



Out of Africa ... **into Malta**

Friday 13th – A Mediterranean Sea Story



On Friday 13th January 2012, the Costa Concordia was lost in the Mediterranean, in a tragic incident which attracted world headlines. Almost all the 4,252 people known to be on board were saved, 32 died or remain unaccounted for.

That same day, the first of three boats carrying African refugees across the Mediterranean from Libya towards Malta and Italy was rescued by coastguards, in an incident which attracted no news coverage whatsoever. 72 were saved, including a pregnant woman and 29 children. The second boat was rescued two days later by a Maltese armed patrol vessel, assisted by the US Navy. The 68 who were saved included a mother who had

just given birth. They're now in Malta. You probably missed the story – it wasn't exactly international headline news.

The third boat didn't make it. A distress call warning of engine failure was intercepted by the Maltese maritime authorities the morning after the Concordia disaster. Then no more was heard...until the last week of January, when the first 15 bodies were washed up on Libyan beaches – at least 55 were lost.

In Italy, following the Concordia, there are investigations, prosecutions, and claims for damages, stress and compensation. Large sums of money will ease the stress of a holiday gone wrong.



In Malta, there are survivors who have lost absolutely everything – including husbands, wives or children. Many were fleeing for their lives in the first place. Life must somehow begin again, after release from detention, which for some could be anything up to 18 months. They will be placed in one of Malta's 'open centres'. Tent Village houses several hundred already, in a mix of ex-army tents on concrete bases, or 'cabins' which, with some irony, are converted shipping containers. Stifling ovens in Malta's high summer; cold, damp and depressing in winter.

The St Andrew's Scots Church in Malta is co-ordinating a growing project called **Out of Africa ... into Malta** which seeks to meet acute and longer-term needs of the individuals and families through a series of initiatives – from coolboxes in the summer to keep food fresh and safe from rats, to children's snowsuits and blankets in winter, these small things make life more bearable.

Also the project has established **Malta Microfinance** and imaginative ways are being sought over the next three years to stabilise families and community groups, and provide the means by which they can leave the tents and cabins permanently,

building a future. The same opportunity can be offered to Malta's poorest families; a sharing of opportunity and a real chance of achieving better integration among people from widely different backgrounds and experience, but whose problems are shared.

On a warm, still, summer Friday evening in June 2011, a large group of people gathered on the waterfront of Grand Harbour, Valletta. Rev Doug McRoberts of St. Andrew's Scots Church, and Father Joe Cassar of the Jesuit Refugee Service led a refugee remembrance service. Flowers were placed on the water in memory of those who died on their journey to freedom – more than 1500 last year alone between Libya and Malta, according to UNHCR. The start of the service was delayed by a couple of minutes, to allow a large cruise liner to exit the harbour, with all her lights on, her siren sounding, and her passengers – some already in evening dress – lining the decks. She was the Costa Concordia.

Out of Africa ... into Malta is a real ministry and mission opportunity on the southern edge of Europe, where continents and cultures meet, often uneasily. Your support will transform lives out of all proportion to the cost of your giving.



The Church of Scotland
World Mission Council



OUT OF AFRICA
INTO MALTA

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Scottish Charity Number: SC011353
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