



**inside:** The Hidden Cost of Shore Leave Decline  
and why this trend cannot be ignored

# A time to reflect

## Lent 2026



18 February  
– 2 April  
2026



**In the long, hard months at sea, your care truly matters. This Lent, please help us to continue to reach seafarers and their families.**

Our Lent Appeal will be mailed to supporters soon. If you are not on our mailing list but would like to be, please email: [info@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:info@missiontoseafarers.org) or call +44 (0)20 7248 5202.

## Welcome to the latest edition of FAN!

What sets The Mission to Seafarers apart, as anyone who spends time around it soon discovers, is an unflinching focus on the people at the sharp end of global trade: seafarers and their families. In a commercial industry defined by competition and scale, that clarity of purpose stands out. That is so not simply aboard ship. It is noticed in conference halls and boardrooms alike, where the Mission's voice serves as both a corrective and a reminder that behind the abstractions of shipping lie human lives – complex, vulnerable and too often unseen.

That attentiveness explains why the Mission's plans for the future are being shaped not by assumption but by listening. Through our survey work over the past year, seafarers have spoken candidly about their experiences, and while some of what they say is uncomfortable, it is essential.

This issue of *FAN* places those voices centre stage, as we update you on what those surveys have revealed and also reflect on a year gone by through the eyes of those who live and work at sea.

Their testimony underscores a hard truth: that seafaring remains one of the world's most challenging and dangerous professions, and the erosion of shore leave – once a defining feature of life at sea – has intensified the strain. Physical health, mental wellbeing and morale are all suffering. In a world that prides itself on progress, this is one area where conditions are plainly deteriorating, and we are taking time to let you know a little more about

that and the work we are doing to address it.

It is within this reality that the Mission operates and, with its partners and supporters like you, continues to serve the world's 1.89 million seafarers and their families.

Thank you for your support.

**The Ven. Dr Peter Rouch**  
Secretary General



## inside

<b>What Seafarers Worry About</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Reflections of Life at Sea</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Hidden Cost of Shore Leave Decline</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Life Beyond the Horizon</b>	<b>10</b>

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# What Do Seafarers Really Worry About?

We asked more than 1,500 seafarers to share their honest insights into life at sea in our most ambitious survey yet.



Too often, the voices of seafarers are muffled by the vast distances they traverse and the unique hardships they face. This survey seeks to change that. By listening directly to 1,623 seafarers from over 20 countries, we learned their views on welfare, mental health, and their working environment – and where support is most urgently needed.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The findings revealed a workforce under sustained pressure. Twenty-two per cent of all respondents reported frequently feeling stressed or fatigued at sea. More concerning still, 3% had experienced suicidal thoughts while working. While this represents a small proportion, it signals serious distress that often goes unseen.

## SHORE LEAVE

It was no surprise that shore leave was high on the list of concerns (explored further on pages 8–9). Nearly half of all respondents said they rarely or never get a chance to put a foot on solid ground, and just 7% told us they always get ashore.

As one seafarer explained, “It takes us three months before we return to port and get a chance to go ashore.” Short port turnarounds, operational pressures, and security restrictions all play a role in the shore leave crisis – and it is having a devastating impact on the wellbeing of seafarers and safety on board.

## MEDICAL CARE

Medical care is something most of us take for granted, but in the middle of



**Looking ahead, the most significant concern is employment insecurity.”**

the ocean, the stakes are high. While 64% rated the medical care at sea as positive, a worrying 11% reported critically poor access.

One seafarer shared a stark example of a colleague injured at sea: “None of us knew how to stitch wounds, so he had to endure the pain, relying only on pain relievers to sleep.”

Geographical challenges are exacerbated by training gaps on board and reliance on approvals. But seafarers can see a way forward and are calling for improved medical training, clearer protocols, and better use of telemedicine.

## REMARKABLE RESILIENCE

Despite the challenges, the survey also highlights remarkable resilience. Many seafarers draw strength from staying in touch with family, exercising, socialising with crewmates, and faith. In fact, 78% say that faith helps them face challenges at sea.

This human response to a changing industry is a powerful reminder that crews cannot be forgotten. “Prioritising seafarers’ wellbeing is not just an ethical duty; it is the foundation for safety, talent retention, and the long-term resilience of shipping itself,” said Peter Rouch, the Mission’s Secretary General.



