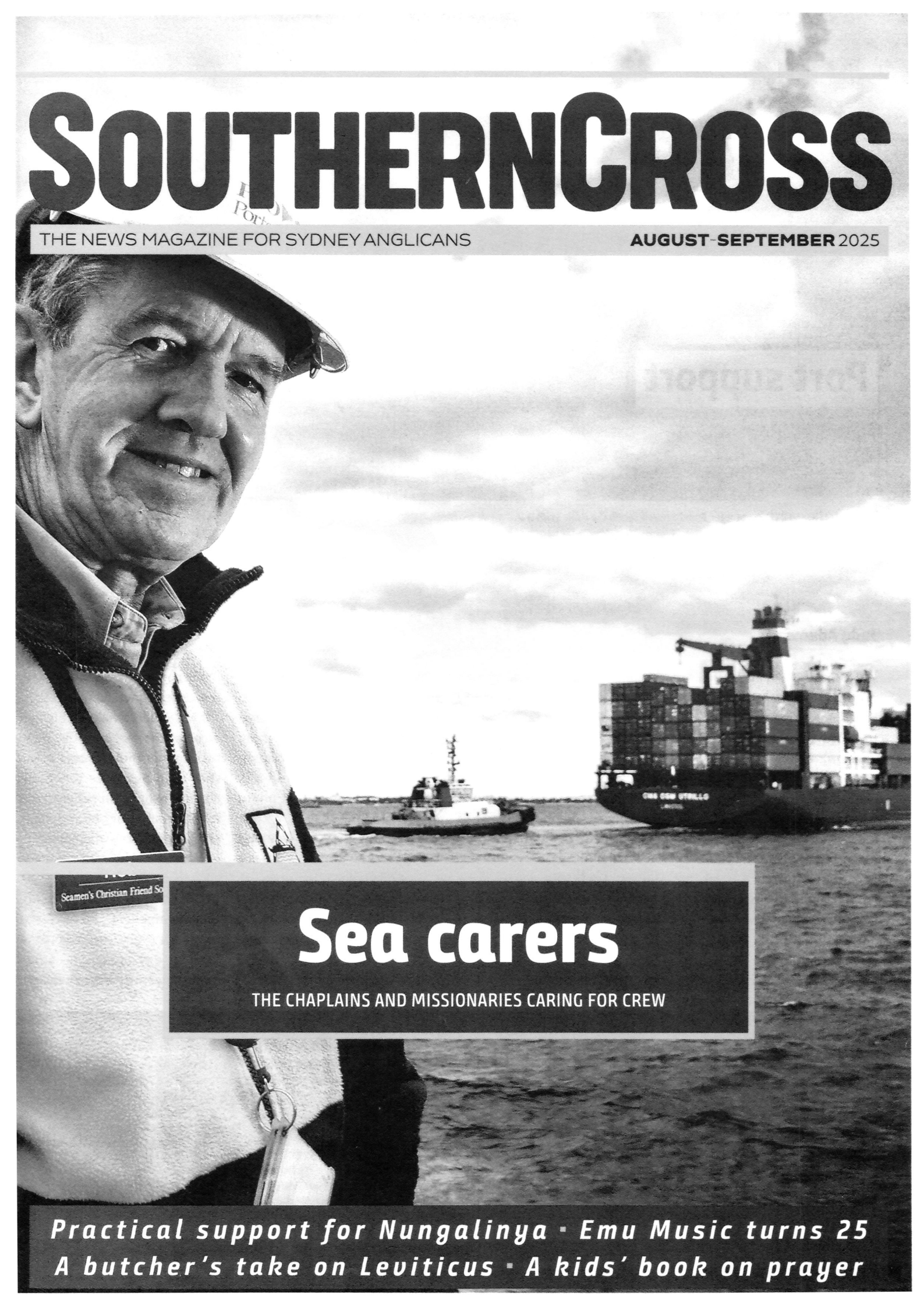


SOUTHERNCROSS

A black and white photograph of a man in a white jacket and cap, smiling, with a large cargo ship in the background. The man is in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The ship is in the background, on the water. The sky is cloudy.

