



XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

Gdynia, Poland, 24th - 29th June 2007



*In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope,
through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia*

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To His Excellency
Most Rev. AGOSTINO MARCHETTO
Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care
of Migrants and Itinerant People
VATICAN CITY

Your Excellency:

The Supreme Pontiff was pleased to learn that from next June 24-29, the XXII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea will take place in Gdynia, with the objective to reflect on: *Solidarity with the People of the Sea, Witnesses to Hope Through the Word of God, the Liturgy and Diakonia*.

In expressing sincere appreciation for this initiative, which shows ecclesial concern for those who work in the difficult sector of maritime work, the Holy Father wishes to send through Your Excellency his most cordial greetings to the Authorities, the speakers, and all those who will attend this prestigious appointment during which the wishes and the spiritual and human expectations of the people working in close contact with life at sea will be studied in depth.

While invoking Mary's maternal protection, His Holiness wishes to impart to Your Excellency and those present at the programmed event the implored Apostolic Blessing, a pledge of abundant celestial graces.

I have the honor to be, Your Excellency,

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone
Secretary of State

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FINAL DOCUMENT

THE EVENT

The XXII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea was held in Gdynia (Poland) from the 24th to 29th June 2007. Two hundred seventy delegates, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious, Lay Members and Volunteers, Maritime Personnel, Observers and Guests, came from 60 countries, to reflect on the theme “*In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia*”.

From the beginning it was designed and planned to be a pastoral event. The word “pastoral” is taken here also in the wide sense, as it did not want to exclude anything inherent to the life and work of the men and women of the sea. This Congress was intended to give to AOS the opportunity to think and take stock on what constitutes its spirituality and its specific contribution to the maritime world.

The formal opening of the Congress was preceded by a working morning session for the Bishop Promoters, Regional Coordinators and National Directors which was dedicated to the role of the Bishop Promoters in fostering cooperation with the local Church (Episcopal Conferences, National Directors, Chaplains, volunteers and parishes) and on the opportunities and challenges for the AOS in the particular Churches.

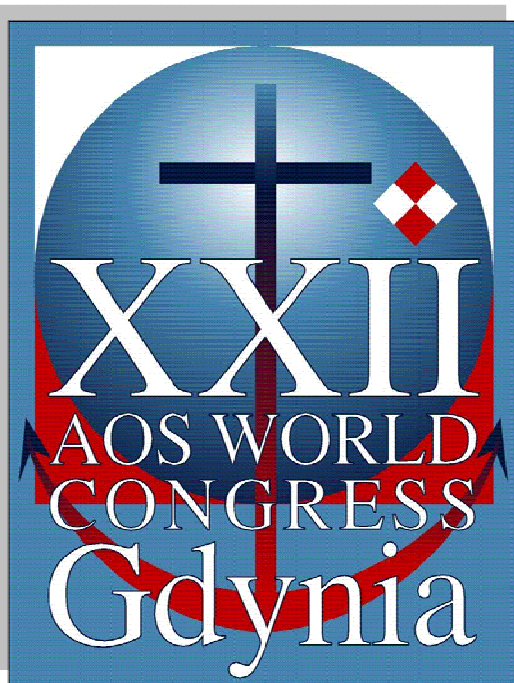
After a welcoming introduction by Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios, Rev. Giacomo

Martino (animator and presenter of the theme) and Fr. Raymond Desrochers, QFM, presented the problems and needs of national and local AOS, followed by a general discussion. Rev. Martino stressed the importance to listen to the seafarers’ needs, of training and of enlisting the cooperation of Christian communities close to the ports so that our Stella Maris Centres can

be truly their home away from home. He also welcomed the new AOS Manual. Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios’ presentation centered on the necessary cooperation with the particular Churches, as the work of AOS must not be seen in isolation from that of other works done by other organizations who also visit ships. All this cooperation must be nurtured so that the faithful in a particular parish may realize that AOS is everyone’s concern. Fr. Desrochers said that he has been blessed to be a full time chaplain, as it is important that AOS be a priority for the chaplain, that he has a clear mandate and be given the material means to realize his

pastoral responsibilities. Times are changing and this chaplaincy in Asia, where there are few Christians in the ports, is a wonderful opportunity for ecumenical cooperation, inter-religious dialogue and cultural understanding. Also “with full respect for the other”, there are plenty of opportunities to share one’s faith.

This was followed by a Round Table on the role of the Bishop Promoter animated by Bishop Tom Burns (presenter of the theme), Archbishop Tadeusz Głowski and Fr. Samuel Fonseca, C.S., who had been



asked to share on their European and Latin-American experiences. Afterwards there was a general exchange of views. Bishop Burns centred his intervention on the key responsibilities of the Bishop Promoters, which are to orient, support and counsel, to assess and evaluate. A Bishop Promoter fosters the work of AOS by communicating and sharing his vision and evolving a strategic plan and liaising with the Episcopal Conferences and the other Bishops. For Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski, in line with the Apostolic Letter “Stella Maris”, the Bishop Promoter does not replace the local Bishop but nevertheless has an essential role in “triggering” and motivating the various initiatives in favour of the maritime world. Appointed chaplains are essential for the ministry of the sacraments especially the Sacraments of the Eucharist and reconciliation. For Fr. Fonseca the Bishop Promoter has the great responsibility to choose chaplains and pastoral agents who are suited to this apostolate. They have to support the initiatives by being facilitators and multipliers of information. Above all they must help provide the conditions, which will assure the continuity of the “project”.

The **official opening of the Congress** began with a concelebrated Mass of the feast of John the Baptist. Archbishop Marchetto presided over the celebration and, in his homily, said that “John the Baptist was the witness par excellence ... because he prepared the paths of the Lord through the life witness that accompanied his message ... He also listened to the people of his times ... and identified the aspirations and expectations of his contemporaries ... Today [this] mission [of witness] is entrusted to us in particular to continue Jesus’ mission and reveal the Good News of God’s presence, action and love, through His Spirit, in the maritime world where we are also witnesses daily to unjust situations, exploitation and oppressive structures, all those ‘less than human conditions’ (*Populorum Progressio*, 20).” He added that a Christian cannot remain in the sacristy but is someone committed also to build a more just and fraternal society. For AOS to give true witness like John the Baptist, it must listen to the Word, be faithful to the Sacraments and be ready to serve.

At the official ceremony, after the reading of a letter of welcome from the President of Poland, Mr. Lech Kaczyński, there were speeches and greetings from the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, the Episcopal Promoter of AOS Poland, Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski, of Gdansk, Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, the Mayor of the City of Gdynia, Mr. Wojciech Szczurek, the Minister of Maritime Transport, Mr. Rafał Wiechecki, the President of the Port Authorities, Mr. Przemysław Marchlewicz, and the Commandant of the Polish Navy, Admiral Floty Roman Krzyżewski.

