



STELLA MARIS
SOUTH AFRICA
SUPPORTING SEAFARERS AND FISHERS
AROUND THE WORLD



**WELCOME TO THE PORTS OF
DURBAN, RICHARDS BAY,
PORT ELIZABETH, and
CAPE TOWN**

Annual Report

April 2021 – March 2022



I welcome you all to this 1st Annual Report of Stella Maris South Africa. I am grateful to God for inspiring us to coordinate our efforts in pastoral care for the People of the Sea. This report has quite a few new beginnings.

Firstly, we begin with a new Bishop Promoter, Bp Vincent Mduzuzi Zungu OMI who represents us at the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC). Secondly, we have a new National Director, me (Fr Rico Talisic cs. Thirdly, we have two new Port Chaplains in the ports of Richards Bay and Port Elizabeth. Fourthly, this apostolate to the People of the Sea has taken a new brand name, 'Stella Maris' in the centenary celebration in 2020. Fifthly, Stella Maris is beginning a new century in the maritime world and the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, I take this fiscal year 2021-2022 as a door that opens for us an innovative and spirit-lead ministry.

As we closed this fiscal year, we also opened a new year that requires renewed fidelity and dedication to this ministry. It is important to begin slowly but with sure steps towards the right direction where we want to take this ministry, in order to achieve greater interest in and reach out to more seafarers and fishers coming in and out of the ports of South Africa.

To this end, I would encourage all Stella Maris port chaplains and volunteers (ship and hospital visitors), the ambassadors of the Roman Catholic Church, to work hard in this ministry, not for our own sake but for the sake of seafarers and fishers and for the glory of God.



Rev Fr Rico Almedilla Talisic cs
National Director
Stella Maris South Africa

Stella Maris South Africa is a community of trained Catholic chaplains and volunteers (ship and hospital visitors) who visit the People of the Sea (seafarers and fishers) regardless of creed, language, ethnic origin, colour, and gender to cater for their pastoral and welfare concerns.

We do this by taking care of the holistic needs of seafarers and fishers by visiting ships, hospitals, and other places where they congregate to provide spiritual assistance, practical welfare, and advocacy, in ways consistent with the principles, teachings, and tradition of the Catholic Church. We ensure that the rights of seafarers and fishers are protected by advocating on their behalf.

We engage with different government agencies, maritime schools, and the local Catholic parishes to educate the faithful on the important role the People of the Sea play in our society, their needs and issues that affect them, and how the church in South Africa can best meet them. In this way, seafarers and fishers know and understand that the Catholic Church cares for them.

Note:

We expand our pastoral care from the People of the Sea to the care of the sea/ocean and marine life. It is imperative for us to also care for the sea and fish.



As National Director, Fr Rico Talisic presented his vision for Stella Maris for the coming 3 years. Below are the 19 objectives that he is hoping to achieve:

1st year

- i. To maintain Stella Maris members' good relations with one another and be well informed of each port's ship and hospital visits and other activities.
- ii. To have regular meeting with all members either online or face to face.
- iii. Organize group spiritual exercises, training, workshops, etc to equip and enhance our skills, dedication, and love for this ministry.
- iv. To find more volunteers with specific skills like medical doctors, lawyers, etc.
- v. To increase the number of ships and hospital visits to reach more seafarers and fishers.
- vi. To be keenly aware of any concerns of seafarers and fishers.
- vii. To be prompt with various reports.
- viii. Regular visits of the National Director to other ports.
- ix. Opening of Stella Maris Centre and/or ministry in the ports of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and Saldanha Bay.
- x. Promotion of Stella Maris ministry in the local, national, and international arenas.

- xi. Participation in seminars and conferences relevant to seafarers and fishers in the local, national, and international arenas.
- xii. Maintain communication with Stella Maris UK, Vatican, Regional Coordinators, and with Stella Maris National Directors and Chaplains around the world.
- xiii. To involve seafarers and fishers in activities and events so that they also become a catalysts for change and of service to their fellow crewmates.
- xiv. Engagement with government agencies, consulates, NOGs, parishes, maritime schools, etc.
- xv. To raise funds for the activities and programs.

2nd year

- xvi. To explore other relevant services for seafarers and fishers.
- xvii. To compile modules or publish a booklet for seminars or workshops and general information about our ministry
- xviii. To establish and be an active member of the Port Welfare Committee in Cape Town.

3rd year

- xvi. To establish the legal entity of Stella Maris South Africa as NPO and PBO.

