



Caring for seafarers  
around the world



27

# Flying Angel Campaign

Supporting Seafarers  
during COVID-19



The Mission to Seafarers during the pandemic.

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# Message from the Secretary General

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The Flying Angel Campaign has been vital to The Mission to Seafarers at a critical moment. The funds it has generated are allowing us to maintain our lifeline to seafarers and their families at a time of unprecedented hardship.

To have reached such an ambitious target within just 14 weeks of launch has been a quite extraordinary achievement. That achievement is a strong testimony to the widespread recognition of the heroism of seafarers. It acknowledges the extraordinary challenges which the pandemic has brought with it for those who continue to keep global trade moving. It is also testimony to enormous generosity, particularly, but not exclusively, of the shipping industry. So many have given, often at extremely high levels. To say we are profoundly grateful is an understatement! Thanks go to all. I also want to thank our extraordinary fundraising team, particularly Jan Webber our Development Director and all who have worked with her. It is also of paramount importance that I thank Esben Poulsson who has played such an energetic and influential role at the heart of the Campaign. I am enormously proud of the way in which The Mission to Seafarers has been able to respond to this exceptional crisis. We have sustained port work whenever possible, often in very creative ways, meeting vital crew need at the front line. Our digital services, especially the newly created Chat to a Chaplain, have been transformational. Our family networks have been able to make a profound difference through intervention with families at home. This document will demonstrate the impact which these new funds are making. Your giving is transforming lives. Thank you so much.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Wright". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

**The Revd Canon Andrew Wright**  
Secretary General

The funds generated are allowing us to maintain our vital lifeline to seafarers and their families at a time of unprecedented hardship.

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# Digital Chaplaincy Services

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With the world in lockdown, we moved more of our chaplaincy services online and brought forward elements of our digital strategy in order to support more seafarers.

## Chat to a Chaplain

Chat to a Chaplain launched on Monday 20th April and has operated continuously, 24/7 since. This online messenger service provides a chat function for visitors to the websites and social media pages of The Mission to Seafarers and the International Christian Maritime Association. As nation after nation went into lockdowns of varying severity, seafarers lost their access to shore leave and to vital welfare services provided by traditional chaplaincy models. The project offers a digital chaplaincy opportunity for welfare teams unable to carry out traditional face-to-face services owing to COVID-19. To date, over 1,200 seafarers have contacted the service and we have responded to 472 requests for assistance. The service offers one-to-one pastoral counselling, advice and signposting on issues to do with Covid-19, referrals to our Family Networks in the Philippines and India, spiritual services and, where possible, referral to local port teams to provide socially-distanced support in port.

## Seafarers Happiness App

For seafarers, demand for information and essentials has never been as vital as it is right now. Thanks to your generous donations, The Mission to Seafarers has been able to develop a dynamic and agile platform, the Happy@Sea App. This will provide a live, one stop shop for seafarers looking to reach out for information and welfare support. Due in February 2021, the App is designed to fulfil three core functions:

- › **Provide Information:** Clear, live port information available on an interactive map. Seafarers can plot their voyage and contact Port Chaplains to arrange ship visits, order essentials, and process special requests.
- › **Provide Welfare:** 24/7 live communication features enabling seafarers one-on-one time with a Chaplain who can mentor them during their voyage, arrange economic, social, or spiritual assistance, and manage justice and welfare cases.
- › **Promote Wellbeing:** Interactive and engaging mental health and wellbeing tracker build around our Happiness Index. This allows seafarers to monitor their wellbeing, download Mental Health resources, and access MtS publications like The Sea.



Chat to a  
Chaplain ↗

Mi-Fi Units ↘



The Happy@Sea App is vital at a time when ship visiting and shore leave face heavy restrictions. Ordering essential, accessing live information, and receiving virtual counselling over an App is the future of life at Sea. Happy@Sea is our solution, providing a safety net to seafarers facing adversity and empowering them to feel in control during these uncertain times.

#### Mi-Fi units for seafarers

Good quality connectivity is always a key priority for seafarers, and never more so than during these long and seemingly endless periods away from loved ones. Sadly, however, there are many who are without access to the internet on their vessels or whose only option is to pay high charges for access. Faced with extended contracts and unable to get ashore, these seafarers are desperate to communicate with the outside world and most importantly, their loved ones. The Flying Angel Campaign is enabling us to provide our centres with mobile MiFi units (individual Wi-Fi internet units). These units are 'lent' to ships by our chaplains, giving seafarers vital internet access whilst they are in port. Following a successful trial in the UK, the MiFi units are now being made available in our stations around the world.

In Bangkok, MtS Chaplain the Revd Dave Hinay has two units which he is lending to ships and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Up to 10 crew members can connect to the Wi-Fi at a time, enabling them to enjoy free internet access for the days they are in port. *"Seafarers are so happy that they can contact their families whilst in port,"* says Revd Dave. *"The gift of Wi-Fi has visibly improved the crew's mood during this troubled time."*

The latest Seafarers Happiness Index report revealed that the stress and worry of being trapped onboard was greatly alleviated by access to the internet. Seafarers reported that they were able to keep in touch with family, perform key administration tasks, and keep abreast of news thanks to online access. Access to communication is crucial to the state of mind of crews and being able to offer this vital access has greatly enhanced our ministry.

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# Maintaining our port work during COVID-19

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Where possible, we have carried out socially-distanced face-to-face services and are busy preparing our centres to welcome seafarers back when it is safe to do so.

