

**Faculty:** Jessica Sparks, Assistant Professor, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy

**Project Locations:** Taiwan and Philippines

**Dates:** Early May-late August 2024

**Project Title:** Views Through the Porthole: Documenting the Role of Port Chaplains and their Interventions to End the Trafficking and Labor Abuses of Migrant Fishers

**Project Details:** Increasingly, there is growing awareness of the egregious human rights violations occurring at sea and the challenges associated with upholding labor standards and regulations on marine fishing vessels. The International Labor Organization of the United Nations estimates 128,000 fishers are working in conditions of forced labor at any given time. Migrant fishers are one of the world's most hidden populations as regulatory gaps allow them to transit across the seas and between countries separate from immigration permissions, meaning they are often denied access to labor market protections and recourse and remedy when their labor rights are violated (Sparks et al. forthcoming).

Religious organizations are important, yet often overlooked, actors combatting labor exploitation. Through their missionary work, they establish networks which build resilience against labor abuse, and they sustain practical reach into at-risk communities (Hyland 2021). Many fishers share unique connections to religion; perhaps a by-product of working one of the world's deadliest and most isolated occupations (Campling & Colas 2021). Whilst the historical role of sea-chaplaincy is well documented (Koltari 2021), its contemporary role and function are underexplored despite contemporary ship-visiting missionary work being increasingly recognized as a vital in-port resource for exploited fishers. As rooted, long serving, and trusted port community members that can uniquely transcend geo-political boundaries, chaplains are often the first to detect labor abuses and have become instrumental coordinating partners in its reporting, intervention, and remedy.

Whilst researchers methodologically harness the networks of port chaplains to reach exploited fishers (Vandergeest et al. 2021), little work has yielded insights on their unparalleled ability to relate to fishers nor formally documented their role and capacities as change agents fighting labor abuses through collaborations with unions, government agencies, and others. This project is addressing this research gap by co-producing the first systematic empirical evidence base of port chaplains as actors of fisher labor resilience. Working with the world's oldest and largest ship visiting ministry, Stella Maris, the project uses photo voice to showcase the role of port chaplains, collating their insights, and mapping their capacities to co-produce transferable knowledge which could improve detection of abuses and enforcement of labor rights and elucidate novel intervention points to end exploitative labor practices. As supply chain actors increasingly spearhead global, top-down efforts to construct grievance mechanisms to comply with new regulations, it is imperative to understand how and where fishers' use chaplains to report complaints and what unique systems chaplains have in place to build trust with fishers. This knowledge can then be used to build more effective grievance processes that truly elucidate and remedy labor abuses at sea. Without this understanding from chaplains who are the lynchpins in grievance processes, actors risk fairwashing one of society's most enduring scourges.

Using an already prepared and piloted guide, the student will interview port chaplains about their ministry relating to the exploitation of migrant fishers and guide them through an auto-photographic activity, visually documenting their day-to-day missionary activities with fishers in port and fishers preparing to depart for and returning from overseas fishing work. Field work will occur in the Philippines and Taiwan,

and additional interviews may be conducted over Zoom with chaplains in other countries. The student will assist with collecting, collating, analyzing, and disseminating the qualitative oral and photographic data through a co-produced photo exhibition at UN headquarters for World Fisheries Day, in addition to assisting with the writing of an academic paper and policy briefings for supply chain, civil society, and government actors.

### **Tasks and Responsibilities of Research Assistant:**

The student will begin the experience by attending a three-day Stella Maris convening in Taichung, Taiwan. The purpose of this is three-fold. 1) It will provide an in-depth, immersive orientation to the problem of forced labor at sea and to Stella Maris as an organization and their work with exploited migrant fishers. 2) There will be an opportunity for Dr. Sparks to train the student on how to conduct qualitative interviews, and for the student to conduct mock/practice interviews with Stella Maris leadership. This will create an opportunity for both Dr. Sparks and Stella Maris leadership to observe and provide feedback before the student starts conducting the actual research interviews. 3) There will be chaplains from all over the world in attendance, to expand the research footprint beyond the chaplains working in Taiwan and the Philippines

The student will then be responsible for conducting and transcribing approximately 15-20 qualitative interviews (many in-person, with some additional interviews potentially completed over Zoom) while also guiding the chaplains through the photo activity. For in-person interviews in Taiwan and the Philippines, the student will also shadow chaplains in their ministry, and record observations as the chaplains meet with fishers in port and in seafarers' centers for pre-departure trainings and returning debriefings.

During the field work, the student will also record observations on how Stella Maris operates within the greater ecosystem of actors, including representatives from local, national, regional, and international (i.e., the UN) government agencies; unions; and other civil society actors.

When the student returns from field work, they will be trained on qualitative data analysis techniques and will be one of two coders of transcripts and photos. They will assist with writing up findings for an academic paper and policy briefings. The student's contributions to the project will be integral, which will be recognized through authorship on all project outputs.

### **Qualifications:**

- The research assistant will need to complete the CITI trainings as required by the IRB before conducting any research activities.
- The research assistant should also have a desire to work closely with people of different nationalities, genders, religion, and socioeconomic and education levels; a demonstrated commitment to human and/or labor rights; discretion and maturity in dealing with sensitive content; organization skills for scheduling and coordinating interviews; and an ability to occasionally work irregular hours (in the event some interviews are conducted over Zoom, the research assistant will need to accommodate the chaplain's schedule and a variety of time zones).
- Experience working with marginalized and oppressed populations and culturally diverse populations is recommended, but not required.
- Communication and interviewing skills as well as familiarity with qualitative research methods are also desirable, but not required.

### **Description of Field Site:**

For port visits, the student will need to wear a hard hat and high visibility vest (both which will be

provided by Stella Maris in each location). They will also need to wear pants and closed-toed, flat shoes in the event they board vessels with the Stella Maris chaplain. Due to cultural and religious norms of the migrant crew on board vessels, students identifying as female will need to cover shoulders and décolletage (i.e., no tank tops). No hand or wrist jewelry should be worn, as rings and bracelets can get caught when climbing ladders to board vessels. Sunscreen, light pants and long sleeves are recommended due to potential sun exposure in port. In Taiwanese ports, the student will need to wear a face covering if boarding a vessel to prevent the spread of COVID-19, per Taiwanese regulation.

**Housing in Taiwan and Philippines:** The student will stay in hotels. All hotels will be within walking distance of Stella Maris's facilities and have WiFi and air conditioning. The student will have a private room with en suite bathroom. The faculty leader will stay in the same hotels. All hotels will have staff and security on site 24/7.