On Monday 25th, after morning prayer, the reading of the Message of the Holy Father and the singing of “Veni Creator”, the first full day of the Congress started with the **Presentation of its theme** by Archbishop Agostino Marchetto. In his address, he stressed that AOS mission is towards all seafarers, regardless of their creed or nationality and that its action must always be adapted to the needs of our times. In line with the teaching of the Church, we must interrogate ourselves on the essence of our pastoral mission, namely on the place of the Word of God, the Sacraments and Diaconia in our ministry. This Congress is the occasion for AOS to better understand its spirituality and how to exercise the proper pastoral care to the people it is called to serve. Hope for us Christians is at the heart of our life, the “anchor of our spiritual and pastoral life”, founded on the person of Jesus Christ. To be witness of Hope, in fact, means to be “witness of Jesus-Christ”. A witness is in solidarity with the people he is sent to and Hope is also a great force for the transformation of today’s realities by casting on them the light of the risen Christ. He then went on to present the program, introducing each speaker and resource person, the subjects and sub-themes to be covered in the keynote addresses, Round Tables, workshops, testimonies and interventions.



This first day was partly devoted to the **current situation in the maritime world**. Mr David Cockroft, Secretary General of ITF (International Transport Workers’ Federation), in his presentation stressed today’s challenges in the maritime world, which are isolation and job security, criminalisation of seafarers, lack of shore leave, fatigue and abandonment. For him the main needs of seafarers in port are communication facilities, transportation, pastoral care and spiritual counseling. Starting from Pope Benedict’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Rev. John Chalmers, explained how the practices of love, hope and charity can renew and deepen our energy for God’s mission among seafarers. We are called to be witnesses and to express for the people whom we are called to serve, a love nourished

by an encounter with Christ. For this we need a formation of the heart. To witness God's love is to witness solidarity, which is a consequence of love. The work of AOS is not just welfare activity, but also an indispensable expression of the Church's very nature. Hope is not synonymous with optimism or merely a sunny disposition, but it transforms our doubts in the conviction that God will ultimately triumph. It is the practice of love, hope and solidarity that change lives.

Then followed a presentation on **The state of AOS around the world** by Msgr. Jacques Harel, in charge of the AOS International, the maritime sector of the Pontifical Council. It was based on the questionnaire circulated in 2006 and on the Regional Coordinators reports. This presentation was then commented very briefly by each Regional Coordinator.

The day ended with a talk by Bishop Pierre Molères, who reflected on the theme **Hope motivates and inspires AOS' commitment**. After describing Hope and its components, he explained that AOS finds in this virtue not only its inspiration and motivation, but also its ability to introduce into the maritime world "the Christian humanism of Hope", through its accompaniment and presence in seafaring communities.

The second day of the Congress was devoted mainly to the place of the **proclamation of the Word of God** in AOS. After morning prayer, Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, who was appointed President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People on 11th March 2006, then addressed the Delegates on the theme **AOS, a specific pastoral care**. He thanked his predecessor Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao for "his leadership in the past and his commitment to the AOS". He said that we must be attentive to the signs of the times and be inventive in our responses, casting a look of Hope on the people of the sea, whom we are called to serve. We have to build a society that puts in its center the dignity of the human person. He thanked the AOS chaplains and pastoral agents for their valuable work and underlined the essential contribution of the laity to this ministry. He made an appeal for unity and highlighted the main conclusions/recommendations of the Rio de Janeiro Congress in 2002. He qualified the post-Rio period as a time of "progress and fertile initiatives",

recommending to all the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church"

This was followed by a presentation of the **AOS International Website**, a powerful new tool also for the proclamation of the Word, by Msgr Jacques Harel and Commodore Chris York.

Inter-religious Dialogue, as Pope Benedict said, is of vital necessity at both the pastoral and doctrinal levels. Msgr. Felix Machado, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, in his address entitled **Witnesses of Hope in an ecumenical and inter-religious milieu**, first of all affirmed the fundamental difference between the goals of ecumenical dialogue and those of inter-religious one. A Christian, today, must witness his faith in God' love in a pluralistic world where he is called to be a sign of Hope, especially through the promotion of this dignity. Respect for the human dignity is the foundation stone of inter-religious dialogue. Where prophets of doom preach clash of civilizations and cultures, we Christians remain committed to promote reconciliation, peace and harmony in the midst of religious plurality. He underlined the "high regard" that the Church has for other religions, but also the necessity for a Christian to be deeply rooted in his faith to confront the challenges and difficulties of inter-religious dialogue. AOS has an "indispensable contribution" to make in this domain.

In the afternoon a round table was organized to discuss ecumenism and cooperation with kindred societies. The panel was composed of the Rev. Dr Jorgen Katz, Mr. Tom Homer and Mr. Andrew Elliot respectively of ICMA, ITF-ST and ICSW. Dr Kanz insisted that the spirit of unity must be supported by concrete acts; hence ICMA has developed a code of conduct, whose key word is "respect". All important decisions are taken by consensus; no decision is imposed on other members. ICMA is also a provider of training for chaplains and pastoral agents and more and more seafarers' centres are today being run jointly by different Churches operating in the same port. Mr. Andrew Elliot presented ICSW, of which AOS is member through ICMA, and which provides pastoral care by supporting its members through specific projects, seminars and regional seafarers' welfare development programmes. For Mr. Tom Holmer, exploitative conditions still exist in the maritime industry hence the importance to organize globally, while acting always in solidarity, if we want to be effective. He welcomed the ecumenical rapprochement between societies. Cooperation of ITF, AOS and other societies is crucial for supporting internationally the welfare of seafarers. The formation of Port Welfare Committees is of critical importance.

The rest of the afternoon was taken up by group work. Each delegate was invited to participate in one of the workshops on 13 different themes available.



On Wednesday, the third day of the Congress, the matters of reflection were the celebration of the Sacraments, Diakonia and our vocation, to enable all those who are subjects of our spiritual care to benefit from them. In the absence of Bishop René Marie Ehouzou, Rev. Irénée Zountangni from Porto Novo (Bénin) read the key note address on **The Liturgy nourishes the hope of seafarers and fishers' communities**. In this address, the former AOS chaplain and national director, now Bishop, explained how the Liturgy refocuses the life of seafarers on their Christian faith and gives them their religious identity and spiritual dynamism.

The Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, have also a social dimension, and the second morning session was devoted to Diakonia. All Christians, but especially the Deacons, are called to witness Jesus' deep compassion for every men and women. Deacons play an important role in AOS, where they have a ministry of presence to realize their function and service. A Round Table, animated by Deacons Ricardo Rodriguez, Albert Dacanay and Jean Philippe Rigaud and his wife Marie-Agnes, was organised on the theme **The Deacon: ordained for the Proclamation of**

the Word, Liturgy and Charity. All the Deacons were accompanied by their wives. Rev. Ricardo Rodriguez has built up his pastoral life on a total commitment, with the support of his wife Isabel, to the seafarers by developing a relationship with all the stakeholders of the maritime profession through networking and ecumenical cooperation.

