



PROMINENT ASSUMPTIONIST FR. YVES HAMON, A.A. (1864-1925).

The Assumptionists and the Ministry of the Sea

In December 1894 Fr. François Picard, the superior general, gathered twenty or so men of influence (ship-owners, maritime union chiefs, naval officers, newspaper journalists from the *Bonne Presse*) at the general house in Paris to reflect on what could be done for the 15,000 sailors who left France every year for seven or eight months on ships to fish on the high seas for cod near Iceland and Newfoundland.

The staff at weekly *La Croix des Marins*, founded by the Assumptionist *Bonne Presse* (now known as Bayard Press), was moved by their total isolation, insecurity (loss of dories in the fog, collisions, storms), excessively long hours of work, and deplorable hygienic conditions. Under the leadership of the Assumptionist Bailly brothers (Vincent de Paul and Emmanuel) the Ministry of Sea (MOS) was launched with the stated goal of *“providing material, medical, moral, and spiritual support for those working in the deep-sea fishing industry.”*

An impressive history

In order to carry out this mission, the MOS, between 1894 and 1939, equipped itself with seven floating hospitals that would bring to this disadvantaged population medical care necessary for such an exacting occupation both in terms of its physical demands and climactic conditions, the morale-boosting service of delivery of mail from family members they missed, and the presence of a chaplain. Likewise, two overseas “reception centers” (maisons de famille) were built, one on the island of St. Pierre and Miquelon, off the Canadian coast, and one in Iceland, destined for sailors on leave, in convalescence, or awaiting their next assignment. Fathers Yves Hamon and Eugène Bergé, consumed with « zeal for God and for men on the high seas », were the first two Assumptionists that made of this ministry such a success and helped these men deal with three of their greatest plagues: alcoholism, sickness, and loneliness.

Yves Hamon (1864-1925)



Birthplace of Fr. Yves Hamon in Brittany

Fr. Yves was born in Brittany (France) and entered the Assumptionists in 1888 after several years in the diocesan seminary of Poitiers (Vienne).

His Breton character, his devotion to the needy, his singular disregard for all personal comfort, his attraction to adventure and even danger, and his physical stamina permitted him to carry out work with a population that he adopted wholeheartedly and that showed him countless signs of confidence; for the most part it was a labor of love both grueling and thankless.

In 1895, only a year after his ordination, Fr. Yves, for his first assignment, was sent by Fr. Picard to St. Pierre and Miquelon to found and run the first « Maison de Famille ». After a successful launch of this facility and several months of service, he returned to France where he was asked to accompany the medical crew of Assumptionist-owned ship, Notre Dame de Salut, that had been temporarily converted into a floating hospital, to Madagascar. After this assignment, he was once again on his way to St. Pierre and Miquelon when the vessel he was

on shipwrecked and the passengers barely escaped. The following winter he spent visiting fishermen along the coast of his native Brittany and then sailed the high seas going from one ship to another bringing the sacraments and solace to sailors. In 1897, he accompanied one of the now famous Assumptionist pilgrimages by sea to the Holy Land, launched in the 1880s. After returning to his chaplaincy duties on the high seas (two years of which he spent in Newfoundland), in 1900 he went to China as a military chaplain of the French Red Cross for a time before returning to his duties at the MOS. In 1906 he oversaw the construction of a new “maison de famille” in Iceland. Shortly thereafter, in order to learn English, he traveled to the Assumptionist parish of Bethnal Green in London, staying for five years and also receiving care for incipient diabetes. In 1912 he tried to return to the ministry he loved most, sailing to St. Pierre and Miquelon, but after a year it was clear that his failing health would not allow him to tolerate the trying conditions of this life. He returned to London and served for 7 more years there before retiring to his native France, where he died in 1925.

Fr. Yves was an undaunted pioneer in this new apostolate. The ministry of the sea owes its existence and its development to this zealous trailblazer.