

The Human Elements in Shipping: A Maritime Chaplain's Perspective

**API Conference
San Diego, CA
June 24, 2008**

*The Rev. James D. Von Dreele
CEO/Executive Director
Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey*

Introduction

In my work as the Executive Director and Port Chaplain at the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) and in the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA), I have attended many maritime business conferences. What has struck me over the years is that seafarers are often only an afterthought, if ever mentioned, during these heady deliberations.

If you look around here today, there are few active seafarers in our midst. Yet, they are the crucial element in shipping. Slowly this industry is beginning to realize the central importance of seafarers. We often refer to the seafarers as "recruitment and retention" issue. The crunch is coming and the industry is awakening to the fact it must deal with the human element in its business. Maritime chaplains have a lot to share about seafarer needs and how to improve their living and working conditions.

What are Seafarers' Main Needs? Why Should We Care?

In 2007 the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) published a study, *Port Based Welfare Services for Seafarers*, conducted by the Seafarers International Reach Centre (SIRC) of Cardiff University, Wales. SIRC looked at a previous survey done in 1996 and compared those results with their broad based survey of seafarer welfare services provided by maritime port ministries and welfare organizations world wide. From a chaplain's point of view, it was a sobering report outlining the profound needs of seafarers and the gaps in services by port based maritime ministries.

Perhaps the most eye opening graphic from the SIRC report is the following chart of the top six services port ministries provide seafarers and the importance they attach to these services:

Port Based Welfare Services

Services	1996 Study	2006 Study	Net Change
Transport to Shopping	70%	85%	15%
International Phone	79%	81%	2%
Transport to Centers	n/a	72%	n/a
Cheap Phone Cards	n/a	71%	n/a
Internet & Email	n/a	68%	n/a
Counseling	45%	57%	12%

Clearly from this survey, seafarers need access to shore leave and communication services. Technology has become a major factor with the advent of phone cards, Internet and email – all unheard of or unavailable in 1996.

The final portion of the report analyzes what the maritime industry does to provide welfare services. It is not an encouraging report. Here are some of the findings:

- 50+% of the companies surveyed have no welfare budget for their ships.
- Many debit seafarers' salaries for welfare/entertainment services – all without permission.
- Very few ships have email services for their crews.
- Many owners and captains have very paternalistic attitudes towards seafarers. They “know what is best” for their crews.

And we wonder why we have recruitment and retention issues in this industry. Given the base line of seafaring working and living conditions on the majority of ships, why would anyone want to go to sea?

Other Factors Influencing Crew Morale

We are now in the 5th year of ISPS and port security enforcement continues to consume shore and ship operations. Post 9/11, seafarers bore the brunt of the over reaction to security concerns for several years. The immediate instinct was to block all shore leave access. After 2004 this eased up substantially. But, I am sad to say, a number of terminals, predominately petrochemicals, still have policies that either block shore leave and crew change outs or charge prohibitively high security fees (\$200-300) to transport each seafarer. NAMMA conducted a survey this past spring and found dozens of terminals in the New England, Mid Atlantic and Gulf Coast regions with these policies. The fundamental right for seafarer shore leave is being denied on a routine basis throughout the country. This is one more thing that discourages seafarers after being at sea for many weeks and months.

Turn around times also affect shore leave opportunities. It is estimated that 80% of all ships have a turn around time of less than 24 hours. In a bulk port like the Delaware River, turn

around times average between 24 and 36 hours. If a ship shifts to a second or third terminal, shore leave becomes virtually impossible.

At SCI we have 10 years of statistics of our ship visits and services. Remarkably, shore leave levels have averaged only between 20-25% per ship. There are a number of factors beyond turn around times that account for this low percentage: working, need for rest, lack of US Visa and depression. The implementation TWIC will restrict any crew members who currently walk through a terminal for shore leave. It will be up to the local maritime ministry center to provide the TWIC escorted service for shore leave. Most, if not all, seafarers center resources are quite stretched as it is to meet this increasing demand for transportation.

Finally, chaplains and ship visitors often confront the clash of cultures and nationalities aboard ship. Certain nationalities should never be put together on the same ship. Racism and abuse are prevalent on many open registry ships today. To compound all this, the seafarer has to deal with the immense isolation aboard ship. He is gone for up to nine months and rarely has an opportunity to contact his family.

A New Wrinkle – Criminalization and the Environment

Since the grounding of the Exxon Valdez, governments have been zealous in pursuing prosecutions of criminal offenses. There are enough horror stories of prosecutors jailing seafarers for months at a time, denying them due process and using their incarceration as leverage against the ship owners. This is all well known and documented. Unfortunately, some of the owners have been very negligent to deserve these prosecutions.

But the new wrinkle for the last few years has been the aggressive prosecution by the US Department of Justice of pollution violations aboard ship. (Many other countries are starting the same process.) In the last three years we have had 8 crews detained locally as material witnesses or defendants in these criminal investigations. These detentions typically take 6-9 months, depending on whether the ship owner decides to fight the allegations or settle with DOJ.

These seafarers are housed in a local hotel for the duration. DOJ & USCG require that the owner pay their wages, housing and per diem during the investigation and court proceedings. Seafarers are not permitted to go home or get a job during this time. Boredom is an ever present reality. But more significantly, they worry about whether they will ever work as seamen again. Several manning agents in their home countries have informed the families about the blacklisting process if their husbands continued to cooperate with the DOJ investigations.

