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Fr Martin Caddell pictured with Catholic crew members after an onboard Mass

# Port chaplains witness rise in calls from crews for onboard services

A Liverpool maritime charity is stepping up efforts to deliver church services on board vessels after reporting a rise in demand for spiritual support from crew members.

The Liverpool Seafarers Centre (LSC) offers wide-ranging support to 50,000 seafarers who pass through the River Mersey Ports and berths every year, including church services, sacrament and blessings onboard vessels.

The news comes ahead of Sea Sunday – an annual celebration held on the second Sunday in July – when Christian churches of all denominations remember and pray for seafarers, giving thanks for their lives and work.

During Sea Sunday, charities such as the national Apostleship of the Sea, The Mission to Seafarers and the Sailors' Society as well as non-denominational groups such as Sea Cadets carry out fundraisers, hold parades, and run awareness campaigns about life at sea.

LSC is an ecumenical partnership between the Apostleship of the Sea (Liverpool) and The Mersey Mission

to Seafarers, both bodies being independent of the national and international Missions.

LSC CEO John Wilson said Britain has a heavy dependency on the invisible army of brave seafarers with 95 per cent of everything we consume transported by sea. And with the cruise season well underway, Liverpool is also expected to welcome 58 ships each carrying between 120 and 1350 crew from now until September.

However, many seafarers on board cruise vessels are only permitted up to two hours shore leave making it difficult to attend church services. Crew on merchant vessels, too, are precluded from attending church services, even when in port due to operations on board.

"We are one of the few port cities to have a seafarer welfare centre located in the actual cruise terminal," said Mr Wilson. "So, we are able to interact directly with seafarers as soon as they leave the vessel. Merchant vessel crew have often been at sea for many days, often weeks, working

long hours. Many are people of faith, often desperately in search of spiritual nourishment, and we are witnessing an increase in requests for church services to be delivered on board. This affords seafarers the opportunity to practice their faith in a way many of us take for granted."

Mr Wilson pointed out that the crew are often seeking to attend Mass, receive the holy sacrament, a blessing or even counsel from a priest.

"Life goes on while these people are at sea including major life events such as births, deaths, marriages, divorce and bereavement. It may be that they have suffered a rough passage with storms or adverse conditions, or an incident onboard, or are even travelling on a new ship and request that the vessel be blessed. Whatever it may be, we have the ability to bring 'church' to them."

"In the first few weeks of 2018, we have delivered six services. This is an increase on the same period last year, when we delivered a total of 12 services throughout the year."

Fr Martin Caddell, parish priest at St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Blundellsands, Liverpool, and honorary chaplain to Liverpool Seafarers Centre, has delivered many of the recent services on board.

"Our presence on board vessel is always carried out with the upmost respect to all crew members, including those of other faiths," he said. "We always seek permission from the captain to perform a service following a request from crew. The actual service usually takes place in the mess area. It is a more fluid and flexible approach to that of a church service, with crew members able to come and go, so as they can fulfil their other responsibilities on board."

The Archbishop of Liverpool, Malcolm McMahon, said: "Sea Sunday gives us the perfect opportunity to recognise and give thanks for the invaluable work of the Liverpool Seafarers Centre in providing spiritual, emotional and practical support to seafarers from across the world throughout the year."

## Christian Heritage Centre in hunt for first director

Trustees of the Christian Heritage Centre (CHC) at Stonyhurst, Lancashire, are searching for a pioneer to become a major part of the centre's history, as its first director.

"This is a truly exciting opportunity," Lord David Alton of Liverpool, chairman of the Christian Heritage Centre Trust, told *The Universe*.

"Building Theodore House has been a classic a labour of love and the Christian Heritage Centre's pioneering first director has the opportunity to ensure that it becomes an asset for Christian renewal and re-evangelisation. At a time when bishops have rightly expressed dismay at the arbitrary closure of centres for retreat, study and prayer, their encouragement

to press on with this project has been crucial."

The CHC was established to increase access to the unique collections held in trust at Stonyhurst on behalf of the whole Catholic community – not least for the 2,200 Catholic schools and 3000 British parishes; but also to use these collections to challenge and inspire.

"Month by month *The Universe* has beautifully documented the construction of Theodore House, the flagship £4 million project, nearing completion in a ruined mill building, set in stunning woodland grounds, and which will be open for retreats, Christian leadership formation, visits by school parties, parishes, scholar and visitors

wanting to walk trails in the beautiful Ribbles Valley countryside familiar to J.R.R. Tolkien and Gerard Manley Hopkins," he said.

With 34 bedrooms, lecture theatre, seminar rooms, atrium, refectory, library and oratory the trustees hope that Theodore House – named for the Syrian Christian who became the eighth Archbishop of Canterbury – will be a gift to the whole Church.

"We need to raise £300,000 to equip the building and complete the family annexe but have the funding in place for three years for a director to move this hugely important project forward," said Lord Alton.

Dominican Brother, Sam Burke OP, has responsibility for religious over-

sight, and he explained that the director would help put the CHC on the map.

"Reflecting on the lessons of our own history, we want Theodore House to be a place that focuses on the scourge of religious hatred and opens mind to the collective failure to recognise the indifference that repeatedly fails to respond to horrors ranging from the Holocaust to the Armenian Genocide. In short, we want to form Christian consciences of an entire generation to avert such tragedies in the future," Br Burke said.

**For more information see:**  
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