This pastoral vision is realised by being an instrument of God's love through the practice of charity/service, the proclamation of the Word and Liturgy. Rev. Albert Dacanay, himself a relatively recent migrant to Canada, described his spiritual journey which has led him to the Diaconate and subsequently to the responsibility of AOS- Canada national director. His wife Delia, his family and his work in the AOS have greatly contributed to the realisation of his call to bring Hope to seafarers. There is an urgent need to make every local Church aware of the existence of such a ministry because for the ministry to grow it needs the support of the local community. Rev. Jean-Philippe Rigaud and his wife Marie-Agnès gave their testimony about their experiences in the context of a merchant marine school and how the Diaconate has its place in the maritime environment and is perfectly suited to it. For them the diaconal ordination of Jean-Philippe has reinforced and clarified an already exist-

ing commitment to the maritime world.

In the afternoon before departing for Gdansk for a cultural visit, there was another workshop session.

In Gdansk, the participants were received at City Hall by the Mayor of the City and had the opportunity to meet President Lech Walesa, who gave a lively testimony of his work and leadership of Solidarność. Cardinal Martino in his reply stressed the historical role of President Walesa in bringing about the fall of communism in Eastern Europe.

The Thursday session started with two talks on the fishing area, in which AOS has been traditionally active. The first presentation entitled **AOS commitment to the fishing sector** was made by Fr. Bruno Ciceri, C.S., and the second one by Mrs. Cristina de Castro on

The sustainability of fishing communities: a fisher's wife perspective. Both talks highlighted the precariousness of the fishers and their families; Fr. Ciceri welcomed and praised the adoption by ILO of the new consolidated Convention on fishers. AOS, especially the AOS International Fishing Committee, must intensify its efforts in favour of fishers, unite its voice to their voices, to be advocates for their rights. Mrs. de Castro

for her part stated that although conditions differ from port to port, basically the problems and consequences of separation for fishers' families are common to all. She also told of their struggle to uphold the fishers' human rights, of their representations to the EU and appealed for the support of AOS International network.

Next Msgr Harel introduced the **AOS Manual**, which will be published after the Congress. The Manual has been completely revised taking into account the more recent Pontifical Documents, the new International ILO Conventions and the numerous suggestions received. It strives to respond to a great demand among chaplains, ship visitors and volunteers for a handbook that would help them meet the daily challenges of their apostolate. AOS being a specific apostolate, it also aims at providing a sound base for formation and special training.

Mr. Douglas B. Stevenson, of the Seamen's Church Institute of New-York and New-Jersey, then spoke on the **ILO Maritime Convention, 2006** (MLC 2006) and of the **Work in Fishing Convention, 2007** as a sign of Hope for the maritime world. He qualified the convention MLC 2006 as one of the most significant achievements in the entire history of seafarers' rights law, but with little value if it is not put into



practice. Mr. Stevenson went on to explain how seafarers' rights laws developed and the role of the ILO in establishing international labor standards and the contribution of ICMA to this process. He insisted that we should not view seafarers with pity, or as objects of charity. They are highly skilled and dedicated professionals who deserve our respect. They need legal protection because of their vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and discrimination. Hence we need to encourage all the maritime nations to implement the MLC, 2006 now.

In the afternoon, a Round Table on **Cruise Ships Chaplaincy in the light of the theme of the Congress** by Msgr. John Armitage (AOS-GB), Rev. Luca Centurioni (AOS Italy) and Rev. Sinclair Oubre (AOS -USA) shared with the delegates on the world of the cruise industry and also on the ministry of AOS in that area and its plans for the future. In their presentation Msgr Armitage and Rev. Centurioni after an overview of the cruise industry, outlined the content and structure of the AOS cruise chaplaincy, how to achieve onboard communities and suggested plans for the future. Rev. Oubre for his part described the reasons for the development of the US cruise ship ministry, the working of the pastoral program and discussed some issues related to Motu Proprio "*Stella Maris*".

The afternoon session ended with the workshops. After dinner each region met for the nomination of candidates for appointments, later, as Regional Coordinators by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

On Friday 29th, the last day of the Congress, the final session was presided by Archbishop Marchetto. This assembly was devoted to the presentation and approval of the **Final Document** and to the reading and the approval of the **Message to Seafarers**. These documents were adopted after a number of amendments and suggestions were made from the floor which will be considered later on. The President of the PCPCMIP, Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, closed the Congress by thanking everyone, especially the local Organizers who had spared no efforts to make this Congress a momentous event.

All the participants then departed by ship to the Polish "Festival of the Sea", during which the Congress participated to the blessing of the fishing fleet and to the Eucharist presided by Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski.

CONCLUSIONS

Inspired by the theme *In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia*, and after having reflected and prayed during the XXII AOS World Congress in Gdynia (Poland) the delegates believe that



as AOS they are called to introduce into the maritime world a "Christian humanism of Hope", through their presence and testimony in seafaring and fishing communities.

Hope is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. This hope, for us Christians, has a name: Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. Aware of the challenges faced by the maritime community and their ministers, delegates were reminded that their deficiencies are not an obstacle to Hope. Part of the AOS mission, therefore, is to bring this message of Hope to the maritime community by also being the voice of voiceless people. The dignity of each person must be respected – and is, in fact, the foundation for inter-religious dialogue. Echoing Pope Benedict (*Deus Caritas Est*, 38)), AOS activities "will always be insufficient unless they visibly express a love for the people they work with, a love nourished by one's encounter with Christ." We are loved by God so we can love others.

Hope and solidarity, then, speak through us as we reaffirm our commitment to the threefold responsibilities which constitute the essence and specificity of all our pastoral engagement:

- The place of the proclamation of the Word of God in AOS;
- The celebration of the Sacraments as the source and "raison d'être" of our pastoral care;
- The service, "diakonia", to all but especially to the poorest.

The conclusions concern the following aspects:

Development of AOS

The support of Episcopal Conferences and Bishop Promoters is essential for the good functioning and development of the AOS.

The Bishop Promoter, as Bishop of the sea, has a prophetic role in proclaiming concern for the entire maritime environment.

Some port chaplains have too many other responsibilities to allow them to do their ministry well. Some are reassigned quickly, before they have the opportunity to provide continuity in the service to seafarers, thus blocking development of the local ministry.

Women have an important role and place in bringing the Good News aboard ship and in drawing wives and families of seafarers together ashore at the local, national and international levels.

Good cooperation and personal relationships between AOS and local port Authorities enhances the possibility of seafarers finding assistance and help.



Permanent Deacons

The presence of Permanent Deacons in AOS has been steadily increasing in the last years, as they assume responsibilities at local, national and international level.

While continuing to lead a familial and professional life, Deacons, by their ordination, are called to a ministry of service, which is constitutionally suited to proclaim the Word, celebrate the foreseen Liturgy and exercise charity among seafarers and fishers.

It is worth noting that many Deacons, engaged in AOS, have been or are still seafarers and consequently are seen by the people of the sea as part of them.