**78% say that faith helps them face challenges at sea.”**

Read the full survey results here: [www.missiontoseafarers.org/publications](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org/publications)

# Reflections of Life at Sea: Resilience, Faith, and Camaraderie

For those who call the ocean their workplace, every day brings change – unpredictable weather, new regulations, and shifting schedules. As seafarers reflect on the past 12 months, they also share moments of profound beauty, personal growth, and deep human connection.

## FAITH AS AN ANCHOR

Psalm 121 asks, “Where does my strength come from?” For many seafarers, faith provides the anchor they need to navigate life’s uncertainties. Belief in God sustains hope beyond what can be controlled, offering comfort in the face of daily challenges.

It is why so many seafarers are pleased to see the dog collars worn by our chaplains or readily accept an invitation to pray.

Jerry Palma, a steward, reflects, “I’ve faced challenges, like dealing with a co-worker who doesn’t like you. I find support by praying to God. I am proud that I’ve learned so many skills this year with His help.”



STEWARD JERRY PALMA

Beyond the quiet strength it gives crews to face the day, faith also shapes how they engage with one another, their work, and constant change.

## GROWTH IN A WORLD OF CONSTANT CHANGE

Pressure and uncertainty are as much a part of life at sea as navigation and watchkeeping. New technology, evolving regulations, and the responsibility of keeping a ship safe all demand flexibility and continuous learning.

Capt. Aleksei, describes 2025 as a year of profound change and reward. “We faced new environmental regulations and IMO rules, but the most meaningful part of my year was mentoring new crew,” he says.

Each voyage brings opportunities for personal and professional growth, teaching lessons in patience, adaptability, and resilience.

These are opportunities that Chief Engineer Georgeen, sailing from Malaysia

“Life at sea is about being strong, resilient, and grateful for every blessing.”



CHIEF ENGINEER GEORGEEN

to South Korea, relishes. “Support from crewmates and the office team made a big difference,” he says. “I’m proud of how much I’ve grown and the more confident, dependable seafarer I’ve become.”

## CAMARADERIE: A SECOND FAMILY

If faith sustains the individual and growth shapes the professional, it is teamwork and camaraderie that hold the ship together.

Lisa Briers, a Deck Officer Cadet, told us of her key learning from the year. “As tensions rise, it’s important we remember to look out for each other. That’s what this year has taught me: that we must all have each other’s backs.”

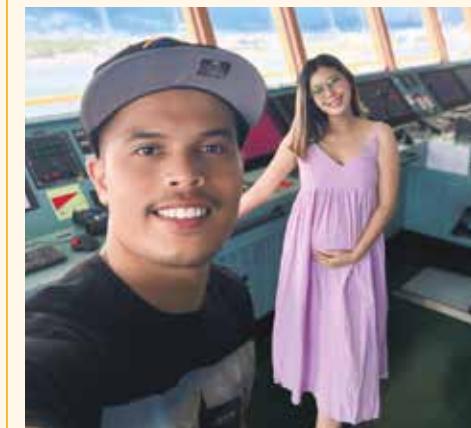


DECK OFFICER CADET LISA BRIERS

“We must all have each other’s backs.”

Life at sea is a shared experience, and crews often become like a second family – supporting each other through even the most personal challenges. For Filipino seafarer Wilan, his crew made all the difference in a turbulent year.

As he explains, “My wife and I were blessed with a baby girl, born on 4 January. The hardest moment was in October when she was hospitalised for six days while I was onboard. I felt worried and helpless, but my crew supported me with prayers and encouragement.”

