



The Apostleship of the Sea is the ministry of the Catholic Church offering hospitality and pastoral care to the seafarers, fishers and their families.

Known to seafarers around the world as Stella Maris the Apostleship of the Sea cares for the spiritual, social and material welfare of all the people of the sea regardless of color, race or creed.

The Apostleship of the Sea is present in around 260 ports of the world with chaplains and volunteers.

Note:

I am aware that using the word "migrants" to define all kinds of people trying to cross the sea into Europe is very restrictive. I should clearly distinguish them in refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, trafficked people, etc. However, in my presentation, for all the practical reasons, I use the term "migrants" to define all the people who are rescued at sea. Once they are rescued and properly identified we can start defining more clearly their status.

Migrants using sea routes to search for better life or to escape situations of persecution or war is not a new phenomenon. At the end of the 1970's we had the "boat people" from Vietnam, but it was a different period (nations were still willing to accept migrants especially the ones caused by the Vietnam War) and most of all it was in a reduced scale compared with what is happening now in the Mediterranean Sea.



**1970's
VIETNAM:**

**800.000
Boat People**

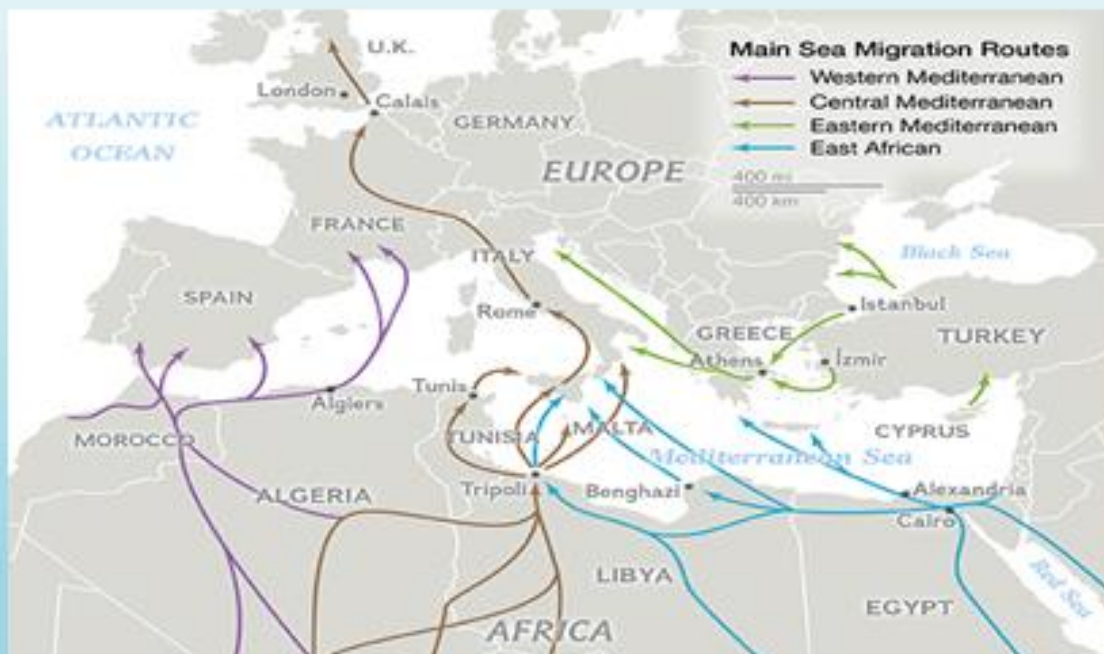


During the Roman times the Mediterranean Sea was called “Mare nostrum” in Latin, “Our Sea”, because on a commercial and military level it was completely under their control.

Throughout history things have radically changed and today it is impossible to call it again “Mare nostrum” (the waters of the Mediterranean Sea touches 23 countries).

Infinite are the sea routes for trafficking of migrants, smuggling drugs, weapons, etc.

