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Andrew Middleton of the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Apostleship of the Sea climbs a ladder from a tugboat into the MV Dali May 1, 2024, to minister to the crew of the ship, which struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge March 26, causing it to collapse. (OSV News/courtesy Bishop Adam J. Parker)

Christopher Gunty

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When Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Adam J. Parker and Andrew Middleton, director of the archdiocesan Apostleship of the Sea, approached the stranded MV Dali at the site of the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, the bishop noticed that it looked like it was leaning, and wondered if that would be evident onboard the ship.

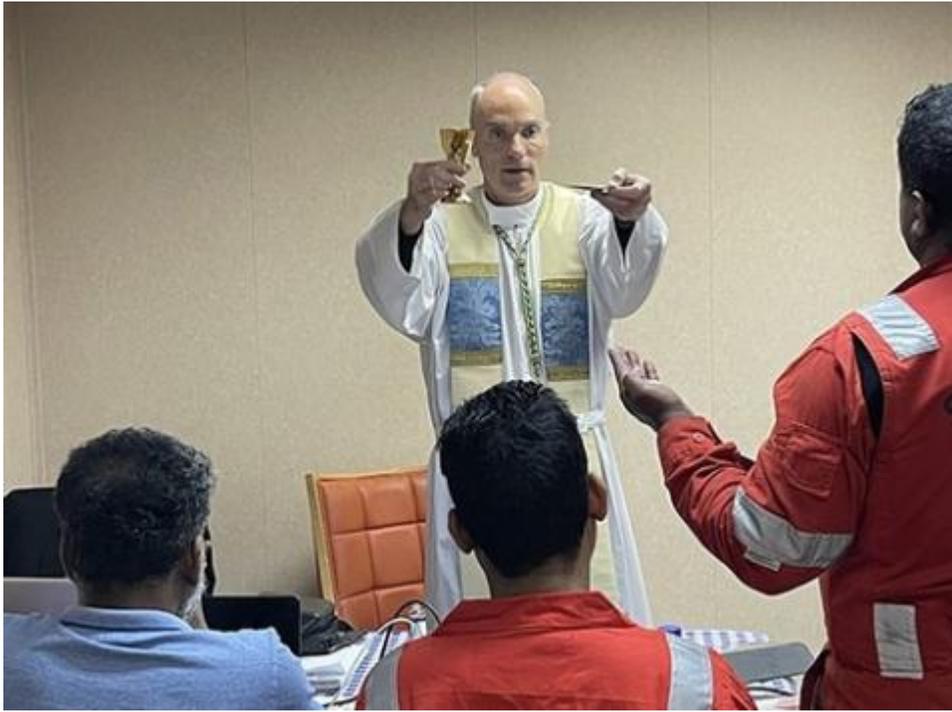
The two were transported May 1 to the Dali via a tugboat in the Patapsco River to visit members of the crew, who have remained on the ship since it struck a main support of the bridge in the early morning hours of March 26. The bridge collapsed within seconds, causing eight road workers on the span to fall into the river. Two survived, and the body of the last of the six who died was recovered May 7.

"The ship in fact is leaning because of the wreckage that is sort of pinning it down," Parker said, "and what occurred to me as I was walking across the ship on the residential floor is that nothing in their life is balanced right now. And just as the floor itself is not balanced and it was evident to me that they're feeling a great deal of anguish and uncertainty, especially about their futures because they don't know how long they're going to be there."

The Key Bridge Response Unified Command used precision cuts made with small explosive charges May 13 to remove a large section of the Key Bridge wreckage from on top of the Dali, a ship registered in Singapore.

"The small charges, a standard controlled demolition tool, will split the large section of truss at specific locations to create multiple, smaller sections, which allows salvors to use cranes and barges already on scene to remove these sections of the bridge and ultimately remove the M/V Dali from the channel," said a release from the Unified Command in advance of the event.

The efforts should allow the Dali to be refloated and returned to port within a couple of days for transfer of cargo and repair, as well as help clear the shipping channel.



Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Adam J. Parker celebrates Mass for Catholic members of the crew of the MV Dali May 1, 2024. The bishop and Andrew Middleton of the archdiocesan Apostleship of the Sea visited the crew for Mass and to deliver supplies. The Dali struck Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge March 26, causing it to collapse. (OSV News/courtesy Bishop Adam J. Parker) Editors: best quality available.

Parker and Middleton trekked to the Dali to deliver care packages and to celebrate Mass for Catholics in the crew. At that point, the bishop noted, the ship had been trapped under the wreckage for five weeks.

"It certainly was also evident the anguish that they (the crew) were feeling about those who had died because at that point there were still two of the individual highway workers who were still in the water. In fact one of them, the fifth one to be recovered, was recovered that very day while we were out there," Parker told the Catholic Review, Baltimore's archdiocesan news outlet.

Before he began celebrating the Mass for three of the six Catholic members of the crew, the bishop told them he was offering the Mass for them and their families back at home, as well as for the highway workers who died. As he placed the list of names of the workers on the table that would be used as an altar, one of the crew members wanted to have the list, so he could continue to remember those who died in his prayers.

"It meant a lot to him to know the names of the people and to be able to pray for them. That moment is something that I will never forget," the bishop said.

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Middleton, director of the archdiocese's Apostleship of the Sea, a ministry to seafarers who come through the Port of Baltimore, said scheduling the visit was a bit complicated. The apostleship had assisted the crew of the Dali in the days before it left port and was in contact with some crew members after the accident.

A representative of the ship's management company had reached out to encourage the visit.

"I think they were appreciative of the fact that we were maintaining that contact with the crew and trying to do our best to help them from afar," Middleton said.

Parker said he believed their visit was only the second one to the ship not related to the ongoing investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board, FBI and other official agencies.

To reach the ship, the two had to climb a ladder from the tugboat into a door open on the side of the massive ship, and then climb two flights of ladders to get to a level that had an elevator. This was made more challenging by the fact that Middleton and the bishop brought with them several boxes of donated care packages and other material for the crew, which had to be hoisted up by rope on the ladders.

The pair met with most of the crew members, except for a handful who were still needed to maintain the working systems of the ship while it is stranded. The crew of 21 at the time of the accident have since been joined by three more, all of whom are from India.

Parker passed along greetings from Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, and read a letter from the archbishop to the crew, which he left with the captain. The bishop and Middleton chatted with the crew, getting to know their specific home regions in India and whether they had family back home.

One of the crew members pointed out that it was the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. "It felt especially fitting that we had the opportunity to go out and make this visit to these laborers on Catholic Labor Day," Parker said, noting that he was impressed that the young crew member knew it was the feast day.

Middleton said that a woman from Minnesota had heard about the Apostleship of the Sea in a news report after the bridge collapse. She asked how she could help and put together care packages for each of the crew members, truffles from a local confectioner, and T-shirts emblazoned with "Minnesota Cares" on the front and the ship's name on the back.

After distributing the packages, Parker celebrated Mass and gave those attending as well as their fellow Catholics who could not attend the Mass rosaries blessed by Pope Francis.

He said he thinks the crew is still feeling deep anguish about what happened the night of the accident. He said one crewman, one of the engineers, reflected that if it had only been five more minutes before the ship lost power, it would have been clear of the bridge.

"Him saying that to me, five weeks after the accident, made me think about how many times that very thought must have gone through his head in the days and weeks since the accident itself," Parker said. "So, for me personally, it was very, very moving to be out there to feel the depth of their own feeling and anguish about what had happened and about what is going to happen to them moving forward."

He said this was the first opportunity the Catholic members of the crew had to receive Communion in many weeks. They had been in another port before coming to Baltimore, and from there, they were scheduled for a 28-day trip to Sri Lanka, around the horn of Africa. The accident happened during Holy Week.

The Mass "clearly meant a lot" to those who attended. "They were especially grateful to be able to be there for the Eucharist," the bishop said.

He said celebrating Mass at the exact site of the crash and praying for those who died was especially poignant.

"It is wonderful to see the outpouring of support and prayer that the whole Baltimore community, Catholic and beyond, has extended since the accident. It was especially moving to be there for the Mass right at the scene of the accident and the entire

visit was very powerful for me personally. I was just grateful that we had the chance to get out there," he said.