

## SEAFARER MINISTRY

3 February, 2016

Last evening, on 2 February, our church was represented at the Annual General Meeting of the Association Marseillaise d'Accueil des Marins (AMAM) or Marseille Sailors Benevolent Association. All Saints has been active in ministry with seafarers since its beginning in the 1840s. Our primary ministry focus today is towards Commercial Seafarer ministry and many of our congregation members assist by volunteering as staff at the Seafarers' Club in the Marseille port dock facilities. 99% of this voluntary ministry is not evangelization... but some is.

Most of the work is enabling access to the Skype phones so that the sailors can phone home; selling shaving cream, razor blades, tee shirts, personal gear and souvenirs from the Club's tuck shop so the sailors can replenish their supplies without having to travel all the way into town in their short time allotted to be ashore; and supervising the use of the football and pool tables whilst the sailors have some fun ashore in a liquor free environment. Often the sailors only have two hours or less to come ashore to tend to their needs (first calling home and second looking after themselves). It is a long way from the dockyards to any retail space and so the Seafarers' Club fills that need.

The life of a commercial sailor is a hard one. Months and months at sea with only a few hours ashore each time the ship berths. Ship to shore communications are limited and so there can be long periods without contact from home. Sadly some ship owners and operators are unscrupulous and take advantage of their employees. Many sailors belong to an international maritime union but contacting a union representative can be as hard as contacting family at home.

It is possible that someone back home might become ill or even pass away and the sailor, unable to travel home is living in grief. This is when some pre-approved and trained AMAM volunteers may board the ship to visit with the crew. Sometimes it is the sailor who gets ill; again this may prompt a visit onboard. If a sailor is landed to hospital and the ship sails away, there may be a ministry requirement to visit with the sailor and, once released from health care, assist in getting them to the airport to fly home or to the designated port to re-join the ship and complete their contract.

Father David took some notes at the AMAM annual general meeting last evening. Happily, in 2015, no hospital visits were required. The Seafarers Club was open for 236 days in 2015 (it is not open when no ships are in port) and 21,840 sailors passed through the Club's doors. They came from 92 different countries but the vast majority came from four places: Indonesia, the Philippines, India, and the Ukraine. On an average day, 86 sailors visited the club with the slowest day bringing in 34 and a busy day having 151. Since 1994, when the Club started keeping records, just under 327,000 sailors have been served by AMAM staff and volunteers.



*The Annual General Meeting of the Association Marseillaise d'Accueil des Marins (AMAM) was held on 02 February at the Les Gens de Mer Hotel in Marseille.*