Mediterranean Sea Today



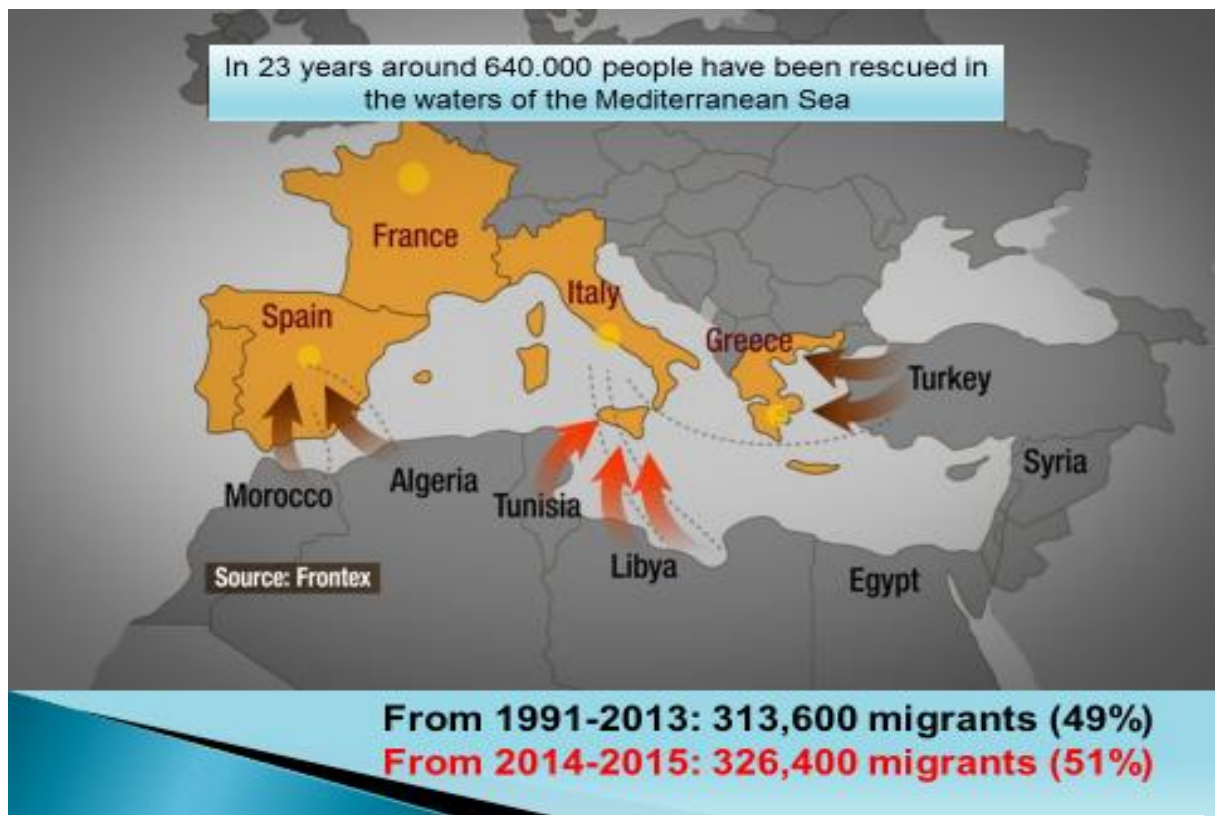
23 countries and infinite sea routes

Since early 1990, the Mediterranean Sea has been used by migrants as a privileged route to land on the coasts of Italy and try to enter in Europe.

In 1991 with the Albanian crisis, in a few months thousands and thousands of migrants were crossing the Adriatic Sea with any kind of boats in order to reach Italy. The most famous one, was the M/V Vlorë arriving at the port of Bari with more than 20,000 migrants on board.



According to the statistics of the Italian Coast Guard during the last 23 years around 640.000 people have been rescued in the waters of the Mediterranean. In the last two years Italy has rescued more migrants than in the previous 23 years (in the period from 1991-2013: 313,600 migrants (49%) and in the period 2014-2015: 326,400 migrants (51%)). The numbers and nationalities of migrants have varied depending on where humanitarian crisis were exploding.



In 2015 the number of people crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Italy slightly decreased and increased for Greece because of the opening of the new Eastern Mediterranean route, but considering the political decisions recently made by the EU with Greece and Turkey and the continuous instability of a several countries in Africa, for sure the number of migrants arriving by sea to Italy will increase significantly. Unless a political solution will be found for a number of difficult situations in Africa, what we could describe as the biggest search and rescue operation of all times that might continue for many years more.

