

**“Supporting Port Welfare”**  
**Seminar: Meeting the Challenges of Seafarers’ Welfare**

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**6 February 2018**

By my very rough calculation, in ports around the world, more than a quarter of a million Christmas gifts were given to seafarers this past Christmas. A woolly hat and gloves, some toiletries, perhaps a bit of chocolate – a small gift to show seafarers far from home that they are not alone during the holiday season.

But that gift is not the sum total of what we do – in fact, in many ways it is a token of appreciation, a symbol of our much larger commitment to seafarers’ welfare. That gift is only one of the many ways kindness is shown. Most seafarers’ welfare centers also give free or low-cost transport to local shopping and welcome seafarers’ to a center where they can relax, use free Wi-Fi or sit back for a friendly conversation with staff and volunteers.

But how do seafarers’ centers do it? Where do they find the resources for all this generosity? How does all this support come together?

Visitors sometimes assume that seafarers’ centers are funded by governmental programs or a single benefactor with deep and generous pockets. Those situations are extraordinarily rare. Despite appearing to be one seamless organization from the outside, many partners typically contribute to the operation and support of a single seafarers’ center, including both institutions and individuals. When it comes to seafarers’ welfare in the port environment, the service provided arises from a web or a network for the benefit of seafarers.

Seafarers’ center trustee members and Port Welfare Committee representatives represent stakeholders from shipping companies, unions, supporting faith communities, and even port authorities. And often those who do not have a direct business interest in shipping are the most critical members of these committees, in specific those representing the port authorities. In several recent studies, it was found

that port authority involvement with seafarers' centers is one of the biggest factors in encouraging others in the maritime community to collaborate and contribute. Partnership between centers and port authorities, in other words, is essential. Sometimes it is a technical challenge to send delegates from a public body onto the boards of a local charity, especially a faith-based one, but there is usually a way to work out that representation even if it takes some creativity.

And maritime companies and port authorities have so much more to offer beyond sending representatives to a center's trustees or on a port welfare committee. They can get involved in many other ways. No doubt, we can remember even that seafarers' welfare workers frequently include chaplains, ship visitors, and staff – both paid and volunteer in each category. These individuals bring an incredible diversity of backgrounds and true passion to benefit seafarers' welfare. Sometimes they come because a family member is or was at sea, making this personal connection into a service to strangers; but even more often, seafarers' center volunteers and workers have no previous connection to the sea. They might have a friend who volunteers, heard about the work in their religious community, or just wandered past the center by chance. In any case, the team of a seafarers' center is vital to its success.

Some ports – like here in Hamburg – even enjoy multiple seafarers' centers, created at different times and often by different church traditions, for the benefit of seafarers. Today they most often collaborate directly even if independent, sometimes serving different parts of the port, feeding on each other's strengths and filling in where there is weakness.

Yet collaboration is more than just about efficiency. As the seafaring life itself is typified by social isolation, so also do people working in seafarers' welfare charities – often in port areas far from other community organizations – feel isolated. Staff and volunteers find that working and meeting together – like we are doing today – makes sense for the work itself but also for the encouragement that it provides. It is truly rewarding to see people from different generations and backgrounds coming together for the common cause of welcoming the seafarer.

Such collaboration or working together are not new. Many seafarers' welfare charities find their roots in European ports as far as two centuries in the past. They have been serving seafarers – together – for much of that time. They banded together into ICMA, our association in 1969. Here they find encouragement and a unified voice, and collaboration continues today. In exploring new and exciting partnerships, seafarers' centers and individuals involved in maritime ministry can bridge the gaps in seafarers' lives as global shipping changes from generation to generation.

New technology, faster turn-around times, containerization, and smaller crews all mean that the methods of seafarers' welfare one or two generations ago may not work as well today or tomorrow. While internal developments within organizations help accommodate to these swift changes, some of the best adaptations happens when partnerships are formed and organizations find synergies in combination.

I would like to mention three places where partnership is developing.

First, volunteers. I could mention many, but one that is increasingly difficult around the world is finding volunteers.

