as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist and be able to exercise this ministry with dignity, especially on board ships'.

The Pope also implicitly asks lay faithful to take charge of the management of Seafarers' Centres, when he says that 'the chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea should provide pastoral assistance in Stella Maris Centres and in other hospitality Centres for maritime personnel.' *Art.4,§6* For the Pope therefore, chaplains are not appointed in order to run a seamen's club. It must also be said immediately that there is nothing wrong in Chaplains doing so, and that it can even be very meritorious for them to do so, if a Club is necessary and if for a time there is nobody else to do it. But running a Seamen's Club is not the activity which defines the Chaplain of Apostolatus Maris.

4. The participation of the laity is also necessary at the level of the National Direction of the AM. That is why the Holy Father, in his Letter, requests the National Director to put among his principal duties, 'that of being particularly concerned to encourage and develop the Apostolate of the laity, fostering their active participation while bearing in mind the diversity of their talents. *Art XI 7)*

NB Let us say something here about the Chaplains. In order to understand what the Letter means when the word 'Chaplain' is used, one must remember that it is used in the strict and legal meaning of the word according to Canon Law where 'capellanus' means 'a priest who' Here is the text: 'The Chaplain of the Work of the Maritime Apostolate is the priest appointed in conformity with art. XII, par. 2; the authority who appoints him also confers on him the office described in can. 564 of the Code of Canon Law, to attend to the pastoral care of the people of the sea. As far as possible, appointments to this ministry should be characterized by stability'. *Art 4 §1*

'The same authority competent to appoint chaplains can appoint a deacon, lay person or religious to be a Co-Worker of the chaplain of the AM. This Co-Worker assists the chaplain and, in accordance with the law,

substitutes for the chaplain in matters which do not require the ministerial priesthood'. 'Those so appointed to be Co-Workers in the Apostleship of the Sea must be distinguished by integrity of life, prudence and a knowledge of the faith. They should be suitably instructed and carefully trained before this task is entrusted to them. *Art 8 §1 and §2*

## **II. The Maritime Apostolate is a specific and necessarily co-ordinated Apostolate of the Church**

This statement is evident to anybody who knows something of the maritime world. As soon as several people share an objective and want to work together to reach it, they need to co-ordinate their planning and the implementation of the agreed programme. It has been said already that the Pope did not intend to give, in his letter, a detailed list of objectives for the AM., nor does he give a list of the activities necessary to reach these objectives. He just puts the People of the Sea in front of their responsibilities, and tells them that they can count on his priests and Bishops to support them. To Bishops, to Chaplains - priests or their substitutes - however, he does fix concrete objectives and give detailed directives because they share in a special way in his pastoral responsibility of giving the adequate spiritual assistance to the People of the Sea.

The Pope is not only aware of all the programmes initiated by the AM. since its foundation, in response to the numerous and various needs of the people living and working in the maritime world, he encourages them also: programmes of humanitarian, social and more recently legal assistance. He leaves to the national authorities of the AM. the responsibility of organising and co-ordinating them as they see fit.

There remains the problem of insuring that at all levels, all the various activities (spiritual, humanitarian, social, even juridical etc.) that all these activities of the AM., are those of the Church in the maritime world. Here we have to rely on experience, our own and that of AM in other Ports or Countries. If it is always possible to learn from others, local particularities have to be respected, without thinking of having to imitate. Apostolatus Maris International, as a Confederation of National Organisations, knows to respect them, and the General Secretariat is not a tool for interfering with the interior affairs of national organisations. This was already clear in the Constitution of AMIC approved at the IVth AM World Congress of Hamburg in 1934.