Ecumenical Relations

Ecumenical relations between chaplains and other Christian denominations in general are good. *Deus Caritas Est* can help in this; people will be more willing to cooperate with Christians, knowing that they respect their beliefs. A sign of Hope for seafarers is the ecumenical spirit they see as ship visitors work together ecumenically. The AOS relationship with ICMA (International Christian Maritime Association) enhances and promotes a great good force for the benefit of the maritime community and the apostolate. Where ecumenical relationships are difficult, the problem tends to be localized with individuals and personalities. At the same time it is recognized that some proselytizing sects who have no relationship with ICMA create tensions between port ministers and confusion in the minds and hearts of seafarers.

Inter-religious Dialogue

Most of AOS work is carried out in a world which is increasingly becoming religiously pluralistic, and the question we must ask ourselves is how AOS can be witness of Hope now in an inter-religious context. The purpose of inter-religious dialogue is that Christians strive to know and appreciate people of other religions, and that believers of other religions in turn come to know and esteem Christian doctrine and life. Reciprocity in this is essential. AOS, as a Catholic Work, is asked to build sincere, friendly, respectful relations with followers of other religions, believing that the basis of inter-religious dialogue is the respect of human dignity.

Conditions in the Maritime Community

Ship visitors and chaplains often encounter a strong friendly spirit aboard ship and amongst seafarers, indicating that the Gospel is alive and being lived. Regional Welfare Programs by the International Transport Workers Federation Seafarers Trust (ITF-ST) and the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare (ICSW) are good forces and sources of Hope for many, and a benefit to the Region as it has the potential to significantly improve the quality of welfare services to seafarers.

Globalization has changed the way of doing business. The logistical demand of "just enough, just in time" creates difficulties for crew members including isolation, additional stress, fatigue and more time aboard ship. Seafarers' lives continue to change, complicated by the bad practices of unscrupulous operators.

Chaplains and ship visitors have noted: a decline in safety and an increase in accidents and injuries due to overwork and fatigue; abandonment of seafarers often far from home; wages withheld unjustly and unnecessarily, even through double bookkeeping; some contracts are too long; harassment in the workplace, lack of job security and social justice, civil unrest, war and piracy; an escalation of violence onboard, longer



hours of work, longer contracts for the same pay, short turnarounds, lack of shore leave, difficulty in getting compensation for the family in case of death or missing at sea; poverty-ridden seafarers often are defenseless to exploitation and harassment; drugs and alcohol, HIV/AIDS and other health-related problems; pressure of work in port, frequent ship inspections and over zealous enforcement of the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS) limit time ashore.

The AOS Questionnaire of 2006, confirmed by the ITF Seafarers Welfare Survey of 2007, revealed an increased need for pastoral presence and care, due to a deteriorating emotional, spiritual and physical environment. The adoption of the two new ILO Conventions (*Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, Work in Fishing Convention, 2007*) on maritime labour and fisheries constitute a sign of Hope and should further motivate the public and maritime communities to be more involved. AOS denounces discriminatory and corrupt practices and blacklisting against seafarers particularly when they are denied employment because of their beliefs.

Fishers

Fishers tend to work and act as individuals, therefore their voices at national levels and in International Organizations and Forum are often not heard. Regarding access to shore leave and to shore-based welfare facilities, fishers on ocean going vessels have the same problems as merchant mariners.

Although there are millions of fishers who work in a responsible manner and who deserve all our respect, we cannot however ignore that illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing is problematic to the health of both fishers and the environment; over-fishing in some areas will cause open-sea fishing to disappear in a short time; the sustainability of fish supplies is key to everyone's future; accidents at sea are too common and the consequences of fatalities have dramatic consequences on dependants and communities; millions of traditional and coastal fishers depend on their work for subsistence, so their fishing areas must be protected and made sustainable.

Cruise Ship Ministry

We reaffirm our commitment and pastoral support to crew welfare. In the particular social environment of the cruise ship, the chaplain exercises his ministry through a witness of Hope and charity.

We recognize the experiences of some national AOS in responding to the challenges of the cruise ship ministry.

Yachting

Port ministries should be ready to provide pastoral care for the people who sail yachts.

In this field, seafarers are being recruited with promises of good wages, food, and accommodation but are sometimes abandoned in foreign ports. They have problems similar to those of merchant seafarers.

AOS International Website

The AOS International Website and Extranet can be a source and a link to resources to proclaim the Word of God. It has the potential to be a most effective pastoral tool also in demonstrating solidarity with seafarers and fishers. Further, it can reflect the reality of seafaring life today, both good and bad. Advice and guidance on pastoral matters is readily available, respecting the national diversities. Regular contact with families and other seafarers centers also through the AOS International Website reassures and expresses a shared hope, thus building a proactive pastoral community.

In General

The economic development of China and other Asian and Mid-eastern countries has brought about changes in the maritime industry and personnel, and has shifted the emphasis on the importance of various ports. AOS is challenged to develop facilities and services with its sister agencies in ICMA to meet the needs of seafarers in these emerging phenomena.

RECOMMENDATIONS

During the sharing and the debates of the Congress we have been witnesses of the many signs of Hope in the maritime world and these recommendations are as many signals emboldening our collective efforts to make them realities at local, regional and international level. Nevertheless, conscious also of the hard



realities in which seafarers and fishers work, we believe that it is through weakness that God gives the gift of Hope, coming from the merciful and inviting way God looks over this people (cf. II Cor. 11:23-30).

The recommendations concern the following aspects:

Development of AOS

Assistance is needed from the Bishop Promoters and Diocesan Bishops for the timely appointment of chaplains and to provide financial support. It is important that AOS establishes a link with parish communities for prayer and practical assistance, and to recruit new volunteers to this ministry (being aware that in some countries volunteering for a Christian organisation can threaten one's employment). Direct information campaigns towards local port parishes to develop closer cooperation, meeting with clergy and parishioners individually, and reaching out to the wider community at existing centres can help get people involved.

The establishment of volunteer ship visiting teams in the smaller outlying port and fishing communities is highly encouraged. In outlying ports where there are no established centres, mobile units can provide a visible presence for the ministry. It is important that AOS gives its support to women's groups, as well as to other professional maritime organizations whenever the objectives are similar or complementary, careful not to lose its identity.

Chaplaincy Teams

The practice of charity, solidarity and Hope are at the heart of AOS spirituality, based on faith, which is nourished by the encounter with Christ. AOS Chaplaincy teams are called to be witnesses of Hope and they do so daily especially by proclaiming the Word of God.

Regional Coordinators and National Directors must be given adequate time and resources to carry out regular visits and support to chaplaincy teams in ports. Appointed chaplains and pastoral agents must have a clear idea of their mission and duties, with adequate time to carry out their pastoral obligations to all people in need. Where possible, all chaplaincies should have access to easy and viable communication facilities. AOS strength is in its network; no one should work in isolation.

The training and formation of chaplains, pastoral agents and volunteers must be relevant and available.