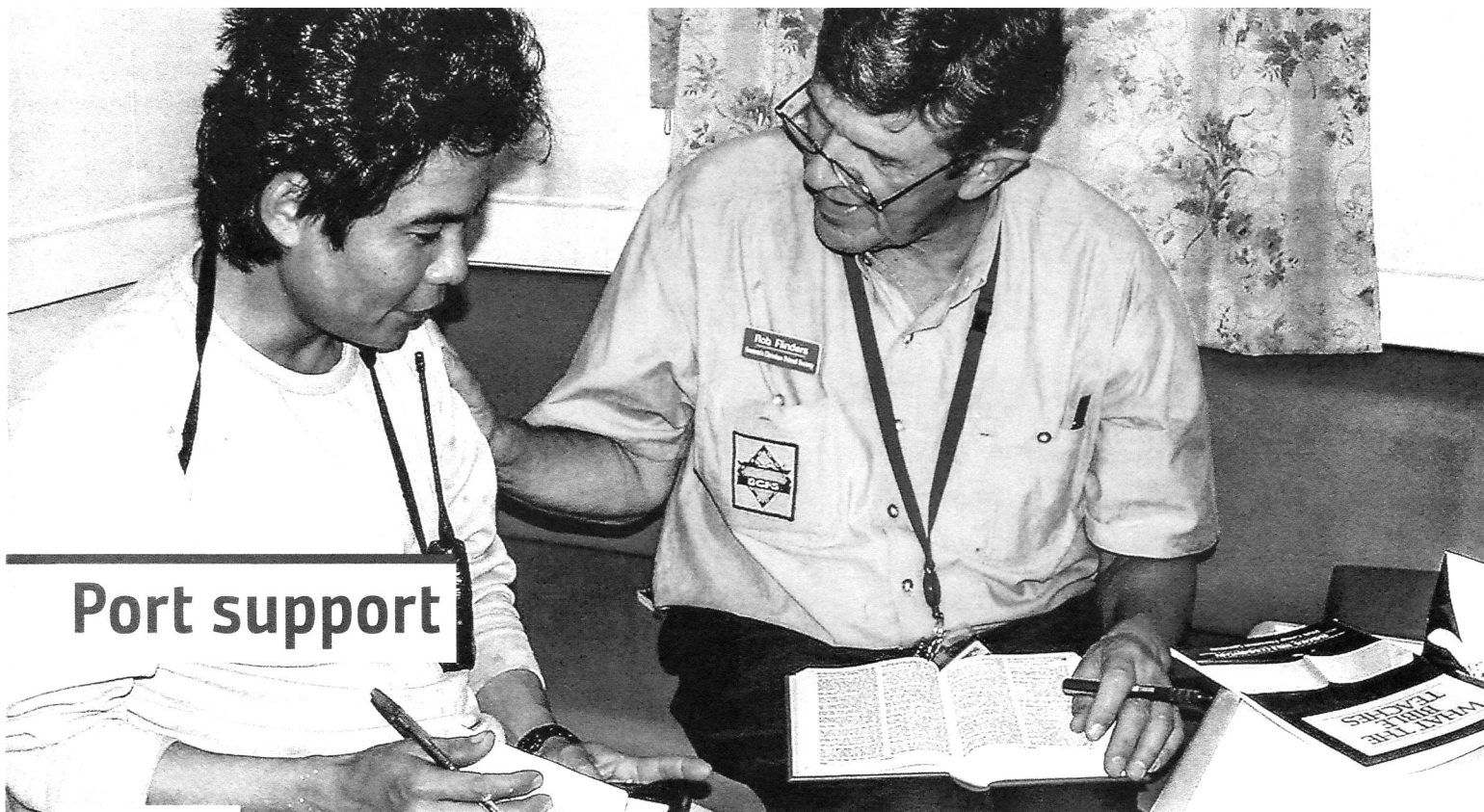
THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2025

Sea carers

THE CHAPLAINS AND MISSIONARIES CARING FOR CREW

*Practical support for Nungalinga · Emu Music turns 25
A butcher's take on Leviticus · A kids' book on prayer*



Port support

Time in the word: a younger Rob Flinders reads the Bible with a Burmese seafarer.

Judy Adamson

We've all seen them – the massive bulk carriers or container ships that seem too huge to float and yet move vast quantities of goods and materials across our oceans each day.

From a distance the ships often look deserted apart from their cargo, but on board the seafarers are busy doing everything from cooking to navigation and engineering maintenance.

It's a lonely life, separated from family for many months at a time, and this is where

organisations like the Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS) and Mission to Seafarers can be a source of physical, mental and spiritual support.

Rob Flinders, an 85-year-old former seafarer, has been a port missionary with the SCFS for 25 years, based most of that time at Port Botany. It's voluntary, but he works five days a week – sometimes seven, depending on when the ships come in, if there's an emergency and what stage the seafarers have reached in their Bible studies.

