



100 Years of Supporting Seafarers

In October 1920 in Glasgow Apostleship of the Sea was established to support seafarers in need. 100 years later we are the largest ship visiting network in the world, providing seafarers with practical and pastoral support, information, and a friend in times of need. Read the story about everything in between.

The Apostleship of the Sea was founded in Glasgow in 1920. At this time Britain had one of the largest merchant fleets in the world, employing many thousands of British seafarers. The Apostleship of the Sea ran large seafarers' hostels in all the major port towns where seafarers could stay while their ships were in port, often for weeks at a time. Hundreds of volunteers from the local parishes were involved in providing hospitality and entertainment for seafarers in these hostels, which were always full.

Over time the Apostleship of the Sea grew into a world-wide pastoral and welfare organisation with 80 functioning centres by the end of World War II.

Then globalisation and the drive for greater profit margins, combined with technological advances, changed the face of international shipping forever. Ships became larger, ports moved down river, and turnaround times for ships in port were reduced dramatically. Crews also became smaller, and were increasingly recruited from developing world countries where wages were lower. Owners registered their ships under so-called flags of convenience to avoid stringent regulatory controls. Today's seafarer is no longer in port for a few nights, but often only for a few hours. In these changed circumstances Apostleship of the Sea adapted to provide pro-active outreach by way of ship visiting to assess practical needs, backed up by a modern drop-in centre inside the docks, equipped with email terminals and telephones to facilitate contact with loved ones back home whom they may not have seen for nine or even twelve months.

While the nature of our work has evolved, our founding belief that every seafarer deserves fair working conditions, respect for their human rights and the very best we can offer remains at the heart of what we do and to date there are 230 chaplains in over 300 ports across 41 countries from Australia to the USA.