The importance of prayer, formation of the heart, the experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the teaching that Eucharist is the source of love are essential components of such formation. Professional training based on an appreciation of various cultures and human psychology is also important. The National Director in communion with the Bishop Promoter must implement and oversee such programs.

Volunteers, in addition to specific pastoral training and formation based on the new *AOS Manual for Chaplains and Pastoral Agents*, need support and recognition at all levels for their dedication.

Most recent needs analysis show that among ser-

vices most needed by seafarers are: ship visiting, pastoral care and spiritual counseling, religious celebrations, transport facilities and communication with their families.

An increase in the number of ship visiting teams, when required, has to be considered to meet the changing demands of the industry; teams should meet and pray together regularly and also before

and after ship visits.

AOS chaplaincies are called to support efforts to form Port Welfare Committees in ports where none presently exist.

It is a priority for AOS to identify lay leaders and train them to form small ecclesial communities aboard ship. Suitable persons should be commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist.

Local parishioners, especially young people filled with enthusiasm and love of God, should be recruited and encouraged to use their God-given gifts for the maritime community.

Local universities and NGOs, especially those with a focus on seafaring, can be of assistance and enrichment.

Chaplains and volunteers will find their work enhanced by their ability to speak English; offering English language training can be a reward for their good will.

The participation of Eastern Rite Catholics in AOS brings new possibilities and challenges: an increasing number of seafarers come from Catholic Eastern Rite Churches; Latin Church personnel have to adjust their thinking and practices to respond to the Eastern culture and Rite.

Pastoral initiatives are the mission of every Stella Maris and associated center. Financial and other struggles must not be allowed to sidetrack the Mission.

The Maritime industry is often dominated by economic considerations over concerns for the welfare of



seafarers. We must give support and encourage the current efforts to put the “human factor” at the centre of the industry’s efforts and preoccupations.

National and local workshops dedicated to *Deus Caritas Est* are encouraged.

Permanent Deacons

AOS at national and international level should encourage the appointment of Permanent Deacons to the Apostleship of the Sea and promote new vocations to the Diaconate among people linked to the sea, in communion with the respective Bishops, aware of the necessity also of the ministry of priests.

Maritime Community

Participation in Port Welfare Committees is encouraged as it can be a means to financial support, training and providing recognition for the work being done by all the Missions. It can also create easier access to port facilities and ships.

Port levies paid by ships for seafarers’ welfare should, in justice, be passed on to the seafarers’ welfare agencies for their support.

Collaboration between the seafarer and the shore side shipping fraternity is encouraged, thus embracing all stakeholders in a single focus of port welfare. A designated port chaplain to liaise with port authorities, trade unions, ship owners and agents is helpful.

AOS pastoral agents are encouraged to network with maritime training facilities.

Ecumenical Relations

Partnering with other agencies where practical is encouraged to share limited available resources, but above all to give witness to this unity, even if it is not yet a full one, which has been wished among his disciples by Christ himself. The key word for ecumenical cooperation is “respect” but it must be supported by concrete acts. Respect for the people but also of the identity of every Church and ecclesial Community.

Inter-religious Dialogue

AOS pastoral agents must not attempt to achieve peace at any cost by aiming at the least common denominator between religions, but must respect the fundamental differences among them.

There are many forms of dialogue. AOS pastoral

agents are encouraged to practice the dialogue of life which implies concern, respect, sensitivity and hospitality towards others. Reaching out to people of other religions in dialogue is an opportunity for witnessing the faith in Christ. In this dialogue it is important that the Catholic partner be rooted in his/her faith while being open to reach out to others.

AOS, through dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions, is called to build trust and confidence across religious boundaries.

Fishers

The ministry to fishers, especially artisan and traditional, should be well organized under the direction of the Bishop Promoter and National Director. Fishers and their families are an integral part of the local Christian community and a sustained pastoral plan

should be designed for their various specific needs. Many of the contacts with fishers are being maintained by local parishes. AOS has potentially an important co-ordination/resource role and can help raise this awareness in the parishes through a network of parish contacts and by promoting Sea Sunday celebrations.

The integration of the specific pastoral care and territorial one is necessary. The pastoral plans for fishers can be shared at the regional level, to aid the development of an AOS international perspective, in the context of the existing AOS International Committee on Fishing.

The existing tension between ecological concerns and the needs of fishers for work must be solved reasonably. AOS International (Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People) can help by supporting balanced policies on sustainable fishing that takes due account of both environmental and human factors.

In accordance with its own nature, the AOS International Committee on Fishing should take an active role in promoting the implementation of the *Work in Fishing Convention, 2007* Convention. It is important to continue to promote fishers’ welfare and dignity also in the international arena through ICMA.

Cruise Ships Ministry

The presence of a chaplain aboard a cruise ship can be an opportunity for prayer, celebration of the Liturgy and evangelisation. During the voyage passengers and crew may wish to reconcile themselves to God and the Church and one another.



AOS International can lead a dialogue with the cruise industry, in general, to plan and improve pastoral support programs for seafarers at sea.

The ministry on cruise ships is being studied in Europe and North America. Continuing follow-through on the regional recommendations already made is encouraged.

There should be training courses based on best practice for all seagoing priests serving on cruise ships.

There must be an internationally recognized standard for priests serving aboard cruise ships based on accreditation, training, suitability and good health.

The work on the draft Code of Practice for Ministry at Sea (Cruise Ships) needs to be pursued. There should be a collaboration between onboard chaplains and the parishes at the port of call.

It is crucial that the chaplain or cruise ship priest has a focus on the entire community of the ship, the crew and the passengers, with no distinction of religion, race, culture or gender.

Port Chaplain pastoral visits aboard cruise ships are necessary when no chaplain is aboard.

Maritime Authorities

The new ILO Conventions (*MLC 2006 and Work in Fishing Convention, 2007*) are an occasion to renew the efforts of AOS to advocate in favor of promoting their adoption and insure their implementation. AOS members should be aware of their government's position and campaign for their swift ratification and implementation.

Every region has to consider the possibility of setting up a strategic plan that will dovetail with ICSW regional welfare development programs.

AOS must remind and witness to the wider community that the crew is more valuable than the cargo.

Publications

Appropriate printed materials must be readily available to help seafarers develop their faith. It is necessary that all such materials specify the place of origin. Materials that are meant to represent AOS nationally or internationally should be approved respectively by the National Director or by AOS International. The same principle is applied to the images of Our Lady, Star of the Sea.

Projects and initiatives

Establish dialogue with the country of origin of visiting Catholic seafarers.

Encourage and develop courses for lay leaders and ministers aboard ship in consultation with AOS International when it is beyond the responsibility of the National Director.

Participation in Ship Welfare Visitors' Training Course, the ICMA's Seafarers Ministry Training program and other training possibilities are encouraged. Mention must be made of the Houston Maritime Chaplaincy Training Program.

The development of AOS in countries where it does not exist is a priority. Exchange of personnel and twinning should be considered. Because this effort falls outside the national boundaries, concrete communion with AOS International is required also to keep the principle of equity and the common good.

