On Wednesday, December 18, 2019 I visited the Apostleship of the Sea program with the staff at the Stella Maris Center in Manila, Philippines. During my visit I was able to meet with the staff and become more familiar with their tasks and roles at the Stella Maris Seafarers Center, Inc. as well as conduct a training on Mental Health for Victims of Human Trafficking and wellness for workers or service providers working directly with victims or survivors of human trafficking. The Stella Maris Seafarers Center offer board and lodging and various support services for seafarers such as paralegal support, medical and health services, and spiritual counseling. Conditions on the sea vary and depending on the situation seafarers are exposed to, wellness and mental health are critical components for seafarers.

During our meeting, we reviewed the new online COMPASS modules designed to introduce the more crucial aspects of maritime trafficking. Module topics include Human Trafficking at Sea – exploring the different types of trafficking at sea, as well as the seafood industry and the legal frame of maritime law. Other topics include guidelines for safe shelter operations, promising practices for comprehensive shelter management services, and fraudulent recruitment practices in the maritime industry. An in-person training on mental health for survivors of maritime trafficking was conducted with the staff, which included the topic on vicarious trauma. The session reviewed types of trauma, potential victim responses to trauma, identification, and tips for working with victims who are suffering from trauma. Staff also participated in a discussion of possible ways to address compassion fatigue and strategies on how to prevent secondary trauma.

USCCB looks forward to continuing the dialogue to support the Stella Maris Staff in providing much needed peer support, guidance, and assistance to victims experiencing human trafficking at sea.