

An Evening at the Seafarers' Centre

Antwerp XL is partnered with all sorts of businesses in the breakbulk supply chain, but we also work with charities. The official charity of this year's show is the Mission to Seafarers & St Boniface at the Port of Antwerp. You might ask yourself, how does the church fit in with modern seafaring? Father Brian Millson explains the brilliant work he was doing every evening at the Seafarers' Centre to support sailors of different backgrounds from all around the world before the coronavirus pandemic resulted in its doors being temporarily closed...

Every evening at the Seafarers' Centre starts when we receive a list of ships in the harbour, we always make sure we know where each ship is berthed as the sailors often don't!

I meet the sailors from Container Ships and Roll-on/Roll-off vehicle carriers first and then the sailors from the Bulk Carriers, Tankers and Refrigeration Ships (Reefers) shortly thereafter.

I check with each person about the name of their ship so I can let them know which bus they'll be getting on when they need to return to their ship when the evening comes to an end.

While they're at the Seafarers' Centre, some will attend Mass in the Chapel on Saturdays and Sundays, but we're mostly about making sure the seafarers have a chance to relax, take care of any personal business that needs attending to, and connect with their families.

We make sure everyone has a chance to settle down for a beer if that's what they want to do, or perhaps contact their families over Skype. Others will watch TV, play billiards or maybe have a browse of the books and videos in our library. They can take the books and videos and keep them.

Some sailors just want to sit down and talk and that's a service every Chaplain is more than happy to provide.

From time to time we have a request to help sailors with money transfers. Often, seafarers will come and want to send money back home to their family. This can be fraught with problems, especially for Russian and Ukrainian sailors and those from countries where banks don't accept foreign transfers, so we do everything we can to help.

Undoubtedly something very unusual will happen, as it does every evening. Recently we had two former British servicemen in the club, one was from the Army and the other from the Royal Navy. They were providing onboard security for a ship and found 7 stowaways aboard. They hoped we could provide them with New Testaments for the stowaways and we were, of course, very happy to provide them.

Before you know it, the evening comes to an end, and it's time to get the seafarers on the right bus back to the ship.

We put the well-being of sailors above all at the Mission to Seafarers & St Boniface at the Port of Antwerp and hope that, in a small way, we are impacting the industry for good.

Unfortunately, we have had to close our doors while the world copes with coronavirus, but we very much look forward to re-opening soon.

If you would like to support the Mission to Seafarers, visit, missiontoseafarers.org/donate.

Meet the Mission to Seafarers face-to-face when Antwerp XL returns to the Antwerp Expo on 15-17 September. To find out more or book your place, visit, antwerpxl.com.