"When I visit each ship, I have two aims," he says. "One is to engage with non-Christian seafarers and to offer them bibles and Bible courses to study. The other aim is to find any Christian seafarers that might be on board the ships.

"Generally, they are few and far between but if I find a Christian seafarer my aim is to encourage him, provide him with fellowship, provide him with motivation to reach out to his non-Christian crewmates and to help him do that.

"I provide him with the resources he would need."

If Mr Flinders visits a ship and some of the seafarers decide to take up his Bible course offer, that ship becomes a regular commitment for him. Each time it returns to port he will visit, see how the crew members are getting on and how they're doing with their Bible course.

"The courses that we use are very evangelical," he says. "At the end of every lesson there are 12 multiple-choice questions, and their answers give me an insight

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COVER: Rob Flinders at Port Botany.

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into what they understand and don't understand.

"It occasionally happens that I've got two, sometimes three ships in port that I have to visit. And the ships arrive and depart 24 hours a day – there's no deference to the weekend or Sunday! I occasionally go after church on Sunday morning or on Saturday afternoon before dinner. Whatever is needed."

There are about 20 Christian seafarers with whom Mr Flinders is in regular contact, and most are faithfully leading weekly Bible studies on board with their crewmates. This is an important step, as he is only able to visit personally when a ship is in port here – which, for ships trading to Southeast Asia, is once every six to seven weeks in a contract that usually lasts for nine months.

"Seafarers rarely have an opportunity to go to church," he explains. "They spend 85 per cent of those nine months out on the high seas, not in port. And in many, many ports they may



Listen and support Retchie Salvador on board ship with a group of appreciative seafarers.

never see a chaplain or another Christian at all.

"I love that SCFS is evangelical... getting the Scriptures physically into the hands of the seafarers and encouraging them to read and study the Bible."

FINDING WAYS TO CONNECT

Mission to Seafarers (MtS) and the Seamen's Christian Friend Society were set up in the mid-19th century in the UK by men keen to show Christian love and

support to those who worked on the seas.

In ports across the world, both organisations offer practical care to seafarers as well as holding out the hope of the gospel. And if you're thinking that's quite

PRAYER THAT IT WILL PROSPER

The Rev Retchie Salvador was made a deacon in the Sydney Diocese earlier this year, which prompted a huge celebration by the Filipino community in western Sydney, where he lives.

"When Filipinos go abroad, they always find a place where they can meet other Filipinos, so we have a very big community," he says. "The news [that I was going to be ordained] was tossed from one person to many, so everyone was invited. The Filipino community prepared two whole pigs and many other things as well... so it was a big celebration, just like a big wedding."

Mr Salvador's mother and brother travelled from the Philippines for his ordination, along with two uncles and aunts. "In the Philippines, the entire village would celebrate the ordination, so that's what happened here!"

He says he is "deeply humbled and honoured" to be the first person of Igorot heritage (an ethnic group from the Cordillera region in northern Luzon) to be ordained in the Sydney Diocese.

"This has been a source of pride and joy for the Filipino Cordilleran community in Sydney, as it reflects not only



Retchie Salvador is surrounded by supporters after his ordination.

a fulfilled calling but also the growing presence and participation of our people in the life and ministry of the church," he says.

Being a deacon is helpful not just for Mr Salvador's work among mariners, but because he is also involved in church ministry. Despite working full time for Mission to Seafarers, a couple of months ago he also began a Filipino church service in Granville.

"We know there are many Filipinos in the suburbs, and when I shared the plan with some of our community in Granville, they said, 'We'll help you – we'll support you'," he says. "It's for every Filipino, no matter what part [of the country] they come from, and we're praying that it will prosper."

a niche group, consider this: depending on the time of year, one week can see dozens of ships, carriers and tankers arrive at different Sydney terminals.

Last year, the Mission to Seafarers centre in Millers

Point welcomed more than 7000 seafarers through its doors, and made over 600 support visits to ships, hospitals and hotels. And both organisations would be able to do more if they had more staff or volunteers.

The Rev Retchie Salvador, a Mission to Seafarers chaplain, says people are always surprised when he tells them that at least 90 per cent of the things we need and use in Sydney arrive by ship.

"The seafarers are less recognised for their work because they stay on the ships for so many months," he says "but it's not the ships that bring the goods here. It's the people."