Ship visits and hospital visits have never been this challenging in this time of Covid-19 restrictions. In visiting ships, several ships do not allow us to visit them on board. Stella Maris port chaplains and volunteers can visit and see seafarers and fishers up to the gangway. If lucky we can go up to the deck with strict sanitation protocols. There were times when they refused us visiting and denied us from coming up the gangway, so they also refused to receive the services we offered. There were times when we called out to them from the quayside because the gangway was suspended on the side of the vessel to prevent anyone from coming onboard. With much patience, we managed to deliver some of Stella Maris' services to them. We continued to be present and made our presence and services significant despite Covid-19 restrictions.



There was an extreme situation when Indian seafarers lowered a bucket through a rope where we put the magazines, newspapers, and faith materials for them. *(on the left picture)*



There were also times when the Christmas gifts we brought were either left at the bottom of the gangway or handed over on a suspended gangway. *(Picture above)*. In whatever situations we found ourselves in, we adapted and tried our best to be faithful to the mission mandated to us by the Catholic Church.

Covid-19 restrictions severely affected the ship visits on fishing vessels. Shipping agents from fishing companies or agencies drew a hard line to prevent us from visiting fishers. Several times we were told by both agents and skippers that we were not allowed to go on board and speak to fishers. Words like *“Outsiders are forbidden to enter”* are often heard by word of mouth from fishers. Often times we found them written on a board next to the gangway. (Pictures below).



Despite these prohibitions, Stella Maris never gave up visiting fishing vessels and fishers. A desperate moment calls for the bravest actions and faithfulness to commit to our vow to welcome, protect, and promote the welfare of seafarers, especially the fishers.

Instead, we perceived that these restrictions were crucial moments for both perpetrators to prey on the fishers with more abuses against their rights and Stella Maris to raise the shield of protection and uphold their rights.



True enough, we received quite a few complaints from the fishers in South Africa and beyond for instance in Angola, Kenya, and Fiji Islands concerning physical abuse, no medical treatment, withholding of salary, debt bondage, and abuse of living and working conditions which are clear indicators of forced labour in the fishing sectors. Stella Maris intervened and addressed their grievances through referrals to various consulates in the country. Besides, Stella Maris UK assisted the victims with financial assistance amounting to US\$ 200 upon their arrival in Manila through Centenary Emergency Fund (CEF).

A few more things to note this year under Covid-19 restrictions are (1) the terrible confusion it brings to seafarers/fishers, shipping agents, and Stella Maris ship visitors, (2) the difficulty of crew change, and (3) extensions of work contracts.

For seafarers, there were strict regulations from their shipping companies by not allowing them shore leave. But fishers were confused. At times, they were allowed by the skippers and agents to go out of the Cape Town port until the V & A Waterfront, but port security did not allow them. The other times, the port security allowed them to go out but their skipper and agents did not. There were times when those in J Berth could go out but those in M Berth were not allowed or vice versa. As the fishers were confused, Stella Maris ship visitors were also confused as to what to say when they inquired about shore leave.

Another hot issue during lockdown was the difficulty of crew changes. Crew change became a huge issue because of the exorbitant plane fares and the expense cost and long days of quarantine in hotels. For this reason, only seafarers from big shipping companies were willing or able to change the crews on their vessels, but small shipping companies, especially from fishing sectors couldn't afford or were unwilling to spend on costly flights.



Unfortunately, the direct outcome of the difficulty for crew changes is the extension of work contracts. Seafarers on merchant vessels who used to have 6–9 months of employment contracts found themselves unable to leave the vessel and were forced to extend their contracts, some up to 13 months and others to 15 months. For seafarers this is unbearable. To make matters worse, fishers on fishing vessels found themselves caught if not imprisoned inside the vessel unable to go home. Almost all fishers who finished their employment contracts in 2021 had no other option but to extend their contracts by word of mouth for another 6 months to a year or 2 years. Fr Rico Talisic had spoken to more or less 15 fishers from different fishing vessels who were working onboard for about 4 years. All of them were promised by their skippers a salary increase, but some of them were not able to get the salary increase and had no way of getting it since they had not signed any documents. An example of this case was the complaint of 11 fishers on board **Feng Ya no. 11** (picture on the left).

Stella Maris port chaplains and volunteers tried their best to reach out to more seafarers and fishers this year. Since April 2021 570 ships had been visited across the ports of Durban, Richards Bay, and Cape Town. On these ship visits, 1684 seafarers and fishers had been visited and assisted. In addition, Cape Town had visited 48 hospitalized and quarantined seafarers and fishers due to Covid-19 protocols.