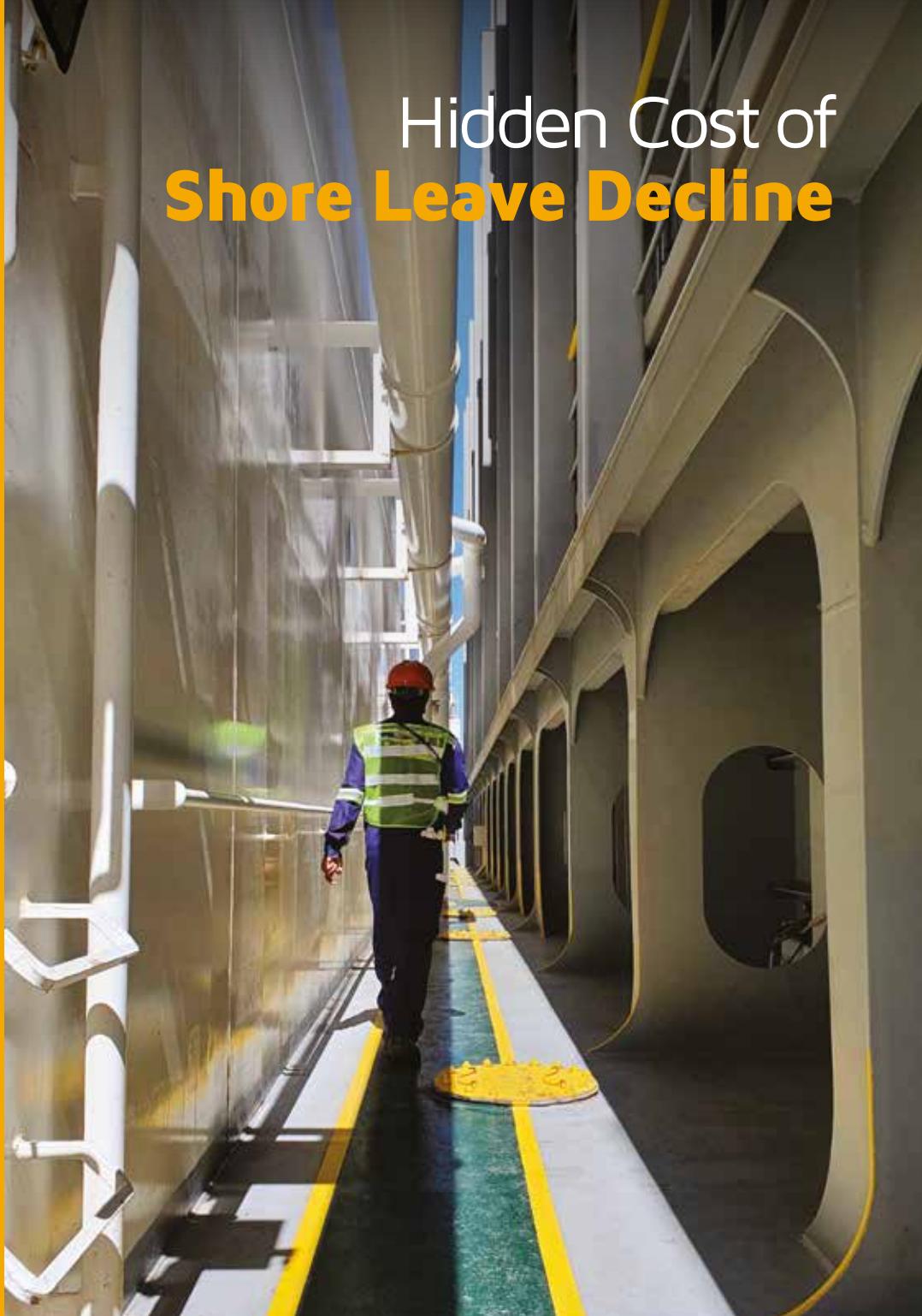


ABLE BODIED SEAMAN WILAN

Despite long hours, demanding schedules, and the constant unpredictability of life at sea, seafaring remains a profession full of pride and purpose. Reymar Maliao, a steward, sums it up simply, “Life at sea is about being strong, resilient, and grateful for every blessing.”

“I’m proud of how much I’ve grown.”

# Hidden Cost of Shore Leave Decline



A lack of shore leave remains the number one concern for seafarers. Ben Bailey, the Mission's Director of Programme, examines why this trend cannot be ignored.

Brutally short port stays, ramped-up security protocols, and expensive or non-existent transport options mean that disembarking has become an elusive privilege rather than an expected part of the job.

In recent editions of the *Seafarers Happiness Index*, some crews went so far as to describe their vessels as “floating prisons”, a metaphor no industry committed to safety and sustainability should ever ignore.

## SHORE LEAVE IS NOT A PERK

Shore leave is not a perk; it is a pressure valve. If the maritime workforce is expected to remain competent, alert, and motivated, it must be given the basic conditions necessary for healthy living.

With up to 80% of maritime accidents linked to human error, limiting rest opportunities is a direct threat to operational integrity. Shore leave should therefore sit alongside maintenance checks and safety audits as a core requirement, not an optional extra squeezed out by tight schedules.

## CLOSING THE GAP IN SUPPORT

At the Mission, teams across more than 200 ports are working relentlessly to support those who cannot leave their ships. Welfare services can offer varied

“ The maritime community must reclaim shore leave as a right.”

“ Some crews describe their vessels as “floating prisons”.

and crucial support, but they cannot substitute for true freedom of movement.

Even the best land-based support cannot replicate what a simple visit ashore provides – the chance to step away, clear one’s mind, and reconnect with the world beyond the steel walls of a ship.