Implementation of HIV/AIDS and other health and hygiene awareness programs are an urgent necessity, not neglecting ethical principles.

The regular celebration of Masses focusing on seafarers and their families in parish churches should be publicised regularly to seafarers on board.

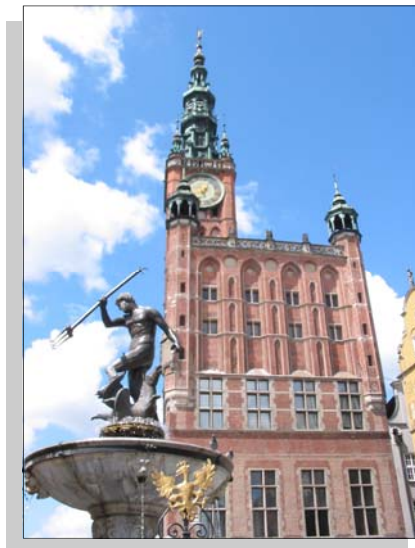
Identifying and supporting onboard leaders can help in the recruiting and training of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist.

The recent initiatives regarding cruise ship ministry, networking, AOS International Website, communication and ship tracking must be strengthened.

Plans to inform the Church about the website, train AOS members and seafarer families, need development.

A Maritime Humanism

Finally, we pledge to remain in solidarity with the People of the Sea as witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia and to advocate a consequent maritime humanism. As AOS also strives to build peace, in justice, freedom, truth and solidarity, we renew our commitment to human promotion and evangelization; an evangelization which is "new in its ardour, in its methods, and in its expression" (John Paul II, Address to Cuban Bishops, 9 June 1998), remembering Benedict XVI words "It is love that gives life".



WITNESSES OF HOPE FOR A CHRISTIAN HUMANISM IN THE MARITIME WORLD.

Today, 29 June 2007, the feast of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul, who was the navigator of the Gospel, we the members of the Apostleship of the Sea are gathered in the Polish port of Gdynia on the Baltic Sea for our 22nd world congress organised by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. We turn to you, the people of the sea, of coastal communities and exercising maritime professions, to address our message of solidarity to you.

The theme of our Congress has been: *In solidarity with the People of the Sea, witnesses of Hope through the Word of God, Liturgy and Service.*

Naturally we are aware of the many inhuman situations which persist in the maritime world and, alongside of you, we speak out against them: the fact human beings still endure great injustices with indescribable suffering and inhumane death.

But we also know that many of you live by genuine values of solidarity and courage and that even onboard ship people of different character, different cultures and religions, can co-exist in friendship.

We also know that new technologies help you to communicate better with your families and among yourselves and to make your voices heard in the public arena. We acknowledge those institutions which make these technologies available to you and teach you how to use them. Not having access to these technologies, or not knowing how to use them, only serves to widen the gulf which separates those who know from those who do not, those who are habitually poor. In reality, certain businesses use technology to subject you to working patterns more appropriate to robots, to the detriment of the human, spiritual and familial facets of your lives.

For these and other reasons, we pledge to remain in solidarity with you as witnesses of hope. The Church is conscious of being that fragile boat on which the hope of the world set sail, the

hope that is more than a mere word, or idea or dream. As Christians we believe that that hope is The One who bears a human name and face, our Saviour Jesus, the Hope of the world.

- As the human face of the love of God, He makes us the messengers of his joy;
- Son of God, He turns us towards his Father whom He teaches us to love as our Father and to worship as our only God;
- Sharing in our grief and our suffering, He urges us especially towards those who have least, so that we can serve them as witnesses of His love.

And so, in these three ways, inspired by His Spirit,

He moves us to advocate a maritime humanism brought to life by Christian hope. The fulfillment of this hope is not a question of achieving or of doing but rather of being, of living a life of true humanity such as God wanted for us whom He created in His image.

It is through this hope that He asks us

to speak not with words which are actions as Pope Benedict XVI tells us, recalling the words of St John, in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*. Specifically, that means that the Lord is not only asking us to be the voice of the voiceless, for which of course your professional organizations serve. But in addition, He asks us to be His Word, the Word that we live and share throughout the maritime world, which is both our world and yours. The Word of God is bearer of His comforting presence and witness to the world which is to come, the world we will build together and which is also the gift of God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

It is through Christian hope that Christ asks us to turn towards God, as you do so often when faced with the vastness of the sea, its violence and its splendour. He asks us to adore the Creator, to respect His creation, to turn our hearts away from false gods and idols. He asks us to celebrate this God who has made us as His own and placed the seal of His infinity in our hearts; this God who gives us His real presence in the Eucharist and strong times of hope, joy and abundance



in the liturgy.

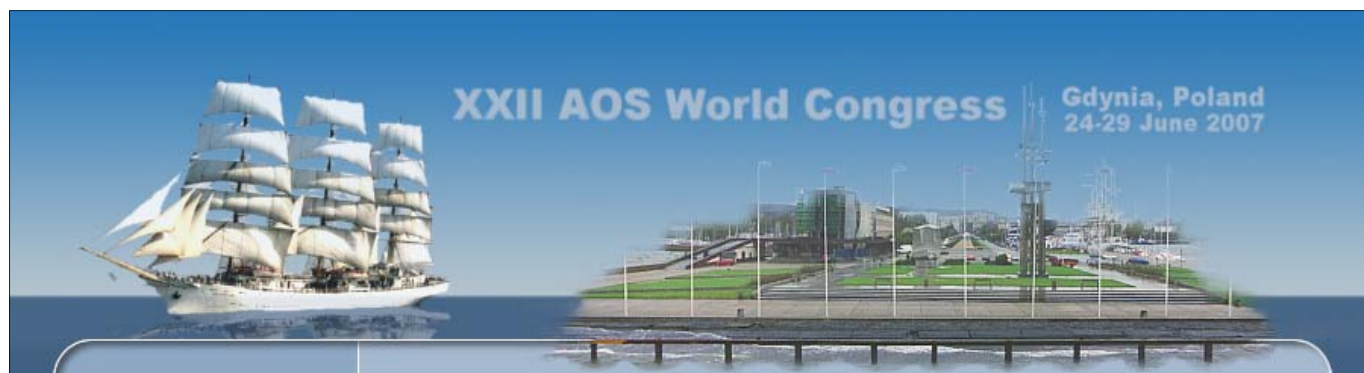
Finally it is through Christian hope that Christ, Priest and Deacon, asks us to serve the people of the sea wherever we are, in the public arena and among the leaders of Christian communities. He asks us to ensure that these people do not continue to turn their backs to the sea but attend to the needs of those who put out into the deep and live from the sea within their culture.

Since the Rio Congress of 2002, we have rejoiced in the creation of the International Fishing Committee of AOS and the passing of the new ILO Convention on Fishing, which favours marine fishers, on 14 June 2007.

