

# Crew Connect Europe Conference in Partnership with ICMA

## An Executive Summary

Many valuable lessons can be learnt from the extremely complex Covid-19 situation society finds itself in. Analysts are saying that many of the challenges we are experiencing in society right now, are not necessarily new and were expected to increase in complexity in the years to come. The Covid-19 Pandemic simply speeded up a lot of these challenges as we need to deal with it right now in a shorter period of time.

### 1. Are We Ready - Best Practice and Resources

#### **Change: Vision vs Victim.**

What is our personal and corporate approach towards the challenges that we face in our respective industries and ministries after more than a year into the pandemic? Do we continue to play the victim part and allow that limitations dominate our way of thinking and doing or do we accept the reality of the day and start operating as people of vision and hope while adjusting to what we are doing? Adjustment does not dismiss the difficulty of the situation, but progress rather than passiveness is very much needed.

#### **Overload: Conflicting information.**

It is true that many people and institutions are completely overloaded with conflicting information when it gets to the pandemic and in a large way responsible for creating a "victim" scenario. We are not referring here to people that fall ill with and the devastating impact of Covid-19. Working through fake news and real news is no easy task. It is therefore important that employees and volunteers are briefed on a regular basis about the changing scenarios of Covid-19 levels and what is expected from then in the workplace.

#### **Principals: Values and Conscience.**

To synchronize the above is almost an impossibility within a worldwide pandemic like this. Not only play religion and belief systems and enormous part in this, but government policies in countries on the pandemic in its different stages with legal consequences for offenders, make entities in both the public and private sectors nervous and hesitant to act. The above filters through to the individual who needs to decide on what action is best for him/her to take.

### 2. Management

What has always been a challenge under normal conditions in a fast-growing industry like shipping (commercial and fishing), has become even more complex during the pandemic. Ship owners do not want their ships to stand still... cargo owners want their cargo to be delivered... end-users need the products and seafarers want to go home when their contracts expire. In this chain of command or rather demand, it is the seafarers and their families who pay the highest price because they are "*out of sight and out of mind*". Most end-users know little about the difficulty under which seafarers are working. Advocacy for the industry has become more important than ever.

Shipping such as the container industry is showing the highest boom in history in the past year with a 400% increase in rates and little care to share some of these profits with seafarers. Capitalism is

exceeding and dominating the industry in many post-war regions. An occupation in seafaring is becoming increasingly unpopular due to the risk to be on a vessel.

### **3. Calling for a Fair Future for Seafarers**

The annual Day of the Seafarer (25 June) is for example providing an opportunity to advocate for higher standards of working conditions. Seafarers can be asked to share their views about their future and what they are experiencing. IMO social media channels together with many other institutions are making use of days like this in an attempt to put more pressure on the seafaring industry and to create greater public awareness.

### **4. The Crew Change Crisis – Lessons Learned and Future Challenges**

Research shows that the conditions which lead to the current crew change crisis are still there, draining the resources of owners, ship managers and seafarers alike. This is still the main challenge respondents have identified for crewing and operations during 2020 while asking the following questions: What actions have maritime organizations, associations and owners taken to alleviate the crew change crisis? What could have been done more or differently, in hindsight? What is different this year? How to ensure we do not hit a further breaking point?

### **5. Seafarers and the Vaccine against COVID-19**

The vaccine against COVID-19 has given many of us hope that we can finally get back to normal and is conceivably, a big part of the reason for the optimism we all felt at the end of 2020, as the vaccine development was entering the home stretch in many countries. For seafarers, a profession so heavily dependent on international travel and free movement, the vaccine would be a silver bullet, if only they could have it. Various institutions are working hard to make this happen.

### **6. Connecting with Seafarers during the Pandemic**

- How did port chaplains and ship visitors connect with seafarers during the pandemic until now?
- How have they done ship visits, personal shopping, communicating using social media or other connections with seafarers?
- What have they learned during the pandemic that might be useful for the future?

In many places the bond between seafarers and chaplains have been strengthened. We need to start thinking like the Apostle Paul who could not be with the church all the time but made contact through writing to them and keeping contact in that way. It is true that making contact through social media takes longer for example, needs patience, and requires reading between the lines before you understand what the challenge is. Chaplains do not have to be professional counselors but caring and understanding the seafarer and their communities in general, can make a big difference.

Shore Leave stays a challenge because of policies that differ between maritime companies and governments. Governments are more relaxed than companies. Companies are scared because they are the ones who lose profits when a ship needs to go into quarantine for example. Ship captains are even more stricken in this regard than governments and ship companies as they simply cannot risk the entire crew falling ill with Covid-19 while at sea. Ships most of the time do not have spare crew onboard.

Gift parcels stays a good and popular way of connecting. Seafarers are keen to receive parcels. The Ship Visitors App can be helpful here where chaplains in different ports can see when last a ship was visited with e.g. notes been made about the ship and purpose of the visit by previous chaplains.

Many older chaplains are currently withdrawn which is hard on them. In some places their services are ended and replaced with younger chaplains. At other places they are re-deployed to man social media platforms and chat lines – there are testimonies from these chaplains who say they are busier than ever on these chat lines. Other older chaplains are redeployed to help with making up parcels to be delivered to the ships by those who do have access. Less chaplains in port put more pressure on the younger ones in port. Some organizations are successfully using volunteers inside the port area and residential communities to assist with groundwork. In some places more volunteers are getting involved than ever before.

## 7. Covid-19 Fatigue

It is true that this is busy happening in many places and that we will be challenged by the pandemic's current reality and aftereffects for many years to come. It is of utmost importance that everyone does whatever he or she can to help the Seafaring Industry. No contribution is too small.

## 8. Closure

Although Crew Connect Europe was mostly aimed at Europe's Seafaring Industry, many other areas in the world benefit too from information that was disclosed and discussed. The Fishing Seafaring Industry (formal and informal) was also mentioned, but not discussed during this conference. The Fishing Seafaring Industry is and stays an enormous and much bigger challenge at all levels of involvement with devastating results for seafarer, their communities and nature!

*Organizations were encouraged during the conference not to tackle all the challenges at once, but rather to choose one or two that can make a difference at this moment in a seafarer's life as well as their communities back home. It might be a good idea for organizations to set up a mini-zoom conference between their own chaplains and committees, not to repeat what we already know, but more so to share light and some solutions about what to do in response to the above information and challenges.*

Many seafaring service orientated organizations are at a final crossroad: do they close like many others already did since the pandemic started, do they merge with other like-minded organizations or is it possible to continue "independently" and how?

What does "**Are We Ready - Best Practice and Resources**" mean to each chaplain with supporting organization and how do we exit from a position of being the victim to ACT again with a Vision?

**Date of Conference: 21 – 22 June 2021**

**YouTube Documentary by Aljazeera: Forgotten at Sea**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKiCW4vYBE4&list=WL&index=51>