I would like to concentrate my attention on the burden placed on crews of merchant vessels crossing the Mediterranean Sea, by involving them in large scale search and rescue operations.

"It is simply not acceptable that merchant ships are still being routinely called upon by Rescue Co-ordination Centres to assist with the majority of rescue operations currently taking place, having already assisted with the rescue of more than 50,000 people since the crisis started to escalate last year. Apart from the fact that commercial ships are wholly unsuitable for rescuing hundreds of people at a time, the Search and Rescue obligations that exist under international law were never created with the current situation in mind." Masamichi Morooka Chairman of the International Chamber of Shipping

2014 → 882 vessels assisted and rescued → 42.000 migrants
2015 → 492 vessels assisted and rescued → 16.000 migrants



Masamichi Morooka, Chairman of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), at their 2015 Annual Meeting in Rotterdam said: *"It is simply not acceptable that merchant ships are still being routinely called upon by Rescue Co-ordination Centres to assist with the majority of rescue operations currently taking place, having already assisted with the rescue of more than 50,000 people since the crisis started to escalate last year. Apart from the fact that commercial ships are wholly unsuitable for rescuing hundreds of people at a time, the Search and Rescue obligations that exist under international law were never created with the current situation in mind."*

The Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC), the Italian national authority responsible for search and rescue, often calls in merchant vessels to divert their route to respond to a distress call coming from a boat with migrants in difficulties. In 2014, 882 vessels were diverted to assist and rescue

around 42,000 migrants and in 2015, 492 vessels did the same for 16,000 migrants.

We are all aware that a container vessel with its vertical walls is not the most practical one to rescue hundreds of migrants in a rubber boat or a small craft and a fully loaded tank is not the best place to accommodate large groups of migrants rescued from the sea.

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and InterManager in partnership with other maritime stockholders, have published two booklets which are *a guide for ship owners and captains to ensure the safety and security of crews who may be involved in the rescue of a large number of people at sea, as well as that of people who save.* This to respond to the inevitable situation of emergency and provide some guidelines for seafarers in these risky situations:

- Rescue at Sea. A guide to principles and practice as applied to refugees and migrants.
- Large Scale Rescue Operations at Sea. Guidance on Ensuring the Safety and Security of Seafarers and Rescued Persons.
- Best Management Practices For Large Scale Rescue Operations at Sea



These booklets are very useful and well done. Looking at the contents you can see that they are trying to cover all the different aspects of the search and rescue operation. There are detailed guidelines on how to prepare the vessels for the rescue, how to guarantee the personal safety and the security of the ship together with the management of people rescued and how to clean the vessel properly once the migrants are disembarked.



However, in regard to mental and physical welfare of the seafarers, I found only a few lines.

In regard to the mental and psychological health of seafarers, I would like to share with you the experience of Fr. Guy Pasquier, chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea at Le Havre, France.

Chronology of events:

September 10, 2014 - 300 miles off the South Eastern coast of Malta, a vessel carrying hundreds of migrants sunk. According to the survivors, the boat was intentionally sunk by the traffickers. A Panamanian container rescued 2 survivors and brought them to Sicily. Another merchant vessel rescued 9 people and brought them to Crete. While the Antarctic, flying the French flag, rescued three Palestinians and continued to Le Havre.

To be noted that the newspaper in reporting the news didn't mention at all the role of the crew in the rescue and the tremendous psychological impact that such experience had on their life.

At Le Havre the chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS), Fr. Guy Pasquier went on board at the request of the Commander.

The chaplain's story:

"At the request of the agent, relaying on a call from the Master for a visit from a priest, I went aboard the Antartic, late in the morning of September 23rd.

The crew was very busy loading supplies and foodstuffs; they were also taking oil from a truck. After going to the bridge, the officer led me to the Master, who explained what was the matter and how I could help. I was asked to meet with the crew and to talk with them about the traumatic experience they had: they had been at the scene of the sinking of a boat with an estimated 500 migrants on board, which had been rammed by another vessel and sank in two minutes. The Master was asked to remain in the area for 24 hours, in order to pick up any survivors. Three Palestinians from Gaza were rescued.