On this occasion, we wish to draw your attention to two publications of the Church: *The Compendium of Social Doctrine* and the *Manual for the Apostleship of the Sea*. These publications are very useful for the formation of all.

To finish, we would like to thank all the pastoral agents, ordained ministers, religious, lay men and women, employees and volunteers who, in whatever way, share in the life of the Apostleship of the Sea. We know of excellent results in many places of the sincere ecumenical collaboration and interreligious dialogue taking place on land, at sea and in seafarers' centres.

Despite the obstacles, the difficulties and the problems which we all experience, we continue to work for our Apostleship of the Sea giving thanks with Mary *Stella Maris*. Those who contend with winds and tides in the promotion of this maritime humanism and who, by the Word of God, Liturgy and Service, especially for the poor, make us witnesses of hope, in solidarity with the people of the sea.



FROM THE MESSAGE OF GREETINGS
FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND
TO THE ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD CONGRESS

Warsaw, June 24, 2007

The vocation to life for the sea and on the sea makes us realize our limited nature and fragility. On the one hand, humility before the beauty and power of the sea leads man to the transcendental and spiritual reality. On the other, the hardships of life on the sea, the particular environment, the rhythm of work, the confrontation with other cultures, religions and customs, the long separation from one's loved ones, the constant fear for one's fate, and sometimes even the sorrow of death--all this puts seafarers and their families before questions and problems. For all this, the presence and comfort of a chaplain are especially valuable.

Here I would like to express my deep esteem and gratitude to the bishops, priests and all the laypersons involved in this pastoral care. Priests occupy an important place in the maritime community. They accompany their faithful, even to the remotest corners of the earth, in their toils and dangers, bringing trust, hope and moral comfort, and demanding their rights (...). The sea speaks to man about the need to seek one another out, the need to meet and collaborate, and the need for interhuman and international solidarity. May your pastoral mission fully satisfy the needs of the human family. To all the participants in the Congress, I express my hope that your work will be fruitful and inspired by deep reflections, and to our foreign guests, that you will have a pleasant memory of your stay in our country.

Lech Kaczynski

PRESENTATION OF THE THEME OF THE CONGRESS

ARCHBISHOP AGOSTINO MARCHETTO,
SECRETARY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT

Archbishop Agostino Marchetto outlined the significance of the Congress in an in-depth, comprehensive introductory report. Here we are reporting the part regarding the explanation of the theme and indicating the pastoral purpose of the event to give witness to hope through the Word of God, the Liturgy and Diakonia.

In the reflection that took place during the work of the Congress, we did not wish to exclude anything that concerns the life and work of the people of the sea in order to gain awareness of their spirituality and specific contribution to the good of the maritime world.

The World Congress was a time of grace for the AM. We pray that after Gdynia we can resume our voyage with greater conviction and promote a maritime humanism in favor of all the People of the Sea.

suppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being". In line with the Holy Father's teaching and as members of the Church we shall interrogate ourselves on our ongoing commitment to the threefold responsibilities which constitutes the essence and specificity of all our pastoral work:

- The place of the proclamation of the Word of God in AOS;
- The celebration of the Sacraments as the source and "raison d'être" of our pastoral care;
- The service, "diakonia", to all but especially to the poorest.

We want this World Congress to be a time of reflection, prayer and sharing that will lift our spirits and renew our apostolic zeal. As we have already said, it has been planned to be a pastoral Congress. Of course pastoral care is holistic, it ranges from material help and advocacy to more specific spiritual or religious aspects such as sacramental ministry and Christian formation and counseling. Ours will be an ecclesial exercise, which is expected to give AOS the occasion to better understand its spirituality and the necessary means to exercise the proper pastoral care to the people it is called to serve.

May I quote here Albert Camus for whom life is absurd because hopelessness is the common lot of every indi-

This Apostolate, of course, has some fundamental and traditional roots and expressions, but it must also constantly be adapted to the needs of our times to contemporary mankind. This, on the other hand, is what the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has done, if correctly interpreted. Hence the importance for us to embark every five years in this undertaking of considerable significance for the good and faithful functioning of AOS. During this week, it will be our task to review together our pastoral outreach in the light of the Teaching of the Church which interprets the signs of times, to support and encourage the ongoing apostolate around the world and to formulate our vision and future plans for the years ahead. To guide

us in this exercise, after a long reflection and after having consulted as widely as possible, we have chosen as our theme *In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the Word, Liturgy and Diakonia*. This theme is also inspired by 1 Peter 3:15-17: *"Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear."*

We shall, during this week, endeavour to explicit and confirm our conviction that AOS expresses one of the Church's essential aspect by being "Witness of Hope" and for us concretely in the maritime world, bearing in mind Pope Benedict XXVI's teaching in his Encyclical "Deus Caritas Est". That is: *"The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties pre-*



vidual, and this absence of hope renders our very existence meaningless. Well, while of course agreeing with him that nobody can live a meaningful life without hope, we do not accept his pessimistic conclusions. On the contrary, the Christian outlook and attitude towards the world is resolutely optimistic in spite of being realistic. It is enough to recall that the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world starts with these wonderful words "Gaudium et Spes"-"Joy and Hope". It is a clear signal given to all that followers of Christ are joyful witnesses of His Good News and Grace and must always be ready and able to assume the duty to give an answer to everyone who asks for the reason "of the hope that is in [them]" (1 Pt 3:15). To do this, as Christians, we believe and proclaim that Christ's death and resurrection has changed the world radically, giving us the possibility to live the joy and hope also with sorrows and anguishes, which are part of our life.

What is then Christian Hope?

For the Catechism of the Catholic Church: *"Hope is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration for happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude".* The anchor is the icon of hope and this is reflected in the logo of our Congress. Whenever in life, we are being

tossed around like a ship by violent waves in dangerous waters, and we run the risk of going adrift, hope, like an anchor, is what allows us to hold fast, not giving way to despair but to persevere and to find again our direction and continue on our way.

Hope is at the heart of St Paul's preaching. As Christian life is born of faith, it manifests itself through love and charity and it is lived in hope. These are the three theological virtues. For St. Paul, the foundation and motive of all "hope" is God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reveals his infinite love and faithfulness in the resurrection of Jesus and in the effusion of the Spirit. "Hope", for St. Paul, is not the result of human reasoning and calculation, of speculation or natural optimism, but it is founded on a person, on an event, which is the very foundation of our faith, proclaimed especially during the Easter season: Jesus has risen from the dead and we are the witnesses of this resurrection. This event is so central that in his first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul did not hesitate to say that if

Christ has not risen then our faith is worth nothing, we have no hope and we are the most pitiable people of all *"if Christ has not been raised, then empty too is our preaching; empty, too, your faith ... and you are still in your sins"* (1 Cor 15:14-17).

