

THE AOS INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE

Commodore Chris York
National Director AOS-GB

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to define the current status of the AOS International Website and to provide useful information for the AOS community from around the world in relation to the scope of the AOS International Website and the potential for the AOS Extranet.

The paper summarises the status to date of the AOS International website and explains in what ways the system meets the original requirements for a public website to promote the work and understanding of the Apostleship of the Sea around the world.

The paper also summarises the status of the AOS Extranet and identifies the potential that currently exists for use by AOS International, AOS National Directors and nationally nominated port chaplains and other AOS staff and AOS volunteers to further the development of the pastoral work of the AOS.

The scope of this paper covers:

- The concept of an AOS Information system
- AOS Website content
- AOS Extranet content
- AOS Website and Extranet Status
- Summary of Usage and Pastoral Potential

Proposal

This paper is offered as a briefing paper for delegates at the AOS XXII World Congress attending the Plenary briefing session about the AOS International Website and the associated World Congress workshops on the potential coverage of the AOS Website and the potential use the AOS Extranet.

The AOS International Website

In order to meet the requirements illustrated by Msgr. Harel, commercial web developers were commissioned to build an information system which consists of three components:

- A Website
- An Extranet
- A Content Management System (CMS)

i) The Website

The AOS International website is divided into five sections which are fixed. Within those sections, pages can be created, edited or deleted by anyone with access to the content management system. A brief description of each of the five sections is included below.

The Structure of the Website

There are five sections of the website

Home	About AOS	Our work	People of the Sea	You can help
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Homepage

The homepage offers entry points to the various sections of the site. It should always appear clear and un-crowded. The entry point to the contact directory appears prominently “above the crease”, i.e. it is not necessary to scroll down to it. The “Latest updates” panel is used to draw attention to chosen articles.

About AOS

Topics relating to the Catholicity of AOS and devotion to Our Lady Star of the Sea (Stella Maris) appear in this section. Information includes:

- governance, including statements from the PCPCMIP
- origins
- AOS today (conclusions of most recent world congress)
- AOS and ICMA
- Our Lady Stella Maris, icon and prayers

The AOS International directory is also part of this section. The directory contains contact information for chaplaincies and offices and details of services offered by AOS around the world. Entries are generated by the AOS International database.

Our work

This section explains pastoral care in the seafaring context. Examples from around the world are added regularly. Articles are presented under two subheadings:

- Practical human care and hospitality
- Spiritual care and formation

People of the Sea

This section includes an overview of People of the Sea and analysis of key sectors. Included in the overview are:

- explanation of the term “People of the Sea”
- effects of globalisation
- human and labour rights
- threats and challenges

There are also subsections devoted to key sectors including:

- Merchant shipping
- Fishing
- Cruise sector
- Sailing and Petit Cabotage

You can help

This section is currently concise, consisting mainly of internal links with suggestions for helping People of the Sea.

There is scope to develop this section to include the promotion of sea going membership of the AOS. Additionally support for AOS campaigns either national or international can be managed here. e.g. Raising awareness about the ratification of the ILO Maritime Labour Treaty or raising consumer awareness about fishing issues.

ii) The Extranet

A website is also a public document which is freely accessible to all on the World Wide Web. Such a document meets the first requirement of enhancing visibility but is inappropriate for the internal exchange of information for project and planning purposes. Therefore, in order to meet all the requirements of the AOS system, an extranet was also commissioned which exists in parallel to the website.

An extranet uses the same technology as a website and is accessible through the World Wide Web. However access is only possible by means of a username and password which must be distributed to users individually. The website consists of texts and images whereas the extranet contains other tools for organising information. A brief description of the extranet tools is included below

The functions of the AOS extranet

The functions of the extranet are:

Home	Documents	Search	Events	Port Form	SWOT	Forum	Contacts
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Home

This the welcome page containing a document which gives an overview of the extranet and how it can be accessed and used.

Documents Library

This function is used for sharing documents such as:

- conference agenda and reports
- key texts
- liturgical resources
- training material
- photographs

For each document, the level of access can be specified (see below). A facility is included for posting comments on each document. The documents are arranged in folders according to subject. These include a folder of instructions for using the extranet. Further folders can be created as required.

Search

This is a search facility for the “Documents” function.

Events Management

This function is for publicising events in a calendar format. It includes a facility for booking places at events through an online form. Booking generates an automatic email which is sent to the event organiser. The booking facility could be used in future in the organisation of AOS conferences.

Port form

This is the interface for the AOS International database. The database holds information about AOS chaplaincies and offices including:

- contact details
- names of personnel
- services offered

Some of this information is displayed in the directory on the AOS website. Personnel who enter information in the International database can choose to withhold all or part of it from the website, for example mobile telephone numbers or email addresses.

In addition to contact and service information, the data entry forms have been designed to collect some operational information, for example: the number and type of vessels in port and the number of ship visits per year. This has been added with a view to future development of the database as a planning tool.

Port chaplains are encouraged to “own” their information in the database, taking responsibility for ensuring that it is correct and updating it when necessary.

SWOT Reports

National and local SWOT reports can be uploaded here by means of online forms with the following headings:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats
- Plans
- Resources

Reports are filed automatically according to country and region.