## A RIGHT GROUNDED IN SAFETY

To truly support crew welfare, the maritime community must reclaim shore leave as a right grounded in safety, wellbeing, and dignity.

This means scheduling operational windows that guarantee disembarkation time, ensuring ports provide safe and affordable access routes for crew, and recognising psychological wellbeing as an essential element of maritime safety protocols.

Shipping has shown remarkable agility in confronting decarbonisation and digital transformation. The same level of commitment must now be applied to the people who operate the vessels and machinery upon which global trade depends.

When the wellbeing of seafarers deteriorates, the entire maritime ecosystem is placed at risk. Their safety, motivation, and mental health are inseparable from the safety of the world’s oceans and supply chains.

Reinstating reliable access to shore leave is one of the clearest steps the sector can take to safeguard its future and honour the people who keep the world moving.

# Life Beyond the Horizon: The Mission to Seafarers in Australia

**At the crossroads of three oceans, Australia depends on the sea. Yet the men and women who keep trade moving remain largely invisible.**



SEAFARERS TRAVELLING TO TOWN FROM A REMOTE AUSTRALIAN PORT

Australasia is vast, and so is the Mission's reach. To put it in perspective, that means 31 ports, stretching from Hobart in Tasmania all the way to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

Many of its major exports, including iron ore and bauxite, are mined in remote communities, where the closest towns might not have much more than a village shop.

As Sue Dight, the Mission's Regional Director for Australia, shares, "In

**“It's the simplest things that mean the most.”**

Port Walcott, the pier alone is three kilometres long. Our buses drive down to collect the seafarers and take them to the nearest town, where there's nothing more than a village shop."

## ANCHORAGE PORTS

In many cases, crews never set foot on land at all. Giant carriers sit offshore while smaller vessels ferry cargo back and forth.

With the rise of mega-ships, which require larger berths, ports are moving further and further from city centres. One example is in Western Australia, where Fremantle's container port is set



SEAFARERS RECEIVE CHRISTMAS GIFTS

to relocate to Kwinana, doubling the distance from Perth.

"Even in Melbourne, it can be an hour's drive in traffic before you're anywhere near a shopping mall," Sue explains.

## RED TAPE AND SEA BLINDNESS

Geography isn't the only challenge. Australian ports are among the most tightly regulated in the world. Combined with fast turnaround times, this often leaves seafarers with little or no shore leave. And when seafarers aren't visible, they get forgotten.

"I once had to explain to a healthcare professional what a seafarer was," Sue

**“in 2025, we welcomed 90,000+ seafarers into our centres.”**



SUE DIGHT, REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR AUSTRALIA

**“I once had to explain to a healthcare professional what a seafarer was.”**

recalls with incredulity. "He couldn't understand why it was critical that a Chief Engineer got a new pair of glasses within 24 hours."

It's a small moment, but a telling one – and a clear example of how society can overlook the people who make global trade possible.



SEAFARERS VISITING A MISSION TO SEAFARERS CENTRE

## A MISSION THAT SHOWS UP

Despite the obstacles, the Mission is a constant source of support. In 2025 alone, our chaplains and volunteers visited 6,500 ships, transported 88,000 seafarers, and welcomed 90,000+ into our centres.

Often, it's the simplest things that mean the most – a lift to the shops, a familiar taste of home or someone who has time to listen.

As Sue reflects, "We may not be able to change the ocean environment, but we can be there for people who work on it."

# Building Relationships in Port

Our chaplains around the world continue to build strong relationships across the maritime industry, ensuring that seafarer welfare remains a priority.

## 1 DANIEL PHANNENHOUR, HAMILTON, CANADA



Heavy cargo operations and extreme cold have recently limited shore leave, making the Mission's ship visits all the more vital. Seafarers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share emotional burdens and to have conversations beyond work. One seafarer remembered a previous visit I had made to the ship a year earlier, shortly after he arrived from China.

## 2 REV'D CANON STEPHEN THANAPPAUL, TUTICORIN, INDIA

The team in India has been using technology to bridge language barriers and share the Mission's work with Chinese and Filipino crews. One chief officer, who did not have authorisation for shore leave, was particularly grateful for this external support. The team also supported the family of an Indian seafarer who died on board a vessel in Indonesia. Alongside emotional support, they assisted with the repatriation of the body and provided guidance regarding death compensation.



