

Catholic, Anglican bishops support Top End ministry to seafarers

The Catholic and Anglican dioceses in the Northern Territory have forged a partnership to deliver pastoral care and other practical support to seafarers who dock in Darwin's port.

Plans to work together at the Darwin Ecumenical Seafarers Centre were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic but were resumed and are bearing fruit.

Leaders of the Catholic ministry Stella Maris and their Anglican colleagues from the Mission to Seafarers recently met in Darwin to progress the joint initiative.

In addition to local chaplains and staff, Stella Maris national director Roslyn Rajasingam and Stella Maris national committee chair Ray Collins attended these meetings with several stakeholders.

The delegation met with Peter Dummet, CEO of the Port of Darwin, who showed them the location of the visiting ships, the several American trucks and helicopter moving around the Chinese government leased Port.

Mr Dummett promised to resume support of the local seafarers' welfare services centre, which will now be jointly run by Mission to Seafarers and Stella Maris.

Darwin Catholic Bishop Charles Gauci said the collaboration with Mission to Seafarers is "a good news story".

"We need to provide wholistic welfare services that include pastoral and spiritual support for Christians and non-Christians," Bishop Gauci said.

"It is not about proselytising, but about respect. Working ecumenically is a superb humanitarian move."

The Catholic Diocese is involved in the employment of the Stella Maris chaplain, and the local parish is able to support the seafarers centre in providing volunteers. Mission to Seafarers currently manages the centre and reaches out to their networks.

Stella Maris Australia Bishop Promoter Timothy Norton SVD welcomes the initiative and said that he is "delighted that a small ecumenical team of Stella Maris and Mission to Seafarers is now available to serve seamen when they arrive in Darwin. A Christian message of hope and fraternal care is very important for workers who have been at sea for months at a time."

"If we maximise the use of resources in the port and work together effectively, ultimately we will be able to best serve the pastoral and practical needs of seafarers," Mrs Rajasingam said.