

# Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 27: SCRAPBOOK FROM THE CATHOLIC SEAMEN'S CLUB

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**H**ow Do Seamen Keep Faith in Vast Watery Desert Devoid of Sacraments? asked a headline in the *Catholic Northwest Progress* in 1960. The answer: the Apostleship of the Sea, which extends the ministry of the Church to the oceans.

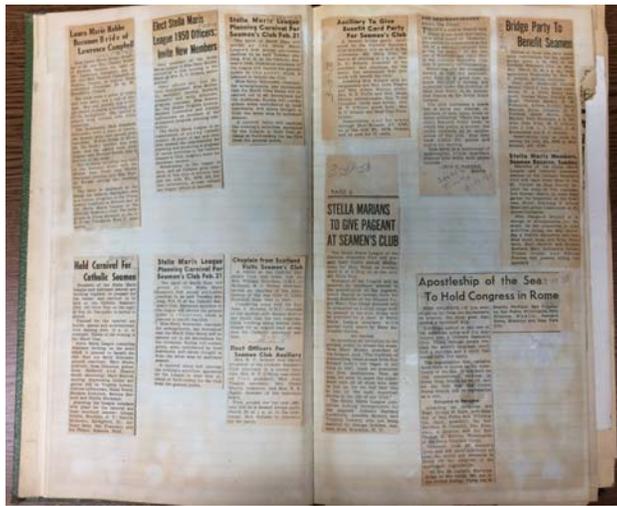
The ministry began in Glasgow, Scotland in 1922. The Apostleship provided hostels where sailors could stay safe during their time in port. Soon the model was taken up by other cities. In 1939, Bishop Gerald Shaughnessy appointed Father H. A. Reinhold as Port Chaplain. The first Seamen's Club opened on Third Avenue the following year. It moved to its more permanent location at 2330 1st Avenue in 1956.

The Catholic Seamen's Club was a unique ministry for the seafarers and fishermen from all over the world who would dock in Seattle, sometimes for a day, sometimes for many days. The Club was not only for active sailors, but also for unemployed sailors, waiting for the call to their next assignment, as well as retired seafarers who needed a place to spend their days.

The purpose of the Club was to provide a home away from home, a place where mariners could pray, find community, stay safe and connect with their families. In the early days, the Club provided stationery and postage so seafarers could write home to their families; in later days, this part of the ministry took the form of telephones and, still later, phone cards! There were also games of all kinds, especially bingo. There was a jukebox, and, in more recent decades, video games. In the 1950s, the Club invited the whole Seattle community to their annual Christmas play and to a program of "Holy Week Meditations," tableaux of the life of Christ with sailors playing all the parts. One year, the Club's Christmas pageant featured seafarers from five different nations!

A principal part of the duty of priests who served as port chaplains took place not at the Club itself, but on board ships that docked in Seattle's harbor, where they sought out sailors in need of pastoral care. The Chaplains were quick to respond in times of need, praying alongside family members and shipmates of those lost at sea. In January, 1952, Father J. J. Murphy, OMI, Port Chaplain for nearly twenty years, participated in a memorial for 46 officers and crew members of the *Pennsylvania*, which sank off the Pacific Coast. A Lutheran pastor and a rabbi also participated in this early interfaith service.

The Club's chaplains also served as much-needed advocates for seafarers in trouble. In the 1970s, a Liberian ship called *Five Bays* was held up in Seattle for several weeks when seventeen of its crew—all Filipino—went on strike, protesting the dirty and



**Above:** A scrapbook packed with newspaper clippings attests to the active ministry of the Catholic Seamen's Club. The scrapbook is now in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

dangerous conditions on board: limited food, no hot water, and 2-3 inches of oily water in the crew cabins—not to mention rust, rats, and cockroaches. Father Ciaran Dillon, OMI was one of the few allowed to board the "hell ship," as it was called. He offered Mass for the crew, and advocated with the captain on behalf of the striking sailors, ensuring that they would not suffer retaliation for their actions. Through the help of Father Dillon and other advocates, the strikers were released from the *Five Bays* and flown home to the Philippines.

The Seamen's Club also celebrated the good news of life at

sea. In December, 1950, the cargo ship *Meredith Victory* docked in Hungnam Harbor, where some 100,000 refugees of the Korean War had gathered, desperate to escape. Knowing his ship might be their only hope, Captain Leonard LaRue took as many of the refugees on board as he could—14,000 of them! They filled the hold and the deck. Space was so tight that all had to remain standing during the five-day voyage. There was very little food and water, but the ship arrived at Geoje Island without any injury or loss of life. In fact, several lives were added—five babies were born during the brief voyage! Captain LaRue visited Seattle in 1952, when the *Meredith Victory* was retired in Bremerton. He visited the Seamen's Club and received a cross from Archbishop Connolly for his heroic action. LaRue later entered a Benedictine monastery in his native Pennsylvania, where he took the very fitting name Brother Marinus. He said, "I think often of that voyage. I think of how such a small vessel was able to hold so many persons and surmount endless perils without harm to a soul... God's own hand was at the helm of my ship."

The life of seafarers has changed dramatically since the Apostleship of the Sea was established in 1922. Seafarers are no longer in port for days at a time—more often, they have just a few hours. Instead of providing a hostel like the Seamen's Club, the ministry today is proactive, going on board ships to minister to the needs of the sailors. Responding to the signs of the times, the Catholic Seamen's Club closed its Belltown location earlier this year. But the ministry of the Port Chaplain, Father Tony Haycock, will continue out of new quarters on the waterfront.

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*Today, July 12, is Sea Sunday. "Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on all seafarers: Our Lady, Star of the Sea, St. Peter, St. Andrew, pray for us. Lord, save us or we perish." (Official Prayer of the Apostleship of the Sea)*