## 3 FR ANDREW DANGERFIELD, YOKOHAMA, JAPAN



The port is preparing to welcome the new Port Chaplain, Revd Dick Johnson, and his wife, Yuki, who will take over in February 2026. Dick brings extensive chaplaincy and pastoral care experience from the UK, and his wife Yuki, who is Japanese, will be a wonderful support. Regular visits to the United Seamen's Service Club in Honmoku and Yokohama Port Medical Services have reinforced the Mission's presence and accessibility.



## 4 MONICA PARK, BUSAN, SOUTH KOREA

The Busan Mission provided consistent pastoral care and practical support to seafarers at the port. Holy Communion, centre hospitality, and ship visits reached 234 seafarers. Gifts to celebrate Chuseok, Korea's harvest festival, were particularly well received by crews from 19 vessels we visited.



## 5 REV'D PAUL TOLHURST, KOBE, JAPAN

The team has been working with fleet managers from Britannia P&I and the Marine Department of Toko Kaiun. It was encouraging to see their appreciation for ship visits and their interest in supporting the Mission's work further.

The team has also been supporting a new container vessel that calls at ports in South Korea and Japan. Due to the high cost of shore passes in neighbouring South Korea, crews are choosing to spend their time in Japan instead. We are also assisting the crews of two nuclear-fuel carriers, which have extended stays in port.



## Make a donation

If you would like to make a donation, please fill out the form below, and complete your contact details at the bottom of the page.

Please accept my gift of:  £10  £25  £50

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My cheque is enclosed (payable to The Mission to Seafarers)

Please debit my credit/debit card: Visa/MasterCard/Maestro (delete as applicable)

Card number:

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Start date: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

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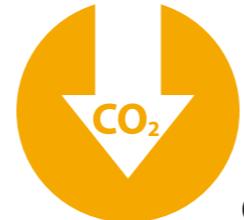


# The Mission to Seafarers ESG Report 2024

The Mission to Seafarers ESG Report 2024 tells the story of our journey toward a greener, fairer, and safer maritime world, with seafarers' wellbeing at its heart. Here are the highlights from our latest report.

## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

We've reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from our operations, and while new centres in Hong Kong and Japan added emissions, sustainable design features are expected to offset these over time. Initiatives like solar power in Colombo and marine conservation projects in Thailand show how we're embracing renewable energy and protecting oceans.



**14% reduction** in direct and indirect CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Supporting seafarers' mental health and wellbeing remains central. Over the past year, we've expanded advocacy for fair and safe working conditions, strengthened partnerships with communities, faith groups, and industry, and reinforced diversity, volunteer engagement, and safeguarding practices. Staff wellbeing was also boosted through an important cost-of-living pay increase.



**284 volunteers** worldwide

## STRONG GOVERNANCE

Our independent board ensures robust risk management and transparent reporting, enabling collaborations across welfare organisations and corporate partners. A standout example is our work with IKEA to embed seafarer welfare and human rights into global supply chains.



**10 independent trustees**

Looking ahead, collaboration will remain key as we champion seafarer welfare and drive positive change for a sustainable, equitable maritime future. Read the full report here: [www.missiontoseafarers.org/publications](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org/publications)

## How you can support us

There are many ways in which you can support our work with seafarers around the world.

### Find out more about getting involved

Please tick the box below and fill out the contact details panel overleaf to find out more about:

- Fundraising
- Remembering The Mission in your Will
- Volunteering
- Involving your company
- Giving in memory of a friend or loved one

### We will send you regular updates about the work, needs and impact of The Mission to Seafarers.

- Please tick if you would like to stop receiving communication from us by post
- Please tick if you would like to stop receiving communication from us by telephone
- Please tick if you would like to receive email communications from us

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# 2025 Round Up



## SafeTALK PARTNERSHIP

Between August 2024 and June 2025, The Mission delivered SafeTALK suicide prevention training to nearly 650 seafarers in the Philippines in partnership with shipping Pacific Basin.

The 2025 Crew Claims Report published by insurer Gard, revealed that suicides now exceed onboard accident fatalities, accounting for 9% of all crew deaths in 2024, highlighting the importance of the course.

## SEAFARERS AWARDS

Last October, we celebrated the winners of our 8th International Seafarers



Awards, recognising outstanding welfare support across the maritime sector.

With record nominations, more than 500 guests gathered at the Fairmont Hotel in Singapore to honour those making a real difference to seafarers' lives.

## OCEANCARE

The Mission recently launched OceanCare, a new global welfare initiative in partnership with Mitsui O.S.K. Lines (MOL) to provide expert, confidential, one-to-one support.

