



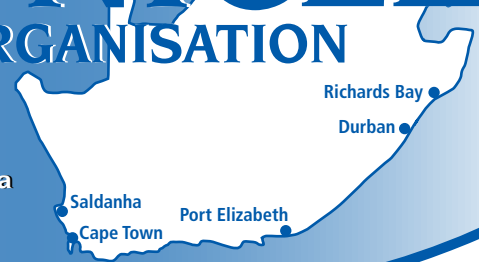
# SEA CHRONICLE

## CHRISTIAN SEAMAN'S ORGANISATION

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**Give a seafarer a  
Bible and you give  
him a Life in Christ**

October 2011 – May 2012

## From the Bridge

This newsletter tells of God's grace transcending languages and boundaries. Amazing grace - including grace for those that feel they are not worthy.

Recently the CSO evangelists experienced some of the grace that transcends language and boundaries. In August, they all attended the ICMA World Conference in Hamburg.

First, a little background information. ICMA is the International Christian Maritime Association. It is an umbrella organisation for most organisations doing missionary work among seamen. The CSO joined ICMA some time ago. Every five years ICMA presents a world conference, involving as many evangelists from all over the world as possible.

Two hundred delegates from 44 countries attended this conference. It was a cosmopolitan congregation of believers! We experienced grace that transcended language and boundaries. The conference theme was: The Dignity of Seamen. Much information was shared about the men at sea, their realities and everything they deal with.

One thing that was very visible, was the worship and prayer with colleagues that share the same passion. Confessing your faith and saying the Lord's Prayer with others, each saying the words in his or her own language was deeply touching. During the closing sermon, Rev Anneke Viljoen had the privilege to pray in Afrikaans – probably the first Afrikaans prayer in the history of the organisation.



*Rev Anneke Viljoen busy praying in Afrikaans during the service in Hamburg, Germany*

We are grateful for the sponsorship of ICMA, inviting all the evangelists to the conference. The ties formed and strengthened will be blessed by the amazing grace we experience.

Please read on and share the realisation of the

depths of God's Amazing Grace for all.

*Wimpie van Schoor*

**Dr Wimpie van Schoor**  
Chairman

**Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)  
That sav'd a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind, but now I see.**

These are the opening lyrics of a song often said to have the best-known lyrics of all time. When you read these words, one can hear the melody of the age-old song, describing a lost son, a

run-away, returning Home. For some it is only a melody and lyrics, but others consider the words part of a very personal story. The story of unbelievable grace, so great, that it has the power to help those that are lost to return Home.

Don't you find it touching that the lyrics were written by a seaman? John Newton, a self-confessed lost son and run-away, was a seafaring man in body and soul. During his experiences at

sea, he was finally saved by something, so great, so far removed from human ability and so incomprehensible - something that he later described as "amazing grace" . . .

Newton was born in London, as the son of a shipping captain in charge of a cargo ship sailing the Mediterranean seas. At 11 years of age, Newton started working on the ship and visited all corners of the earth. In 1744, he was forced to work on a war ship, but conditions deteriorated so badly that he abandoned ship. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested and he had to give up his rank.

Upon his own request, he was transferred to a slave ship. The ship was involved in slave trading along the Sierra Leone coast. Eventually he became a slave of the slave trader and according to legend, he was so badly beaten that it was difficult to recognise him. In 1748 a shipping captain, who knew his father, saved him from slavery. Following an uphill battle in life, Newton eventually captained his own ship, ironically trading in slavery. As an atheist, he abused alcohol and many, many slaves suffered from his cruel, inhuman hands.

Then one day, . . . the ship was captured in the eye of an angry storm and in his biggest moment of need, a moment that he later described as a moment when everything was lost and in which the ship would definitely have sunk, he called out, "God, please have mercy . . ." Later he described the moment as the first instance where he got to know God's mercy and grace.

Grace is something that does not touch one lightly. It pulls you towards a new understanding and heals blindness, allowing you to see with new eyes. For John Newton, it could not be any different. That moment of grace changed his life radically. He wrote about that: "Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace has bro't me safe thus far, and grace will lead me Home."

With new eyes, he could not look at the slaves the same way. It sent him on a road that would eventually mark the end of slave trading in the 17th century. From prodigal son, to slave, to minister in Buckinghamshire, England. In Buckinghamshire it is said that Newton's story about amazing grace touched people

so deeply, that they had to enlarge the church to make room for people.

That is so amazing of grace - that the blind can see again, and that it allows those that are tired of life, hurt by life, to return to the Father's home.

Here, almost three hundred years later, we at the CSO can share stories each day, we can tell you of seamen that are touched, even shaken by amazing grace.

**'Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me Home**

He is from the Cape – born and raised a fisherman. Eventually he came to find his fortune in the Mother City. He speaks West Coast Afrikaans as he tells his story. The language is a mixture of all languages and cultures, but he uses the most beautiful images, as only someone from the West Coast can . . .