It's a hard life for those or

board, so when he visits, the first thing he asks crew members is how they are doing – checking on their day-to-day lives, whether they are being treated well by their superiors if they are lower-ranked crew, and whether their surroundings are safe.

However, the long stretches at sea and time away from loved ones who need them can result in serious anxiety or depression – even suicide.

“I try to build a rapport with them and through conversation they open up about their problems and we pray for them,” Mr Salvador says. “It shows them we’re concerned and there to care for them.

“It’s a privilege to help them with whatever problems they go through. At any time of the day, we chaplains are on call – even on our days off... If a message comes in at night and it’s really important, I have to attend to it. There might be a



Wherever he’s needed: a Mission to Seafarers chaplain like Retchie Salvador makes sure to visit mariners in Sydney hospitals.

serious problem, or they might be in a different time zone and contact us only when they have free time.”

The fact that Mr Salvador is Filipino and speaks three of his country’s languages is hugely valuable, as about 40 per cent of

the seafarers he meets are from the Philippines. Having said that, each vessel has numerous nationalities on board – from Eastern Europe to Myanmar, and China to Indonesia – so his goal is to connect in every way he can to show them the love of Christ, which can include anything from facilitating visits to the mission to arranging for mail deliveries or getting hold of their favourite snacks.

“Many are not from a Christian background so that can be a challenge for us, but they often respond very positively,” he says. “They may not want to accept a Bible, but they are willing to listen and talk about religion and faith.

“For me, every day is a reason for me to praise the Lord because there are times that you get home at night tired... then you receive messages from people saying, thank you for coming on board, thank you for the Bible, thank you for the prayers.

“If people are blessed with the ministry that we do for them, that’s more than enough for me to thank and praise God.” SC

“NO SUCH THING” AS RETIREMENT IN GOD’S SERVICE

When Rob Flinders moved to Australia from England, he was 31 years old, recently married and not a Christian. After reaching the rank of chief officer following 12 years in the Merchant Navy, he resigned and undertook some study, keen for a life on land rather than the sea.

An opportunity arose to teach professional mariners at Sydney Technical College (now TAFE), so he made the move to Sydney in 1971. He began attending his local Anglican church where, despite not being a believer, the minister asked him to help lead the youth group.

“In the providence of God, one of the girls on the youth fellowship committee worked out straight away that this new leader wasn’t a Christian,” he says with a chuckle. “She very discreetly said, ‘I think it would be a good idea if we got someone out to talk to the kids one Sunday evening’ and suggested this fellow from the Department of Evangelism.”

“This fellow” turned out to be Phillip Jensen, who spoke at the evening service from Isaiah 53:6 (“We all, like sheep, have gone astray...”) and invited anyone who wished to, to have a conversation with him over supper. The person who went over to talk to Mr Jensen was Rob Flinders.

“I said, ‘Have any of the kids come to talk to you?’ He said, ‘No’, and I said, ‘I think I need to be the first,’ Mr Flinders recalls. “And the only person converted that night was the so-called youth fellowship leader!”

Mr Flinders (who is the father of Sydney archdeacon, the Ven Simon Flinders) has served God ever since, taking early retirement from TAFE in 1997 to begin serving seafarers in a different way – first with Mission to Seafarers at Port Hedland and, since 2000, as a port missionary with the Seamen’s Christian Friend Society.

He jokes that there’s “no such thing” as retirement.

“I think in some respects I spent the first 60 years of my life with God preparing me for what he wanted me to do,” he says. “I’ll keep going for as long as the Lord gives me the strength to climb up and down the gangways. Realistically, the day will come when I won’t be able to do that, so I’ll encourage those seafarers from home.

“There are Christian seafarers that are like blood brothers to me. I love them, they love me, we’re all part of a team but we’re spread all over the oceans of the world. All over the world the gospel is bearing fruit, as Colossian says – yes, and on the high seas as well!”

PRAYER AND PRAISE

- Pray for more labourers to be sent into God’s harvest field among seafarers on ships visiting Australian ports.
- Pray for wisdom, good health and endurance for those who spend long hours visiting and supporting seafarers; pray also that they will keep walking by faith, not by sight.
- Give thanks for the 20 or so Christian seafarers linked to SCFS who faithfully reach out to their crewmates each week.
- Thank God for the blessing that Mission to Seafarers and SCFS are to countless seafarers around the globe.
- Pray for the Lord’s hand to be on the new Filipino congregation Mr Salvador has begun in Granville.