Each conversation begins with a simple question: "What's on your mind?" From there, Welfare Officers listen, offer guidance, and connect seafarers with further support where needed.

## GALAXY LEADER HOSTAGES

In January 2025, all 25 crew members of the Galaxy Leader – a cargo ship held hostage in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthi – were released after more than 430 days in captivity.

Working with industry partners, our teams in Jordan and Cyprus provided vital support to affected families. We journeyed with Galaxy Leader families throughout, helping facilitate engagement with the International Maritime Organisation as part of efforts to secure the crew's release.

# “I’ve Got Your Back”

## How SafeTALK is Strengthening Safety at Sea

When Tom O’Hare was invited to speak at the International Maritime Human Factors Symposium (IMFS) in December, his presentation on SafeTALK, the world renowned suicide alertness course, demonstrated the broader benefits of putting welfare first.

SafeTALK is often understood primarily to be a suicide-awareness course. But Tom used his presentation to explore its wider impact on what the industry refers to as human factors – the way people interact with their environment, equipment, procedures and each other onboard a vessel.

### BEYOND WELLBEING

Drawing on a case study with shipping company Pacific Basin, Tom outlined how SafeTALK has contributed to meaningful cultural change. The partnership has grown rapidly, from training 256 seafarers in 2024 to more than 1,000 in 2025 – a reflection, he



THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME HUMAN FACTORS SYMPOSIUM TOOK PLACE IN GLASGOW IN DECEMBER 2025

believes, of the course’s perceived value beyond its original remit.

One seafarer feedback comment stood out, “This training gives us assurance that we are heard, and that there are more people willing to listen.”

“For me, those words are key,” Tom explains. “What does it mean for the culture of an organisation when employees truly believe they are being listened to?”

### SAFER COMMUNICATION, STRONGER CREWS

According to Tom, one of the clearest impacts of SafeTALK has been improved communication. Seafarers report feeling more confident speaking up under pressure in any situation.

In one example, an internal company helpline saw monthly enquiries increase from around five to more than 30 following the introduction of SafeTALK and related initiatives. “That’s not about suicide,” Tom says. “It’s about contracts, medical issues, all sorts.”

The training has also strengthened team cohesion and trust. Shared learning experiences have helped crews feel more connected to one another, and more confident that both onboard and onshore teams genuinely care about their safety and wellbeing.

“ This training gives us assurance that we are heard.”

To find out more about SafeTALK visit [www.missiontoseafarers.org/safetalk-registration](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org/safetalk-registration) or email [safetalk@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:safetalk@missiontoseafarers.org)

### EARLY INTERVENTION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

SafeTALK’s emphasis on noticing, asking and acting has translated naturally into broader safety behaviours. “Alertness to safety becomes part of everyday behaviour,” Tom explains. “When something feels wrong, whether it’s a person or a procedure, they’re more likely to speak up.”

Crucially, the course reinforces shared responsibility. Crew members are encouraged to act where they can, and to pass concerns on when they can’t. “It removes the idea that leadership only comes from the top,” Tom says. “Responsibility and care is distributed across the crew.”

For Tom, that’s the real message. “This isn’t just a course about suicide alertness,” he says. “It’s about building safer, more connected crews. When people feel heard, supported and empowered to act, the benefits ripple out across the entire operation.”

As one seafarer put it simply, “I’ve got your back.”

“ Alertness to safety becomes part of everyday behaviour.”





# What Seafarers Really Think About Shore Leave

From safety to sightseeing, seafarers from across the world share their thoughts on the topic on everyone's lips: shore leave.



"A ship can be repaired in dry dock, but a sailor is restored on shore. Leave is the essential medicine for the mental strain of isolation. It is the moment a mariner ceases to be a gear in a machine and becomes a person again."

**3rd Officer John Mark Cartagenas**

"In the constant pursuit of meeting targets and completing voyages, seafarers are often pushed deep into routine and pressure. Shore leave is a seafarer's chance to rise to the surface and take a breath."

**3rd Officer Jay Daquila**



"To us seafarers, the meaning of shore leave is more than just a rest or a break. It is a reminder that we are human beings, not just a cogwheel needed to run these enormous floating steel machines."

**Ordinary Seaman Marck Joenie Cambonga**



"Just the sight of land makes a seafarer giddy. Shore leave brings vitality to crew – a reset. But more than that, shore leave allows you to see the world for free".

**3rd Officer Danica Mae Madela**

"After long days or weeks onboard, it is one of the few chances to reset. It becomes even better when spent with crewmates, helping build camaraderie before returning onboard calmer, more focused, and safer at work."