May be it is good here to reflect a while on the episode of the disciples of Emmaus. The reason the two disciples had lost all hope and were so sad and downcast was because they did not believe the women who had been at the tomb early in the morning and had come back announcing that it was empty and that Jesus was alive. They were terribly disappointed and despondent because Jesus had not risen from the dead as He had promised he would, *"we were hoping...but it is now already three days"* (Lk 24:21). However, as soon as they recognised Jesus, alive, in the breaking of the bread, their whole attitude and personalities changed completely and, filled with new ardour and apostolic zeal, *"they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem"* (Lk 24,33) where they reported enthusiastically to the Apostles that Jesus was



alive and they had recognised him when he broke the bread. It is also to be noted that in the Gospels, no encounter with Jesus leaves anyone indifferent, on the contrary for many it brings about radical changes in the persons concerned.

As “People on the Move”, it is interesting to note that commenting this passage, St. Augustine writes that if we want to share “life” with Jesus, like the disciples of Em-

though we are aware of our frailty and vulnerability, of our sins and death, we are comforted by the hope that following in Jesus footsteps, we shall ultimately have part in Jesus’ victory, even if we must first go through times of trial, sufferings and death. For us Christians, our hope has a name, Jesus Christ: “*Christ Jesus our hope*” (1 Tim 1:1). By suffering his passion and resurrecting from the

whatever the situation Jesus will always lead us to liberation and safety. In the person of Jesus is realised the prophesy of Isaiah “*and in his name the nations will hope*” (Mt 12:21).

Moreover, hope is a fragile and rare good and its fire is often weak, even in the hearts of the faithful. Charles Péguy wrote: “Little hope walks between her two bigger sisters [faith and charity] and is not even noticed. Since she is almost invisible, the ‘little’ sister seems to be led by her two bigger sisters’ hand, but with her childlike heart, she sees what the other sisters do not. And with her fresh, innocent joy, she brings along faith and love on Easter morning. It is she, the little one, who sets along everything”. If hope is present in the heart of every Christian, the Risen Crucified Lord is the name of hope. “Hope, a relation”, is what we read recently in an Italian review. To see, encounter and communicate the Risen Lord is the task of the Christian witness, which is also echoed in poets and writers.

Communion and our and the Church’s mission are the two names of the one same encounter that preserves God’s paternal face and man’s fraternal life with solidarity. Anyone who wishes to deepen this theme could do so by following the trail of reflection to the Verona Ecclesial Congress, in Italy, where the source, root, account and exercise of witness is presented. Here I will only mention “the figures of hope: contemplation and commitment”.

As you understand, hope and giving witness are intrinsically linked. What we believe in and hope for, what we have experienced personally, it is our duty joyfully to proclaim and share. In practical terms for us to be “witnesses of



maus, it is in the welcoming of the stranger that we shall recognise the Master and hence share His life.

Like St Paul and the disciples of Emmaus, our hope, too, is rooted in our faith in the Paschal mystery, in the fact that Christ has risen from the dead and that through his passion and resurrection he has triumphed over evil and death and given meaning to life. The risen Lord is the foundation stone of our hope; his resurrection opens our hearts to the spirit of hope. Now the testimony that the world expects from us is that since Jesus has triumphed over evil, sins, hate, injustice, violence and death, these are not fatalities any more. Even

dead, Jesus gives sense to our own sufferings and to our death.

The virtue of hope is a divine gift, like the two other theological virtues, faith and charity. These virtues are the concrete expression of the love and concern which God has for each one of us personally. As regards hope, it is when we are at our most weak and vulnerable, that God manifests Himself to us in hope. In fact, its object is the accomplishment of our salvation, promised and brought about by Christ our Saviour. To give witness to hope finally means to give witness to the person of Jesus Christ, who is Himself our hope and salvation and the Good News is that

hope” means to renew constantly our reading of the events of our time in the light of the paschal mystery and to testify by our whole life that evil, death, exploitation and injustice will not prevail, but on the contrary that goodness, life and righteousness will have the last word. It is to believe that God is for us and with us and never against us. St Paul is adamant that Christ lives in us and that we shall have part in Christ’s glory: *“God has raised Jesus to life! God’s spirit now lives in you, and he will raise you to life...”* (Rom 8:11).

As we have seen, Christian hope has its source in the testimony in the Risen Christ, so that *“the Resurrection both anticipates and guarantees our hope”*. We are all called to announce and witness the Resurrection to the world, together as one family in which there are different functions (bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, laypeople). Each in his own mission must be the visible sign of Christ’s invisible presence in the world. Pope Benedict XVI, during the World Youth Day in Cologne, insisted that communion of the faithful among themselves and with their pastors is closely linked to the work of evangelisation: *“It is important to maintain communion with the Pope and the Bishops. They are the ones who guarantee that singular paths are not being sought, but that we are living in turn in that great family of God that the Lord has founded with the Twelve Apostles”*. Here we can find the organic, hierarchical nature of our Apostolate, the function of Bishops Promoters, the appointment by the Pontifical Council of the Regional Coordinators, whose functions go beyond the national boundaries. Here we can find the foundation of the

role of the AOS International as a part of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, for matters which are “universal” in approach and in nature, going beyond the national boundaries of the local Churches.

Our witnessing, however, must always remain humble and altruistic inside and outside the AOS: *“Give a kind and respectful answer”* urges St. Peter. In this connection we are also reminded of the words of Pope Paul VI: *“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”*.

A credible and true witness must always be in solidarity with the people he is sent to, so that he can have the empathy that would allow him to understand correctly the situations and respond to their interrogations. Let us go back to the last Ecumenical Council when it says: as *“Church we have the responsibility of reading the signs of time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel... we should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come ... We must be able to understand the aspirations, the yearnings and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live”* (G.S. 4).

The milieu in which we are called as AOS to bear witness (that is the practice of hope in the various aspects of our life), remains today one of the most difficult, demanding and dangerous. To paraphrase the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of the

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in no other age have we seen such prosperity, wealth and technological advances in the maritime industry and yet countless workers of the sea are in extreme need, as so many of them are faced with new forms of slavery in their living and working conditions (cfr. *ibid.*).

Confronted to this situation, we cannot be indifferent, as “our heart cannot be at peace while we see our brothers and sisters suffering from lack of food, work, a home or other fundamental goods”. It is our obligation by our testimony to open the way to new hopes. Hope for us includes, of course, all human legitimate aspirations and expectations but goes further, it links them all to the source of all hope, the love of God, who in Christ wishes to share it with us all. The object of Christian hope, then, is not only faith in life after death, or its eschatological content. Christian hope has also a great power for the transformation of today’s realities as it casts over our existence the light of the Risen Christ, which, far from being alienating, gives a whole new meaning to human life and man’s destiny. As it was said this year at “Notre Dame de Paris” in a Lent sermon: “Our deficiencies are not an obstacle to hope”.





**Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care
of Migrants and Itinerant People**

Palazzo San Calisto - Vatican City

Tel. +39-06-6988 7131

Fax +39-06-6988 7111

e-mail: office@migrants.va

[www.vatican.va/Roman Curia/Pontifical Councils ...](http://www.vatican.va/Roman_Curia/Pontifical_Councils...)