At first, the maritime industry blamed it on the whistleblowers on board ship that were looking for a reward. My experience is that the seafarers take a great deal of risk in exposing these violations and they do so because of physical or emotional abuse from the officers aboard ship.

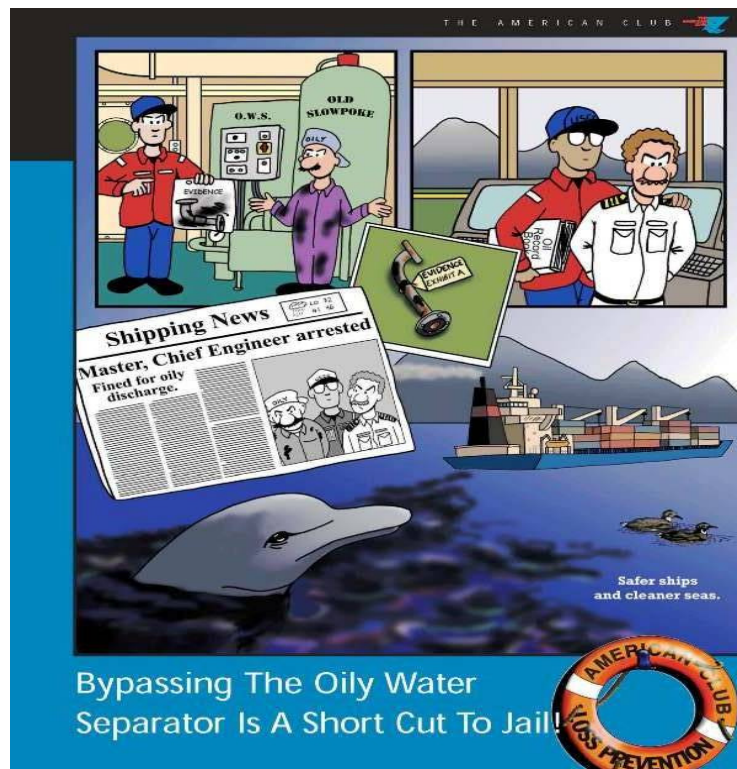
It seems the more DOJ prosecutes these cases, the more there are. I am reminded the 1950's cowboy movies that I grew up on. The typical scene was the cowboy gun slicker who comes to

town. The bar empties out and one foolish local challenges him to a duel. Of course, the gun slicker wins, carves another notch in his gun handle and rides off into the sunset. These environmental cases are relatively clear cut and DOJ always wins. But does it solve the problem? The dirty little secret is that the technology is not there on most ships to deal with the disposal of oil water sludge on board. Seafarers are caught in the middle of these prosecutions.

Psychologists often describe neurotic behavior as doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results. For the last couple of years many in the industry have been raising the concern to work on compliance rather than criminal prosecution. I am pleased to say there is movement in this arena. The USCG is working with companies that voluntarily comply with a new program to address the issues on board the ship, thereby avoiding criminal prosecution. This is a hopeful sign.

Environmental Education – Locally and Globally

Because of our experience in Philadelphia regarding crew detentions for environmental investigations, we decided to begin an educational effort to teach seafarers about the need to protect the environment and the consequences of breaking the law. Over the last 18 months we have been placing two resources on board every arrival in our port: ABS' "Reducing Port State Control Detention Factor" and UK P&I Club's "Marine Pollution Prevention Pocket Checklist". In addition to these publications, we also post the American Club's poster warning of the consequences of polluting at sea. This poster so affected one seafarer that he asked to meet with the USCG to reveal his ship's pollution violations.



On a global basis, NAMMA is a founding member the newly formed North American Marine Environment Protection Association (NAMEPA) of the International Maritime Organization. Among its other endeavors, NAMEPA will distribute materials highlighted above to the 150 port ministries in North America that NAMMA serves. These educational materials will reach the vast majority of ships calling in the ports of North America. NAMEPA is also working with various online educational programs for children to help raise awareness of the maritime industry's initiatives regarding the environment and the great importance of world-wide shipping.

In this and other industry forums there is a rising awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and what is being done already. On a local basis ports are going green in terms of there operations, reducing their carbon imprint in the port. These are all hopeful signs.

Final Thoughts

- We need to see seafarers as our partners in protecting the environment. They can no longer be placed in the middle of owner negligence and governmental prosecution.
- Recruitment and retention issues are driving a lot of discussion in the maritime industry and none too soon.
- As an industry we need to respect the dignity of seafarers as professionals and not as a commodity.
- One way to do this is to provide real benefits for them and their families, such as family health insurance, readily available communications services and robust entertainment/welfare services aboard ship.
- This makes good business sense because it will encourage loyalty and healthy morale. Several leading shipping companies already do this for their seafarers with great results.
- Finally, companies need to adopt an ethic of corporate responsibility to do what is not only good for the investor but also for their workers and the environment.

For more information, contact:

The Rev. James D. Von Dreele
CEO & Executive Director
Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey
475 N. 5th St.
Philadelphia, PA 19123
215-940-9900
vondreele@sciphiladelphia.org