The chaplain's story

- › *Crew were posted on watch to indicate where bodies were floating. More than 300 were picked up and photos taken.*
- › *One of the crew told me he made the sign of the cross at the sight of all those corpses, and prayed for all the victims.*
- › *The mess man said he could not contemplate the thought that there were babies among the victims: "I have a two-year old; I thought about him constantly."*
- › *A young French officer cadet was on watch to identify the bodies and to report their position. he told me: "That day was unbearable (...)"*



Crew were posted on watch to indicate where bodies were floating. More than 300 were picked up and photos taken. The three Palestinian survivors were treated on board: they were exhausted after being long hours hanging onto what was left of the boat with other people who did not make it; they left them ashore in Malta, even though the Master wanted to bring them back to France. While I was on board, two maritime police came to take the testimony of the Master. After lunch, I started chatting with the Filipino crews that I was able to meet; I talked with eight of them (...).

The sight of all those bodies was unbearable for them. Many could not bear seeing such a scene of misery and turned away. They asked: Why did this happen? What is the value of life?

One of the crew told me he made the sign of the cross at the sight of all those corpses, and prayed for all the victims. The mess man said he could not contemplate the thought that there were babies among the victims: "I have a two-year old; I thought about him constantly."

I saw a young French officer cadet (3rd year at Le Havre school), and talk for a while. He was on watch to identify the bodies and to report their position he told me: "That day was unbearable (...)"

The Master performed remarkably, and did not try to skip his responsibilities, hoping that his testimony could be used to bring these traffickers before an international tribunal. (...) I do not know if the Master was a Christian, but God bless him for his display of great humanity."

Conclusions

- ❖ Physical and psychological stress must be recognized and managed by the ship owner by putting in place all the necessary measures to ensure that the crews rests and recovers physical strength before continuing to operate the vessel in safety.
- ❖ Seafarers Centers with chaplains and volunteers (many of whom have received professional training) are always available to provide assistance and support to any seafarer who request it.
- ❖ It is essential for the international community to immediately increase the economic and material resources for a better and more effective search and rescue operations, in order to reduce the reliance on the commercial shipping.
- ❖ We would like to recognize the great humanitarian effort done by the crews of merchant vessels that without hesitation, have engaged in many rescuing operations saving thousands of migrants lives

Conclusions:

- We all know that seafarers are professionally trained and qualified in search and rescue operations, but there is no school or training that can prepare them to handle the rescue of a large number of people. This situation leads to physical and psychological stress which must be recognized and managed by the ship owner putting in place all the necessary measures to ensure that the crews rest and recover his physical strength before continuing to operate the vessel in safety.
- The psychological impact of such an experience in the mind of the crews is very high. Sometimes these rescue operations, for several causes outside the control of the Master and his crew, turn into disasters with many migrants who drown one step away from salvation under the eyes of shocked seafarers. Being witness to these events causes deep emotional turmoil, feelings of guilt and inadequacy for not being able to save them. For these reasons, after having disembarked the migrants and guaranteed the safety of the ship, it is necessary to offer to the crew the possibility to freely express emotions, feelings,

frustrations and fears experienced during what could have been a traumatic experience. Furthermore, it is indispensable, also to monitor the seafarers for long term and unforeseen mental and psychological effects that could affect their professional and human life. In many ports there are Seafarers Centers with chaplains and volunteers (many of whom have received professional training) who are always available to provide assistance and support to any seafarer who request it.

- It is of vital importance to seek for a political solution for the situations of war, violence, terrorism and poverty affecting the nations where these migrants come from. In the meantime it is essential for the international community to immediately increase the economic and material resources for a better and more effective search and rescue operations, in order to reduce the reliance on the commercial shipping, that will continue when it is needed to fulfil its duty of rescuing people at sea alongside the Coast Guards and the Navy.
- The work carried out by the crews of merchant vessels in these circumstances is unique and important, but at a political and social level it has not yet received the recognition it deserves. For this reason I would like to share with you the appeal made by Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, in the 2015 Message for Sea Sunday in which he says: *"On Sea Sunday as Catholic Church we would like to express our appreciation to the seafarers in general for their fundamental contribution to the international trade. This year in particular, we would like to recognize the great humanitarian effort done by the crews of merchant vessels that without hesitation, sometimes risking their own life, have engaged in many rescuing operations saving thousands of migrants lives"*.