

## Island priest saves ship disaster relics as reminder

GIGLIO, Italy |



(Reuters) - In front of the altar in the church of Santi Lorenzo e Mamiliano is a small table covered with relics -- a lifejacket, a half-eaten panettone cake, a hard hat.

They are not sacred objects or remains of a long-ago saint, but profane reminders of recent acts of selfless charity and good will, said Don Lorenzo Pasquotti, the island's parish priest - a gregarious man, bearded, bespectacled and wearing a brown wool cap.

On Friday night he opened the doors of his church, standing less than 100 meters from the port in Giglio, to about 400 survivors of the Costa Concordia who straggled up the steps to the entrance seeking shelter and food.

While clearing up next day, helpers found several objects and Don Lorenzo - as his parishioners call him - decided to fashion a second altar out of them.

"It's to help us remember, positively, what happened," he told Reuters. "It's testimony to a dramatic moment, but also to a great demonstration of solidarity."

The night the massive cruise ship was ripped open and capsized against a rocky undersea slope just a few hundred yards from the port, the passengers reached the church first and the crew later, proof that the ship's staff, unlike the captain, had manned their posts to the end, said Don Lorenzo.

"I pulled out all the food I had," he said. "I still had some panettone cakes from Christmas so I gave them that, and then the community brought more."

Several loaves of bread lie on the table, some with pieces broken off. The bread sits on top of half a panettone, and a white hard hat rests on top of an unopened pack of survival rations -- high-fat cereal bars.

"Costa Concordia" is clearly stamped on the label of a life jacket, and a long piece of rope lies coiled beside an orange emergency blanket.

The local bishop, Guglielmo Borghetti, came to Giglio earlier on Thursday to show, in his own words, "that the church supports them."

His first visit was to Don Lorenzo's church, where he spent a few minutes kneeling and praying. Afterwards he stopped at the makeshift altar for a few moments to view the objects.

On the steps in front of the simple facade, composed of three arcades of light-colored stone above the main door, the bishop spoke to reporters.

"More than 4,000 people were saved," Borghetti said. "We need to see God's work as a positive element of this situation. Jesus doesn't have hands, but he has our hands."

Borghetti said he would bless the crippled liner in the afternoon, and then meet relatives of some of those who died in the disaster.

*(Reporting By Steve Scherer; Editing by Tim Pearce)*

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