



The Apostleship of the Sea of the United States of America

The Diocese of Beaumont

1500 Jefferson Drive

Port Arthur, Texas 77642

(409) 982-5111

(409) 985-5945

sinclair@pernet.net

President's Report for AOSUSA 2005 General Meeting California Maritime Academy Vallejo, California

Overview Since April 2004 General Meeting at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy:

1. The Cruise Ship Priest Program has been very successful, and according to our cruise ship companies, the presence of a priest on board consistently receives the highest marks on their evaluation sheets of any of the enrichment personnel on their cruises.
 - a. Renewals have gone well, and we have approximately the same number of cruise ship priests as last year. In her report, our Secretary General will be able to be more specific.
 - b. We now have three contracted cruise lines: Celebrity, Holland-America and Norwegian Cruise Lines. Our AOS National Director met with Disney Cruises, and they have promised to come on board soon. We have and continue to meet with frustration with Linda Givens at Royal Caribbean, and are at a dead end with her.
 - c. We have received some great press over the last year:
 - i. An article in *National Catholic Register*
 - ii. An article in the *Miami Herald* that was picked up the Associated Press, and carried throughout the country
 - iii. An article from Catholic News Service that was carried in many diocesan and archdiocesan newspapers.
2. I and our vice president, Tom Matyok, continues to monitor the issue of Shore Leave and D-1 Visas for foreign mariners. There is nothing happening on this issue right now. However, the new *Transportation Worker Identification Cards (TWIC)* are being field tested in some areas. We will be monitoring the regulations that are developed for these documents so that maritime ministers will not be excluded in the access to *TWIC's*.
3. The AOSUSA Administrative Board submitted an *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of foreign seafarers and their access to U.S. Courts in tort cases. This was done in March of 2004. In January of this year, the U.S. Court of Appeals issued their ruling against seafarers' traditional right to U.S. courts. The law firm of Holland & Knight reported:

"The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit ruled that foreign seamen and their representatives must arbitrate their claims in a foreign country in accordance with their employment agreements, despite the fact that the deaths and injuries were incurred while the ship was in a U.S. port. In the instant case, plaintiffs or

their decedents were crewmembers on the cruise ship NORWAY. One of the ship's boilers exploded, killing six and injuring four crewmembers. All crewmembers had signed employment agreements providing that claims for death or personal injury would be arbitrated in the Philippines, where the crewmembers had entered into the agreements. The court held that the arbitration provisions in the employment agreements were enforceable under the United Nations Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards and its U.S. implementing legislation."

4. A number of tasks have been completed since the last general meeting. They are:
 - a. The Star of the Sea Award was Present to the monks at St. Paul Abbey for Brother Marinus/Capt. LaRue by our Atlantic Coast board member, Jon Furukawa.
 - b. Tracie Middleton took over the layout of *Catholic Maritime News*, and they have been published in a much more timely manner over the last year.
 - c. Additional avenues of communication have been developed for our members:
 - i. Cruise Ship Priest List Serve
 - ii. Port Ministry List Serve
 - iii. AOSUSA Yahoo Discussion Group (Our Secretary General can help you to subscribe to this group during the conference.)
 - iv. Posting of all *Catholic Maritime News* issues and corporate documents on the web (www.aos-usa.org)
 - d. Encourage our membership to access and use these different avenues of communication.

5. A number of tasks need to be addressed by this conference and in 2005:
 - a. Review our dues structure
 - b. Establish a new committee on seafarer medical issues
 - c. Continue to recruit additional cruise lines
 - d. Increase membership among seafarers and cadet/trainees so that AOSUSA can become the Professional Catholic Mariner's Organization in the U.S.
 - e. Monitor ILO, Coast Guard, Homeland Security and Merchant Marine issues, and respond on behalf of AOSUSA when it is appropriate.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Fr. Sinclair Oubre, J.C.L.
President
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