As part of Cape Town ship visits the following items were distributed to 3,433 beneficiaries:

- 340 toiletries
- 435 Covid-19 emergency
- 124 non-prescription medicine
- 307 enjoy the sports equipment for leisure activities
- 9 local newspapers were given
- 186 Stella Maris magazines
- 28 gift packs for 7104 crew
- 288 received food donations
- 140 received clothing
- 373 received airtime or were connected to Wi-Fi
- 11 received books/novel
- 21 souvenir items
- 150 calendars were distributed
- 28 Christmas gift packs were given to 704 seafarers.
- 78 copies of a booklet with information on the Covid-19 vaccination as well as the Stella Maris Cape Town flyer with further information on how to get in touch and help offered
- 39 attended Holy Mass
- 171 were blessed
- 26 Bibles were given
- 389 Rosaries were given
- 312 Scapulars were given
- 4 were transported
- 2 requested shopping



To achieve the general well-being of seafarers and fishers, Stella Maris programs on providing toiletries, internet connection, sports and reading materials, medical assistance, spiritual services, clothing, and the Covid-19 emergency response fall short. That is why Stella Maris set up and enhanced the advocacy program to assist distressed seafarers and fishers. Aware of the exceptional situation due to the Covid-19 lockdown, a Facebook page was created and published along with emails and contact numbers so that they could contact and report any grievances they might have.

Stella Maris received and addressed 214 reported complaints from fishers coming to the port of Cape Town and abroad such as Dakar, Senegal, and Luanda, Angola. Below is the list of complaints:

- 30 reported withholding of salaries (2 of these are related to debt bondage)
- 26 reported physical and verbal abuses
- 71 reported of lack of food
- 10 reported no medical treatment
- 39 Poor working and living conditions
- 30 reported working over contract
- 1 died
- 3 were provided with financial assistance
- 4 fell victim to thieves in the hotel

This was a difficult situation; a nightmare for many fishers. It was unimaginable how many fishers fell victim to various cases of abuse and rights. A group of fishers had suffered from two or three different forms of abuse. As for Fr Rico Talisic, he couldn't say no and did not neglect the complaints of fishers coming from ports outside South Africa and with some of them passing through the port of Cape Town.

The number is high but almost half of it comes from the ports outside of South Africa which Stella Maris South Africa had a hard time sorting out. By God's grace and with the support of different Consulates, and concerned groups and individuals distressed fishers were assisted.

After a year of ministry, it is important to sit down and look back on the activities and events we have done to see what are the strengths to keep up, the weaknesses that require improvement, the opportunities to take, and threats to be avoided.

Strengths:

1. Two new Port Chaplains and volunteers were appointed in the ports of Richards Bay and Port Elizabeth, respectively.
2. There is a database app for reporting ship visits etc.
3. There is a vision of looking forward and planning activities for the future.
4. There are enough funds for the year.
5. Stella Maris Cape Town has an available vehicle for the ministry.
6. Stella Maris' Facebook page has more than 1000 seafarers and fishers friends.

Opportunities:

1. There are opportunities to engage with various government and non-government institutions for collaborative services to seafarers and fishers.
2. There are local and international meetings, workshops, and conferences to attend to deepen the understanding and widen the network.
3. As the Covid-19 restriction is lifted, hospital visits may be resumed.

Weaknesses:

1. The Seafarer Centre was closed last year and we are moving slowly in acquiring a new Centre in CTP.
2. Stella Maris Port Elizabeth has not yet started the ministry yet. Richards Bay has too few visits.
3. Some Port Chaplains and volunteers have limited time to do ship visits.
4. Port Chaplains and volunteers don't have skills in publishing activities and events to promote the wonderful successes in the ministry.
5. Lack of printed materials.
6. Covid-19 restrictions prevented many ship and hospital visits.
7. In the port of Cape Town, there is limited access allowed to all the berths

Threats:

1. Ship and hospital visitors getting on in years.
2. Ship and hospital visitors as volunteers have limited time available.
3. Legal documents need to be updated.
4. The difficulty of merging funds of Cape Town and national account.

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Prayer for Seafarers

Lord Jesus Christ, ruler of the waves and sea, keep Your blessed hand over the seafarers and fishers and protect them from any kind of illness, accident, and peril of the sea as You calmed the Sea of Galilee and protected the disciples. When the storm comes may they take heart and trust in You. Accompany them on their voyage and work. Inspire them to live their faith and be faithful to their Christian life aboard ship. Let the sea not cut them off from their families, friends, and the Church.

May Our Lady, Star of the Sea, intercede and guide them and their families, and at the end of their employment contract bring them home safely. Amen.