At the same time Apostolatus Maris International is the depository of the World Organisation created in the 30's for the 'spiritual, social and material well-being of seafarers' whose headquarters moved from UK to Rome after the 2nd World War. Eventually the Pope has entrusted its high direction to the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, and we can now look into the accumulated experience recorded in all the AM Bulletins and the Acts of the twenty World Congresses published during its history. We have still another source of information: in 1993, Cardinal Cheli asked his collaborators of the time, Jim Dillenburg and François Le Gall, to send around a questionnaire to consult everybody on a draft proposal to reorganise the Apostleship of the Sea as a membership organisation, with elected representatives at all levels of the world structure of Apostolatus Maris. I remember answering this questionnaire when I was still in Dar es Salaam, and very soon later, in Rome, I worked with Jim on its results. This work was revised after the publication of the Pope's Letter. Cardinal Cheli decided that the last draft was to be distributed to the Congress participants at Davao. It is now an objective to be implemented.

Although it be the 'international' level of the co-ordination between countries, which is the proper domain of the International Office at The Pontifical Council, this project includes dispositions concerning the local branch, the national organisation, the regional and the world co-ordination. It is necessary here again to remember that we talk here of organising the AM. in the 'average' port, diocese, country. Another thing to keep in mind is that the laws of registering associations vary according to the countries. And we must finally remember that the identity of the AM. cannot be limited by a legal text governing 'charities' in UK or an 'Association Loi 1901' in France.

At all levels of the AM., this project follows two rails, that which insures the existence and the quality of the commitment of the faithful and that which guarantees the link, the communion with the Hierarchical church.

1. At the *local level*, you have

- ☞ a certain number of AM active members constituting the AM Local Council ( if they are only a few, all the AM members are there, but only some elected delegates if it is a big group)
- ☞ and the Chaplain or/and his substitute, a pastoral agent appointed by the Bishop.

The two rails are here, the President of the Local Council and the Chaplain (or appointed person). This structure is to be maintained even in the case where the Chaplain's substitute is a lay person.

2. At the *national level* there is

- ☞ Chaplain/Director with or on behalf of the AM. Bishop the AM National Conference which will be either a General National Meeting, or the Meeting of a certain number of elected members representing the local branches in the Country.
- ☞ and the National Chaplain and/or National Director appointed by the Episcopal Conference.

The two rails here are the (elected) President of the National Conference and the National Promoter.

The spirit behind such a structure is to insure a healthy articulation of the laity's and of the clergy's responsibilities so that the AM. is really the Church in the maritime world. A structure similar to the one described above often exists at the local level. But it is less frequently the case at the national level. It also happens that you have such a structure at national level, but at the local level you see in a number of places the Chaplain (or his appointed substitute) who works alone or who controls everything!

The paper distributed at Davao may, here and there, help to solve some problems where a solution has not yet been found. It is especially meant to help where no structure exist yet and where everything is still to be done. Everywhere it can help to make an evaluation of the way this or that country has chosen for recruiting, associating, co-ordinating all the actors ready to commit themselves to the maritime Apostolate.

3. As regards the *regional (continental or semi-continental) level*, we have also to find two 'rails'.

- ☞ On the part of the Chaplains, we can refer to the text in *Art 13* of the Apostolic Letter which speaks of 'appointing a Co-ordinator for a region encompassing several Episcopal Conferences, at the suggestion of the Bishop Promoters concerned, and to specify the functions of such a Co-ordinator'. This is one of the six main tasks entrusted by the Pope to the Pontifical Council regarding *Apostolatus Maris*.
- ☞ But on the part of the faithful in the maritime world, active members of the National AOS Associations, they yet have to be represented in/by a regional structure. What is proposed here consists in requesting the Presidents of these National AOS Associations to elect one among themselves as Regional 'Delegate' or 'Secretary' for that Region.

4. At the *world level*, each year alternately, there would be either a meeting of Regional Chaplain Co-ordinators, or a meeting of Regional Secretaries/Delegates. A common meeting would be organised in time to prepare the World Congress which takes place traditionally every five years.

## CONCLUSION

Let us conclude by quoting resolution 2 of the XXth Congress at Davao, which applies at all levels of the Apostleship of the Sea: 'The nature of the Christian vocation means that lay people should accept their share in this Apostolate and ministry, including its planning, when selected for official posts at the national level, alongside the Bishop Promoter and the National Director. The AM. needs active members associated for the highest goal ever, witnessing to the love of Christ in the world God has put them.