## Safer Seafarers' Centres

We have been working to ensure our 121 Flying Angel Seafarers' Centres are 'safe' for crew coming ashore. Each of our centres is having a deep clean before opening to ensure that we can receive seafarers in a safe and COVID-19 clear environment. Measures to protect seafarers and staff include: new rigid Perspex screens fitted at receptions, bar areas, shops or food serving areas, hand sanitiser units at entrances and other appropriate locations, plastic seat coverings on any fabric-covered seats, and floor direction signage to designate pathways around centres. Centres are maintaining a high level of daily cleaning and have also been equipped with decontamination 'foggers' to ensure that they can regularly deep clean dependent upon traffic. We know that seafarers will continue to have limited access to shore-based facilities, and consequently, our centres will become even more vital as a 'Seafarers Covid-19 safe' environment.

Mark Classen, Port Chaplain for Richards Bay in South Africa, commented on the difference that the new measures have made for the centre:

*"We are very grateful for the funding for PPE, as this has brought us in line with the very strict protocols in our port. The centre signage and protective equipment ensures that our staff, and any visitors, are not only alert but kept safe. Seafarers unfortunately are still not allowed shore leave in our Port of Richards Bay as yet, but we are ready, willing and able to serve them the minute they step through our doors."*

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## Minibus Makeovers

A Mission minibus is a common sight in ports across the globe. They provide a vital service to seafarers wishing to access our centres and visit life outside port. The Flying Angel Campaign has enabled us to refurbish our fleet and mitigate risks presented by Covid-19. This meant applying new standardized operating procedures for fleet management to protect our staff and maintain the confidence of passengers. Provisions vary depending on location and local restrictions, however basic requirements include installing PPE packs, safety signage, and deep cleaning materials including 'foggers'. In the Philippines, our minibus provides daily multiple services around Metro Manila, providing transit for seafarers between port and quarantine centres, delivering vital supplies to seafaring families and transporting on-off crew cycles for shipping agents. The bus has been transformed with washable seat covers, Perspex screens and strict procedures requiring staff wear enhanced PPE.

Our Support Worker, Arnel commented:

*"At first the new procedures and PPE were challenging. It was hot, humid, and the volume of work was exhausting. However, when I saw the desperation in the seafarers' faces, stranded in quarantine and trying to get home, I knew I was doing something important. Soon I got used to the PPE and I used humor to support seafarers riding with us. We gave out goody bags with PPE items and treats because we know they are expensive. We wanted to show them someone cares."*

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Protecting  
Seafarers



Minibus  
Refurbishment

Making our vehicles safe fills seafarers with confidence that they can safely access employment or return home. Whether in Manila, Southampton, or Mombasa seafarers have expressed their gratitude for providing safety during uncertain times.

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# Spotlight on India: Supporting seafarers and feeding families

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As well as supporting those working at sea, The Mission to Seafarers has supported over 1,000 families with accommodation and food.

## Supporting Stranded Students in the UK

At the time that the lockdown came into force in March, there were estimated to be around 255 Indian nationals studying at maritime colleges across the UK. The closure of all universities and the cancellation of flights to India left these students stranded, forced to stay in the country well beyond the period they had budgeted for. With the support of ISWAN's Seafarers Emergency Fund, the Mission provided urgent help with rent and food costs to over 100 of these students who were facing serious financial difficulty.

One of those helped was Sanil, who had come to the UK to undertake his Chief Engineer exams.

*"I was totally upset and worried as there was no ray of light for getting back to my loved ones and uncertainty everywhere," he said. Now safely back in Kerala with his family, he described the Mission as a 'home away from home'. "It was a great relief for me, and I started feeling that at least somebody is there to look after me in this crisis. Thanks a lot for the selfless and unconditional support given by the Mission to Seafarers."*

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For those who were in the country with dependents, knowing that they had a place to stay and could afford basic necessities was particularly vital. Ashwatth, a Chief Officer, had arrived in the UK in early March with his wife and 2-year-old son to undertake his Master Mariner examinations and was not at all prepared for the costs involved in an extended stay:

*"We had to pay our landlord and manage for groceries. We were finishing our money. In a foreign country with wife and a small kid with less money was leaving our family in stress. The Mission to Seafarers came up like a*

*flying angel for help. As soon as we registered with MtS, they helped us to pay our rent and grocery costs."*

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The Indian High Commission began to arrange evacuation flights for the stranded Indian nationals, but the high cost of the flights combined with the family's already strained finances, left them in further difficulty. The Mission stepped in to pay for the family's flights back to India at the end of April. Reflecting on the help he received, Ashwatth commented:

*"I would like to thank you for the invaluable support you provided to me during this pandemic. There are many people who got stuck due to COVID 19, I was one of them and it would not be possible for me to return my home so easily without help of Mission to Seafarers."*

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## Feeding Families

In Tuticorin, meanwhile, the local Mission team have been helping seafarer and fisher families affected by the pandemic. The lockdown in India has left many facing unemployment and thousands of families are struggling to meet the cost of basic necessities. Widows, the elderly and the disabled are among the worst affected. Working with local authorities and parish priests, the MtS Chaplain and a team of volunteers have been providing vital food packages and sanitizers to hundreds of these families.

Families are given a token and asked to attend a church or college campus where they receive a parcel with essential commodities including oil, rice, dhal, vegetables and hand sanitizers. Already over 700 families have been helped with further distribution days planned.



← Ashwatth  
and his family

Tuticorin



"It would not be possible for  
me to return to my home so  
easily without help of Mission  
to Seafarers"

# Thank you to our generous supporters

## Platinum

## Gold

## Silver

## Bronze

			
			
David H Pellatt			
			
			
			
			
			
			

"Telling my experience to The Mission to Seafarers alleviates the anxiety I am sometimes experiencing. I know I can trust you guys because every time I go to the Mission's centres, it refreshes my spirit,"

John a Filipino seafarer





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The Mission to Seafarers



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