

the FIN News

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New FIN Partner -- Seamen's Christian Friends Society (SCFS)

Most church planting initiatives are "land-locked." Many missiologists and evangelism strategists miss the fact that there is more water than land on our planet. For as long as there is water, there will always be people who are living and working on-board the ships (i.e. commercial ships, leisure ships, and war ships). Martin Otto, a German missions practitioner with the Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS) has recognized the need to evangelize and disciple seafarers on-board these vessels.

The SCFS was founded in London in 1846 as a mission to seamen. Its goal was and is "to help seafarers spiritually by telling them about the love of Christ, but also helping them in practical ways". SCFS is represented in ports around the world. At each represented port, SCFS staff members meet with docked seafarers. SCFS' hope is to "strengthen Christians in their belief and explain the gospel to unbelievers in order to bring them closer to the Lord." Their ministry includes worship services, Bible distribution, and Bible Self-Study distribution, inspirational music and film presentations, as well as distribution of other Christian literature. SCFS staff also strive to provide practical assistance, such as taking seamen to local shops, and providing seamen with a way to make phone calls.

The Philippines has long provided ocean vessels with seafarers. According to Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), in the year 2000, there were 198,324 deployed sea-based OFWs; in 2006 the number rose to 274,497. If the estimated 7% of these OFWs are committed followers of Jesus Christ, there are conceivably over 19,000 witnesses for Jesus Christ on-board ocean going vessels! In conversation with Otto, he asks: "Can you imagine if there are also pastors on-board the ship?" In his book *Church on the Oceans: A Missionary Vision for the 21st*, he documented churches on the ocean being led by Filipino seafarers. (Please refer to book review by Dr. Mikel Neumann on the back page).

Church at Sea Alliance (CASA)

Realising that the diaspora Filipinos are not only stationed in different lands, but are also scattered across the seas, FIN sponsored a consultation on-board the Operation Mobilization ship, the MV Doulos, in Manila, Philippines from December 3-5, 2007. Representatives of FIN, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade for Christ, SCFS, and Alliance Graduate School forged a new partnership, called Church at Sea Alliance (CASA) to train Filipino seafarers to become pastors on the ocean. CASA intends to train thousands of Christian seafarers to share their faith and establish churches at sea for seafarers on-board ships. Mr. Otto himself will conduct the first training in April 2008 in Manila. CASA also intends to provide seafarers with evangelistic resources such as the Jesus Film in the different languages represented by the seafarers around the world.

Filipinos today are advancing the Kingdom on-board the ships.



He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Psalm 72:8 NIV

Filipinos are advancing the Kingdom by land and by sea! This issue of the FIN News will introduce our prayer partners to new partnerships and initiatives that are dedicated to planting churches on the ocean. May we rejoice in God's work on the oceans, as we remember Good Friday and celebrate Easter this season.

– The FIN Staff



Church on-board QE2

Book Review

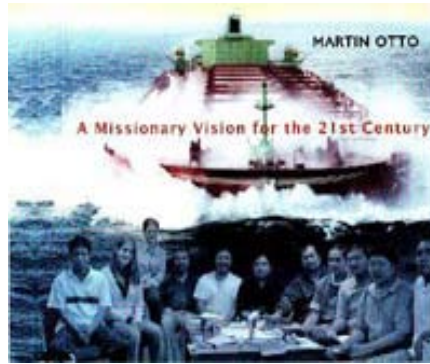
Church on the Oceans: A Missionary Vision for the 21st Century

By Otto, Martin

Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2007

Reviewed by Mikel Neumann

Professor of Missiology, Western Seminary



From the first page, author Martin Otto had my full attention. He spoke about the multiple kinds of church from the Mega-church to the house church and many in-between. He then asks, "What about people who make their living at sea? . . . Do those people not have a right to worship Jesus Christ in a church? . . . Where is their church?" (page 1) .

I have been a church planter for many years; I have consulted with church planters, and have taught church planting. Though I love church planting, as I read this book I discovered my vision to be landlocked. Churches amongst seafarers on commercial vessels — who knew? Until now, not I.

This book of 16 short chapters informs about many dimensions on the issue of church planting and nurturing among the seafarers of the world. A seaman will often be at sea between 8 and 10 months without returning home. He may be at his home for 2 months and then back to sea. If the seafarer is a Christian, then how can he or she grow without a fellowship of believers? If not a Christian, then how will he hear the gospel or see the witness of a living Christian fellowship? This book gives a call to action to reach the 1.3 million people who sail the ships of the world.

Of course, ships make periodic calls in ports where port chaplains are doing a tremendous work of evangelism, discipleship, and encouragement. But two to four days in port is little compared to months spent at sea. Otto, himself a port chaplain in Hamburg, Germany, seeks to plant, nurture and foster the reproduction of churches among the crews of the world's ships. Once there is a fellowship of believers on board, even a small one of 3-4 people, it can have an amazing impact on the rest of the crew. Christians will grow together in their faith. A communal witness is created. It can even have a positive impact on the work environment.

The obvious need for this ministry and the lack of people involved tends to produce in the reader a vision for it. Otto saves the vision chapter for last, but the entire book is crafted in a way to stimulate a desire for this ministry. His vision includes the active participation of Christian seafarers, port chaplains, and missionaries. He shows how each can contribute to the effectiveness of the work. Focusing on the seafarer, he shows how a seafarer with a vision for the church can have a significant ministry by starting a small church on board.

In order to plant a church, on board or anywhere else, one needs to know what a church is. Otto does not disappoint with his definition taken from the New Testament with a focus on the church in the book of Acts. A church on board can be small – even three people. Otto wisely encourages seafarer church planters to stay with the basic essentials of the New Testament church without insisting on denominational emphasis.

Excellent features of the text include the many case studies and examples. While one chapter is labeled "Examples of Church Planting from Ports Around the World" (chapter 11), there are several relevant stories sprinkled throughout the book.

Finally, the author gives practical advice and guidelines on how to go about starting an onboard church. This advice will be helpful and encouraging to those who are engaged in this process or who desire to begin. Otto's considerable experience with his solid biblical background brings a wise authenticity to the process. Short, interesting, and easy to read, this book fills an important gap in the literature for church planters.

News

We would like to congratulate our long-time FIN Secretary, Cheryl Zamora, for her new full-time staff position at her home church, First Filipino Alliance Church (FFAC) in Edmonton, Canada. While we at FIN will miss her, we are excited about the opportunities with FFAC. Cheryl, we salute you for your strategic time with FIN! Thank you for your faithful service.



Filipino International Network

FIN's Mission Statement: The Filipino International Network (FIN) is a catalytic movement of Christians committed to motivate and mobilize Filipinos globally to partner for worldwide mission.

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