

AOS center welcomes Vatican visitor

When seven young men from China walked into the Apostleship of the Sea International

Seafarer Center, Dundalk, March 31, they conveniently provided a live description of precisely what Monsignor John L. FitzGerald was explaining at the moment to his three visitors - including a representative from the Vatican. The AOS director described to his guests the ministry of welcoming seafarers to Baltimore - providing a connection to their Catholicism while in port.

Monsignor Novatus Rugambwa, undersecretary in Rome for the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People; Father Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., executive director of the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; and Sister Myrna Tordillo, M.S.C.S., program specialist of the same, were listening to Monsignor FitzGerald's description of the AOS ministry in Baltimore, when the seafarers walked in, fresh off a merchant ship, on their way to Best Buy and Wal-Mart.

The trio was in the area to attend a national AOS conference in Linthicum.

"We deal with people on the move," commented Monsignor Rugambwa, a native of Tanzania, East Africa, assigned in Rome since September.

Sister Myrna, originally from the Philippines, was visiting the area for the first time and said the "service they (AOS) have is wonderful ... a welcoming ministry." She said it is important to connect not only with those on the ships, but also to establish a good rapport with the Port Authority to carry out the AOS ministry effectively.

Deacon John Langmead, who serves St. Rita, Dundalk, walked in from across the street and enthusiastically greeted the guests with, "Welcome to Dundalk!" He said he looks forward to working together with the AOS center "to support this wonderful ministry. Our church couldn't be more convenient." The parish helps collect clothing, magazines and other materials for the merchant marines, who have very

little connection to their Catholic roots as they travel the world.

AOS is comprised of a dedicated team of maritime ministers (ship visitors) who service ships in Baltimore ports through friendly smiles, transportation, Catholic reading materials, gently-used clothing, phone cards, and prayer cards.