'I've seen the entire world' he says and names cities and faraway places that he has visited with his ship. 'In the old days, things were different . . . he says, thinking of the past. 'In those days we spent longer times in the harbours . . . ' He looks at me from head to toe, as if he decides whether I am worthy of his story.



*Front (left to right): Rev Anneke Viljoen, rev Hennie la Grange (previously Manager: Missionaries: CSO, now Secretary of ICMA), dr Wimpie van Schoor (chairman). Middle: Rev Chris Viljoen, rev Danie Taljard, rev Ferdie Nortje (executive committee member). Back: Rev Loffie Schoeman, rev Nico van Rensburg, rev Jan-Harm Barkhuizen and rev Johan Smith.*

'In those days, we had a "piece" at every quay in the world, someone Head Office (as he calls his wife) was not aware of. I am telling you, we spent nights in the clubs...' he adds, thinking as if it is difficult to recall the memories.

'But' his head hanging low, 'those things have a way to affect you when you least expect it'

'In '98, I was back in the Cape and the doctor "boarded" me. After our compulsory check-up, he told me that my body cannot handle the prolonged drinking. I thought it was nothing, that I would just find another job. Even before I spent a week at home, Head Office left and took the children. At first I thought they would return,

but the one day became a week and the weeks months. At that stage I drank heavily.. For almost two years I never saw my boys . . . then in 2000, I received word that one of them had been bladed.' He remains quiet for a while, thinking. All jokes aside '... he died before I could see him.'

'That day is etched in my mind, like yesterday. That was my fault. My boy did not have a father. He mixed with the wrong crowd.' The man telling the story suddenly looks old and tired.

He told me that everything changed that day. Suddenly he was a wifeless, childless, jobless alcoholic swallowed by life and the things he did. He explains that he ended up at a church door that night, crying. The next day someone found him there. It was his first sober moment in months . . . but also the first dry day for the past ten years. He continues to tell of his amazing grace. He explains how God can pick someone up. His eyes sparkle and tell a different story than the wrinkles.

In February of the next year, "Head Office" called him. They got remarried. Only, it was different then. Grace changes you. Now, tomorrow, he is boarding a ship again. He will reacquaint himself with the open seas, for the first time in ten years. Now he has a wife, a job, children and he is not drinking a drop of alcohol . . .

He concludes his story, almost prophetically: 'Brother, I was lost but now I am found!'

**The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.**

Is grace merely a spiritual home-coming, or could it be physical, tangible - literally returning home after being lost? *Psalms 107:23,24* – "Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. <sup>24</sup>They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep."

7 April will be etched in Daniëlle's heart forever . . . his freedom day . . . his day of a second change . . . his day of a new beginning. On 7 April it is two months since he, the rest of his crew and their massive oil tanker, were taken hostage by Somali pirates.

He remembers the first week...being broken down psychologically, until you beg the sea to swallow you. They started with the officers. The men were taken out on deck, where you could not see them. You only heard the shot.

The fear of being next, the fear that your life, the life that you accepted as for granted, would be ended on that deck. There is the fear that everything you wanted to tell your wife and children, would become idle thoughts in the wind . . . and then you fear the unknown of the afterlife. What would it feel like, what would

it be like? All those thoughts thunder through you . . . and every time the door opens, you fear that you are next.

He explains how adult men cry, how they shake uncontrollably - one can hear he is close to tears as he tells the story.

Days later you find out that those shots were fired in the air, that all the crew members are still alive. They only wanted to instil fear and they succeeded. As the days become weeks and the weeks months, the days become interwoven, a mixture of indistinct confusion.

Some days are worse than others. The pirates use drugs, known as 'CAT' and then they are irrational. Sometimes you feel the cold steel of an AK 47 next to your head and you are never sure whether you will live for another minute.

Such a crisis leads to prayer, he says. If there is nothing left, if you have only that, you pray. If the wet, mouldy air hangs heavy in the jail cabin, you can only pray - there is nothing else you can do. At first, only some pray . . . but soon, when the first shots are fired, all pray. It is not superficial prayer, it is prayer showing absolute dependence and total dedication.

7 April is Daniëlle's birthday . . . and on 7 April there were two spots visible on the horizon. Two helicopters approached and in a scene like that of a James Bond action movie, they dropped two large bags containing millions of dollars on deck.

Generally, it is considered the most dangerous moment - that moment when the money lands on deck. In those moments they fire shots blindly, as the pirates fight each other to get their hands on the money. Daniëlle and his crew were saved, and in a few moments months of worry and confusion came to an end.

In Durban, Chris and some of the other chaplains awaited the seamen. They were traumatised and injured, but they could testify that God truly listens when someone in need calls upon Him.

Today there are still hundreds of seamen being kept hostage by Somali pirates.