Forum

This is an online message board for discussion and exchange of relevant AOS information to help develop the AOS. Discussions can be organised under different headings. It is not possible to post messages anonymously. It is not used for personal or seafarer confidential or sensitive information. It must always be considered that AOS is a Catholic Organisation

Contacts directory

The function offers a quick method of finding names, telephone numbers and email addresses of AOS personnel. Information is drawn from the International database (see “Port form” above). Records can be ordered alphabetically by personnel name or country.

Access to the extranet

There are three different levels of access to the extranet

Level	Personnel	Permissions
A	regional co-ordinators national directors	access all functions read all documents
B	chaplains senior administrative personnel	edit details in International directory upload SWOT reports read non-confidential documents
C	other administrative personnel seafarer “members”	read some documents access contact directory contribute to message board

iii) The Content Management System (CMS)

Technical administration of both website and extranet is effected by means of the content management system (CMS). This system is also accessible through the World Wide Web. Use of the CMS requires some technical skill for which reason access should not be made generally available.

AOS Web site and Extranet User Functional levels

All users can perform all functions listed below their level, i.e. A Superuser can perform all functions, level A users perform all functions except those listed under “Superuser” etc. The role of the superuser is technical. Decisions about access and inclusion are taken by national directors. National microsites are created technically by the Superuser after which they are entirely the responsibility of national directors.

Superuser: The AOS International Office
access all functions of CMS and extranet create, edit and publish pages in International site create new national microsites and provide technical support add / remove resources (documents / images) to libraries edit all details in international database create level A users
level A: / AOS regional co-ordinators / national directors
read all documents on extranet create / edit pages in international site without publishing access every function of CMS and extranet in relation to own national microsite create, edit and publish pages in own national microsite edit details of own country (including ports) in International database create level B and level C users
level B: AOS port chaplains / senior administrative staff
submit resources for inclusion in libraries create / edit pages in own national microsite without publishing complete SWOT report forms edit own port details in International database
level C: other AOS personnel
log into extranet view and post to Message Board read “unlocked” documents on extranet
Public
view public website

AOS International Website and Extranet Status

i) The AOS International Website

Presence on the World Wide Web enhances the visibility of AOS as an international organisation. The description of AOS mission and work is complemented by stories and photographs from around the world. In addition to publicising AOS work to the wider world, the website enables AOS colleagues to learn about each other, thus creating a sense of unity and strengthening the network.

New items are added each month. There are now contributions from most of the AOS regions with Europe, the Arabian Gulf and the Far East particularly well represented. Information and photographs are submitted to the web technical manager who prepares them for web publication.

The current content of the website is largely descriptive. However, there is plenty of scope for supporting pastoral outreach, e.g campaigning, publicising events.

The AOS International directory, which appears on the website, provides contact details of national offices, bishop promoters and port chaplaincies around the world together with services available to seafarers in ports. It is a valuable source of information to seafarers, ecumenical partners and supporters and also enables colleagues to contact each other.

Maintaining the AOS International directory is a particular challenge. It is essential to avoid incorrect or outdated information as this lessens the reliability of the directory and risks misleading seafarers. As far as possible, the information is verified by local contacts.

Being of AOS International, the website is under the editorial policy control of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (PCPCMIP).

ii) The AOS Extranet www.stellamaris.net/extranet

The AOS extranet contains various tools as described above for sharing information. These enable such activities as:

- sharing documents, learning resources etc
- gathering statistics
- discussion
- organising meetings and events
- completing and filing AOS operational SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) reports for national use.
- Sharing AOS contact details

Clearly these activities can contribute to the reporting and planning of national development programmes and the development of internationally shared pastoral resources and ideas. As such, the extranet has great potential for use in developing pastoral outreach. The different levels of access to the extranet allows information to be shared appropriately through national control and regional coordination.

Since the system was launched, only two of the functions of the AOS extranet have been actively promoted for regular use to date. These are:

Port form

The first part of the port form is the data entry interface of the International directory. A small number of AOS colleagues in various countries have edited their own details. In most cases, changes and corrections are made by the extranet technical manager.

Documents

This is the shared filing system for documents in electronic form. Documents relating to various regional conferences and to the world congress have been posted here. Several AOS colleagues around the world have requested access to the extranet for these documents.

The existence and functionality of the AOS Extranet needs publicising to the community around the world and practical development through practical usage by port chaplains and national directors and other AOS personnel.

Summary

The AOS International Website and Extranet are in being and are beginning to contribute to the development of the AOS as envisioned at the AOS Rio World Congress in 2002.

There is a steady rise in visits to the website. Publicity by AOS around the world by the AOS and collaborators will help to achieve the aims of the website.

Month & year	Unique visitors	Number of visits
July 2006	1382	1881
September 2006	1344	1922
November 2006	1147	1557
January 2007	1341	1851
March 2007	1896	2541
April	1862	2415

Conclusion

The AOS International Website and Extranet have huge potential to meet the AOS requirements for improved pastoral communication and international and national presentation of the work of the AOS.

However the website and extranet can only support the work of the international AOS community if there is a commitment at international level to participate. AOS International, Regional co-ordinators and national directors have a critical role to play in implementing the AOS International Website and Extranet system.