**Chief Mate Josue P. Nituda**



"We are fortunate to have the opportunity to go ashore and experience Osaka's culture, food, and beauty. For me, this shore leave was not just a break; it was a dream come true."

**Able Bodied Seaman Marvin Pagoyo Acedo**



"Shore leave is a saving grace, a time to slow down, touch grass, unwind, and be human again. Like rebooting a computer, a refreshing feeling that recharges resilience, giving strength to face the sea again."

**2nd Officer John Harry Santillan**



"As a captain, one of the hardest realities is watching this basic human need be taken away by the never-ending inspections. Safety is important, but a mentally exhausted crew is also a safety risk. Shore leave is not a privilege. It is a necessity."

**Capt John Michael Lechugas**

# Seafarers Happiness Index

The Q3 2025 Seafarers Happiness Index reveals a stark reality check as deep-rooted challenges resurface.

Following a promising upward trajectory in mid-2025, the latest Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) has revealed a significant downturn in seafarer wellbeing, with the overall score falling to 7.05 out of 10, a sharp decline from 7.54 in the previous quarter.

## BREADTH OF DECLINE CONCERNING

The most concerning aspect of this quarter's results is not any single metric, but rather the breadth and consistency of the decline.

When every aspect of seafarer life, aside from connectivity, deteriorates simultaneously, it suggests fundamental problems in how the industry is managing its human resources.

"These results are a clear warning sign," said Ben Bailey, Director of Programme, The Mission to Seafarers. "Seafarers are telling us that mounting operational pressures, growing administrative burdens, and ongoing crew shortages are taking a serious toll on their wellbeing across the globe."

The only bright spot, a modest improvement in connectivity, demonstrates that targeted investments can deliver results. However, one area



of improvement cannot compensate for widespread deterioration across all other aspects of seafarer wellbeing.

## DIAGNOSIS AND PRESCRIPTION

The feedback from seafarers themselves provides both a diagnosis and a prescription. They identify specific, actionable solutions: additional watchkeepers, dedicated administrative officers, improved connectivity, fair compensation, quality provisions, and shore management with seagoing experience.

These are not unreasonable demands, but rather basic requirements for a sustainable maritime workforce.

The Seafarers Happiness Index has consistently demonstrated that when seafarers thrive, shipping excels. The inverse is equally true: when seafarer wellbeing declines, the entire industry suffers. The Q3 2025 results serve as a clear warning that urgent action is needed to reverse these troubling trends.

Read the full report at [seafarerhappinessindex.org](http://seafarerhappinessindex.org)

# Help us change lives

by leaving a legacy gift in your Will



[missiontoseafarers.org/legacy](http://missiontoseafarers.org/legacy)

