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MEDIA RELEASE

Bishops with ports in their dioceses have gathered with Stella Maris Australia leaders to consider how the Church can minister effectively to seafarers – a workforce that continues to suffer the impact of COVID-19.

Almost 20 bishops, in Sydney for the biannual meeting of Australian bishops, met earlier last week with Stella Maris's Bishop Promoter Bosco Puthur, national director Roslyn Rajasingam and Ray Collins, chair of the national committee.

Bishop Puthur challenged his brother bishops, saying "unless we 'own' this ministry, it won't flourish."

"We have to help the seafarers, otherwise we are doing an injustice to them," he said.

Mrs Rajasingam said while pandemic restrictions are easing in many parts of society, life for those working on the seas continues to be trickier than normal.

"Many seafarers struggled to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and many were forced to remain at sea for protracted periods, unable to return home," she said.

"Despite this, seafarers have continued to provide vital supply lines during the pandemic's international border lockdowns."

Stella Maris has sought to maintain as much pastoral support for seafarers as possible during the pandemic. The ministry provided care packs and procured other supplies for the crew. It also offered opportunities for them to get vaccinated when that might otherwise have been difficult.

Some of the bishops in attendance at the meeting spoke about the benefit of ecumenical collaboration in ports, most notably with the Mission to Seafarers, an Anglican ministry.

The ongoing financial challenge of funding ministry to a large number of ports was another of the key discussion points.

It is hoped that Sea Sunday, held on the second Sunday of July each year, will have its first celebration uninterrupted by COVID-19 in three years to highlight the ministry and seek financial support.

Stella Maris and Mission to Seafarers have lobbied to see Australia follow the lead of other countries that have governments support the funding of shore-based seafarers welfare providers, aware of the benefits of such outreach to a vital workforce.

The meeting also provided the opportunity for Bishop Puthur to be thanked for many years of service as Bishop Promoter for Stella Maris, including through a period of significant change locally.

The announcement of the new Bishop Promoter will take place shortly.

Find out more about Stella Maris at: <https://stellamarisaustralia.org/>