**From Judea to Samaria: Hunger for mercy bread  
. . . also in the Ukraine**

The beautiful six-month old STADT CADIZ is proudly moored at the Point, of the Durban Harbour. Its crew is mostly from the Philippines and a few are from the Ukraine.

Upon boarding the ship, Nico met Irwin, the third officer that has been on board for about three months. Irwin will probably only return home in March 2012. Irwin invites Nico for a cup of coffee, a welcome invitation in view of the rather cold Durban winter weather. Irwin's wife is pregnant and they expect the baby in December. Other seamen also join the conversation.

Suddenly one of the deckhands runs towards them and somewhat breathlessly interrupts the discussion. He does not introduce himself, but blurts out a request. 'Sir, I need a Bible'. It is pleading, almost as if his life depends on it. He continues talking, not bothered by the other crew that look at him with irritation. He says that he placed his life in God's hands about a year ago. In essence, his story is that of a man that tasted mercy bread, but cannot get enough of it now. Since then, because he has been on board a ship for eight months, he could not buy a Bible. In every harbour he asks and tries to get to the city.

The expression when someone finds something he had been looking for, for such a long time is priceless – at the moment when Nico gave him a Bible, there was no doubt that it was his latest, most valuable possession.

### **Hunger for mercy bread ... in the Philippines too**

It is a blue Monday morning. The harbour is busy. Nico is in Durban and visits the NILEDUTCH SHANGHAI, a ship with fourteen Philippine crew members. They arrived over the weekend and are waiting, ready to load the last cargo. All are ready, prepared to raise the anchor. It seems impossible to spend even a little time with them.

As a bon voyage gift, Nico quickly takes out some beaded bracelets, showing the colours of the South African flag. Based on the colours, he quickly explains some of the Gospel . . . the story of grace. Then in one moment of amazing grace, everything comes to a halt. They are on their way, but the moment is filled with the simple, yet amazing message of mercy and redemption. The group gets together and repeats everything Nico says. It was supposed to be a fast, quick visit, but it becomes a ceremony in which every member gets an opportunity to explain the colours to a colleague and to receive the bracelets from Nico.

Strange, when you least expect it ...

As he is leaving, the two security guards stop Nico. They watched the ceremony. They ask whether Nico would share the story with them too.

No more explanation is necessary.

### **In contrast ...**

Sometimes mercy bread is physical. Something of this world, sometimes seemingly not related to the Gospel. The contrast is in exactly that - to live with grace, may mean to be busy in our normal lives, to enrich other people with care.

### **The ASMAL I**

In Port Elizabeth the tired ASMAL I and its crew from India, Sri Lanka and the Ukraine waits without much hope. The engine is damaged, irreparably. The rusted holes tell you that the ship's

years at sea are finally over. It has been three months and no one knows when a tug would arrive to tow it to a scrap yard in India. It looks like a ghost ship, lifeless, apart from the generator that drones monotonously.

The crew are around, also appearing to be lifeless. Adion Sing from India, says his contract expired months ago. He is waiting for money to return home. He is shy and a little emotional, but he says that he can no longer shave or brush his teeth. He is penniless. At that moment his most urgent need was so simple. A mere bar of soap and a tube of toothpaste. Danie could help and gave him a CSO blessed bag, containing the most essential things. It helped Adion to simply clean himself and feel like a human being!

Sometimes grace is something from God's Word, something that soothes and pacifies, but at other times, it is a bar of soap ...

### **The BLUE TERN**

The haggard BLUE TERN visits the Durban harbour six times a year, almost crawling into the harbour with each visit. Visiting the crew is a routine task for Chris. Now he often shares a cup of tea with the captain. It was inevitable for the ship to require repairs at some stage. The alternative would have been that the seas would swallow that little vessel - it was just so worn and tired.

Of course the account was astronomical. It was so expensive that the owners could not pay the bill. As always in the shipping world, the logical solution was to stop paying the crew. Very soon the situation developed into a court case that lasted more than a year. Eventually the members could return to their respective countries, but without any money in their pockets. After a long time, the money was made available and all, except one of the men, were paid.

Chris took it upon himself to do everything in his power to get the man's money for him. The lawyer refused to take Chris' calls, did not respond to SMSs' and simply did not care. Months later, Chris' dedication paid off and the money was paid into Chris' account. He sent it per Money Gram to Goa, India. Years later, many battles later, the man received his money. Three days later, the Hindu seaman advised that he received his money:

"Gud mrng sir, yes i recieved money. Thank you sir for ur help. God is with us."

### **A last word ...**

300 years after penning the words of Amazing Grace, the words remain true. 2000 years after being resurrected, Jesus still lives each day.

**At the CSO we are fortunate to witness this every day. But it is not only true in the world of seafaring men, but also where you live. Therefore we also pray for your amazing grace that transcends all understanding and logic.**