

The driving force is love

Without it, I couldn't do my job, says Deacon David Noval.

Text: Lisbeth Rütz

SHIPPING Do you also smile when Queen Margrethe sends the traditional thanks to the "people of the lake" in the New Year's speech? There is now no reason for that, because without the people of the lake there would not have been Nike shoes and a delicious new sweater under the Christmas tree. You would have missed the oranges or lacked the spices for the Christmas food.

Shipping is one of the sectors of exports that is most in the box when Denmark's GDP is to be made up, and it is felt in the ports. "Several ports are in a huge positive development. Among other things, Køge has expanded by 1,000 meters of berth in the past 10 years. Nakskov has expanded by 400 meters, and from 1 March Kalundborg becomes a container terminal for Maersk - the world's largest shipping company in Eastern Denmark. Ports such as Fredericia and Aabenraa have also seen a large increase in ships in recent years, and Sæby (Frederikshavn) has just launched a major expansion. The construction of the bridge over the Storstream and Fehmarn-throughlink also draws a lot of shipping to the country with materials", says David Noval.

David Noval, who was deacon vined on 16 August last year, is from 1 January Scandinavian leader of Stella Maris – a global Catholic NGO and a worldwide network. Stella Maris works according to the principles of Catholic social doctrine and supports the people of the lake regardless of gender, nationality, sexuality or religious affiliation. A large proportion of the sailors who pass by a Danish port are Catholics. But the Catholic Church has not been there for the sailors in the Danish ports since the 1930s. Something is finally being done about this. Right now, high pressure is being done to get the organizational work in place. "Stella Maris has for decades wanted to set up a department in the Nordic countries. The success now is due to many things that are coming into place at just the right time. I have no doubt that this is the impact of the Holy Ghost. But much of the credit is due to Maria Hammershøy from Caritas. She has really acted as a catalyst for the whole process", says David Noval.

Catholic – but independent in relation to the diocese

Stella Maris is an independent organization with independent finances. It is financed exclusively from privately collected funds; but buys some administrative services from the diocese.

"At the end of the day, my job is to re-establish the organization and to draw attention to its existence. My task right now is to find volunteers, make agreements with all relevant ports, establish contact and start cooperation with similar organizations.

I also have to make sure that the volunteers are trained and given the safety equipment they need. The training is hampered by Corona and assembly bans. Furthermore, there are a large number of administrative things that need to be worked on to get the organization in place", says David Noval. He has found a good partner in the Seaman's Mission, which on a folk church basis has been running mission work in Denmark for more than 100 years. At an initial meeting, Nicolaj Wibe, Secretary-General of the Seaman's Mission, told of his joy in having made contact with the Catholic Church. After all, most sailors are Catholics, so there is also an ecumenical angle in the re-establishment of Stella Maris, says David Noval.

In terms of organisational ly, the Nordic Bishops Conference is locally responsible for Stella Maris. The Holy Chair will appoint a bishoply patron according to the re gelgrundlag, as stated in "Motu Proprio on the Maritime Apostolate (1997)"

In agreement with Da Nordic Bishops Conference, work will begin on the reconstruction of Stella Maris in Denmark; but the organisation is meant to be present in all areas of the Nordic region as it is built up.

The sea - en dangerous workplace

Extreme weather conditions, fires and accidents at work can make the sea a stressful and dangerous workplace with long and hard working days. In the past, the ships were in port for several weeks, now they are often only there for hours to a few days, because there is fierce competition in the freight market and costs have to be kept down. Long, hard and monotonous working days, where staff walk up and down each other for many weeks, can be psychologically gruelling, and when you are far away from loved ones, you can feel lonely.

David Noval tells of a tragic event he experienced during his internship in Glasgow. A young sailor sat skyped with his girlfriend on board. Suddenly, the boyfriend broke up with him. He saw no other option but to take his own life. The colleagues on board were, of course, very concerned by the situation; but Stella Maris was able to support conversations about what had happened. For many of the strongly believed sailors, it is important that a deacon or priest comes with via water and blesses the ship again.