From the beginning of organized seafarers' welfare over two centuries ago, dedicated staff and volunteers have been essential to its ongoing success. In the past decades, however, patterns of voluntarism – how people volunteer - have been changing, even in those countries with a history of strong volunteer involvement. This has led to increasingly urgent questions about how to engage and retain volunteers. What will the seafarers' welfare volunteers of the next generation look like?

It is important to acknowledge one key idea: though volunteers labour for free, they are very costly. Finding, training, supervising, motivating, and being with them takes lots of time, skill, and other resources. Yet volunteers remain one of the most valuable resources for many port-based welfare providers. Volunteers must be cultivated and formed. Using an agriculture analogy is good when thinking about volunteers. Not just plop a seed in the ground. Need good soil, rain, sunshine, keep out the weeds. It takes a lot of work.

One key shift in the patterns of voluntarism is the move away from time-based volunteers towards skills-based volunteers. That is, in many port-based welfare organizations, volunteers used to promise a certain, regular amount of time during which they would do whatever jobs were necessary to perform. These would often include ship visiting, driving, and assisting in the operation of a seafarers' centre. However, volunteers are more and more interested in giving of their specific skills in ways and times that they decide. This might include assistance with technology, strategy, or finances. The shift towards skills-based volunteering means that port-based welfare administrators must develop different roles and methods for supervising their volunteers.

I would suggest that finding and cultivating volunteers cannot be done alone, or at least can be done more efficiently together. Rather, this is a project that must be done in conjunction with many church groups, community groups and others. The volunteer that ends up working with you might have already had a good deal of contact with many other groups. Consider your training options – what kinds of training can you do together? What more training might new volunteers need to become potentially the leaders of tomorrow? Finding volunteers will be a challenge, but it is possible – many of you can attest to it – and it is very rewarding.

A second project: I have had the privilege to sit on the executive committee of the Port Welfare Partnership project these past several years with stakeholders from across the industry, including Runa Jürgens. She will speak about the project and her work from her own perspective, but let me just say a few words about why such a program is important.

First, is that such a project is encouraged by the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006. We have a few experts on the MLC in this room – if you have questions make sure to ask them.

In brief, the MLC – often called the 'seafarers' bill of rights' built on existing maritime labour conventions and recommendations to ensure decent working and living conditions for all seafarers. The MLC was designed to sit alongside other major legislation like SOLAS, STCW, and MARPOL. The MLC sets out minimum requirements – it is the case and also the hope that many flag states might have even higher standards.

As you may know, each of the five main sections or Titles has Regulations, Standards, and Guidelines. Regulations are general, non-negotiable points of principle. The rest is called The Code, broken down into Standards, referred to as part A, and Guidelines, referred to as part B. Part A standards are mandatory, but part B guidelines are recommendations about how to put A into practice.

The Port Welfare Partnership project is set up to help understand and promote one part of the MLC, specifically Regulation 4.4 – Access to shore-based welfare facilities and its associated Standard and Guidelines. I encourage you to read this section closely as it deals in greater or lesser extent with what we do, even if we do not run a seafarers' centre. I have distributed a copy of 4.4 – I encourage you to read it closely and think about what implications it has in your setting.

And this is the biggest point – and the second reason we are doing this Port Welfare Partnership – is that it provides a really wonderful opportunity to collaborate. Collaboration is not always easy or straightforward. But the MLC gives us a great point of departure. Last year we had a pilot program for the Partnership project, feedback that I heard was that this gave leverage to bring people around a table that was not always there previously.

Besides the Port Welfare partnership project, this coming May-June ICMA is planning an introduction to seafarers' welfare and maritime ministry course here in Hamburg. The topics of the course cover many introductory things about ship visiting, seafarers' welfare and related topics. But that is only one part of the importance: the bigger importance is the opportunity to spend a week together with individuals from other ICMA societies to learn about what they do, but also to develop friendships.

No doubt, we will not be able to solve all the differences between us simply in one week of discussions. So very often in our work, having a personal relationship a person from another seafarers' centre can make all the difference when trying to solve a problem or be of service to a seafarer. Even today, if you don't know someone, make sure to say hello and introduce yourself.