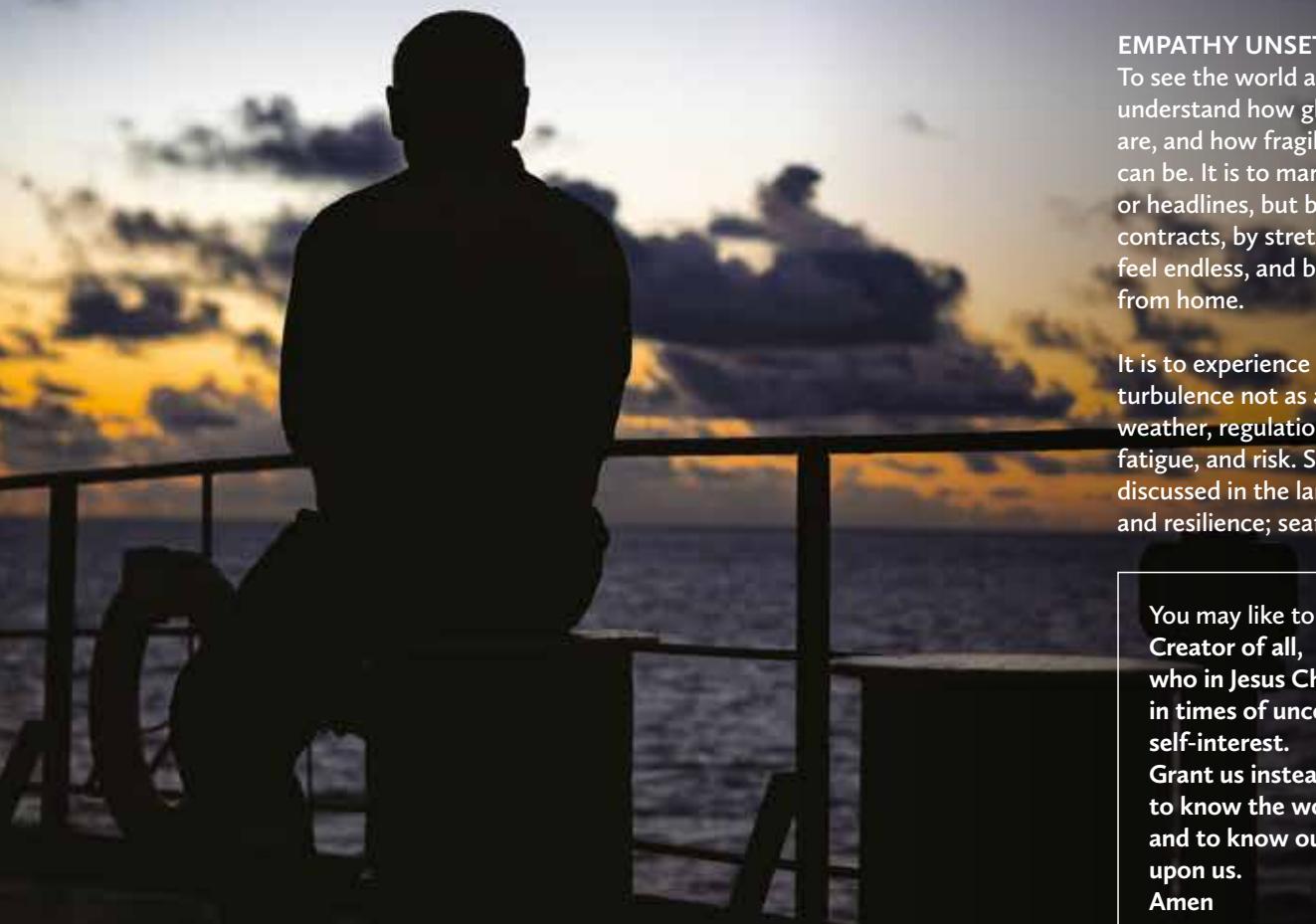
Scan to find out why you should support the Mission with a legacy gift.



# PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

The discipline of seeing life through the eyes of others becomes not a luxury, but a necessity.

By Secretary General, The Ven. Dr Peter Rouch



As 2026 begins, the world feels as if it is breathing unevenly. Conflicts grind on, technologies accelerate faster than our ethics can keep pace, and the certainties that once framed daily life feel increasingly provisional. In such a moment, the temptation is to retreat into what is familiar, to narrow our field of vision. Yet it is precisely now that the discipline of seeing life through the eyes of others becomes not a luxury, but a necessity.

For me, that invitation leads inevitably to seafarers.

## EMPATHY UNSETTLES

To see the world as a seafarer does is to understand how global our lives truly are, and how fragile that interconnection can be. It is to mark time not by seasons or headlines, but by port calls and contracts, by stretches of ocean that can feel endless, and by the ache of absence from home.

It is to experience the world's turbulence not as abstraction but as weather, regulation, border control, fatigue, and risk. Supply chains may be discussed in the language of efficiency and resilience; seafarers live them in

their bodies. Empathy, when practised seriously, unsettles us. It asks supporters, policymakers and institutions alike to move beyond gratitude for the goods that arrive on our shelves, and to sit instead with the human cost of keeping the world moving. It asks us to notice loneliness alongside logistics, mental health alongside maritime law, dignity alongside profit.

## OUR WORK BEGINS WITH LISTENING

At The Mission to Seafarers, our work begins with listening. Chaplaincy is, at heart, an act of imaginative hospitality: stepping into another's story without trying to edit it, offering presence rather than solutions, solidarity rather than slogans. In times of uncertainty, that kind of attention is quietly radical.

Looking through the eyes of seafarers does not offer easy optimism. What it offers is clarity. It reminds us that compassion is not a distraction from hard realities, but a way of facing them honestly. As this new year unfolds, may we resist the narrowing of vision that fear so often brings, and instead choose the wider, harder, more hopeful work of seeing one another – especially those at sea.

You may like to join me in this prayer:  
**Creator of all,**  
**who in Jesus Christ has stepped into the story of our wandering lives,**  
**in times of uncertainty help us to resist the fear that would drive us inwards in self-interest.**  
**Grant us instead the courage to turn outwards,**  
**to know the world through the eyes of others**  
**and to know ourselves through your eyes of compassion that are ever fixed upon us.**  
**Amen**



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