Piracy has again become a major problem after a period of decline - especially on the West African coast of Guinea bay and off the Horn of Africa. Poverty, a lack of employment opportunities and weak state power offer pirates optimal opportunities. Here, too, Stella Maris has opportunities to help. A ship docked in Ghana after being attacked by pirates in the Gulf of Guinea. Two volunteer nurses, both specialising in mental trauma, came onboard and spoke to the sailors before returning home to the Philippines. In Manila, they were greeted by Stella Maris, who provided emergency assistance in a hotel before they could finally return home to their families.

The transport market is under pressure, and it happens sometimes that seafarers get stuck when a shipping company goes bust, and the shipping company cannot pay wages. The ship Malaviya was held back in Scotland and did not return home until 18 months later. Throughout this stressful period, the ship was in close contact with the local branch of Stella Maris. Throughout the process, the three- to four-week visits were visited by Rev. Doug Douglas. Stella Maris provided legal assistance, and local volunteers made sure to help keep up the courage. There was sightseeing at local sights, badminton evenings in a local club and excursions to museums, art galleries and churches. Most of the crew came from India, so contact was made with the local Indian community. Stella Maris was through a crisis-filled process, where demoralisation lurked in the background.

The crew was in a panic on a fishing vessel in a South African port when the local branch of Stella Maris made contact with the people on board. The ship took in water, there were no life jackets on board, and it was small with freshwater supplies. Still, the captain chose to sail on.

At Stella Mari's crisis centre in London, the national management of Taiwan made contact with the ship as soon as it was in port. In Taiwan, the ship was held back and the crew received their missing pay.

When a crew member becomes seriously ill and has to go to hospital, the ship usually sails on. Here Stella Maris can step in by providing contact with the family and colleagues on board.

The working day had started perfectly normally when the sailor Rai suddenly fell onto a ship in Southampton. A massive brain haemorrhage had caused him to collapse and he was flown to a hospital for treatment. He woke up here and had to go through a nightmare. Most of the memory was gone, he didn't understand what was said to him and had been unable to express himself. A deacon from Stella Maris visited him every day during the six-week hospitalization and found an Indonesian interpreter to help him understand what had happened.

Love is the driving force

First Christmas Day, David Noval handed out Christmas gifts to the crews of ships in Køge Harbour, and at the beginning of the year he visited 52 sailors from Kiribati (an island kingdom in the Pacific) at one of Maersk's training centres, where they have been for the last two months. They had not seen their home country for 20 months and right now have no possibility to return home due to COVID-19. Physically they were doing well and got good food. There was an opportunity to get on the internet, activities were arranged for them and they had contact with a sailor, priest. But of course they were homesick and were

marked by one of them dying over the Christmas period, says David Noval. They felt seen and were happy to meet human warmth and interest in their cause.

For David Noval, it's love that drives it all: "The greatest of all is love and without it, we couldn't work. It is love for all people regardless of religious affiliation, race, nationality or anything else. But not just that - probably most of all, also the love of Christ and the path he has shown, us. By example, he has shown us to love the bottoms of society - the excluded and those, who do not care , about.

How to help

Stella Maris works for privately collected funds. Currently, David Noval is the only employee; but work is being done to hire a fundraiser. A lot of volunteers are needed at the start-up stage- and all talent is needed.

If you're no longer that mobile, you can help with prayer. If you have yarn residues, you can volunteer to knit neck tubes, fingerless mittens, socks, etc.

To learn more

David Noval can be contacted at davidnoval@stellamarismail.org When we get back to more normal conditions, he or one of the volunteers is happy to come out to the wards to talk about Stella Maris' work. Any contribution – large or small – is received with thanks on mobilepay 909890.

Captions:

Stella Maris' Christmas presents for the sailors in Køge Harbour. The giftes consisted of a gym bag with reflex with various hygiene items, Danish chocolate, home knits from volunteers, mouth binders and a written greeting.