

# PORTCALL

## Seafarers International House

### MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: ANCHORS IN THE STORM

**S**ometimes the anchor of hope arrives just as you need it most. The first anchor of hope arrived when, at the worst of the NYC's Covid-19 experience, we were able to lease our whole guesthouse over to an agency that helped Covid patients recover for three months. Their mission was completed the middle of July and now, as we go to publication, we are uncertain as to when we will safely re-open the guesthouse and pray that we will be able to "hold on" until a vaccine.

A second anchor of hope arrived in my email in-box recently from a seafarer:

*"Hello again. Thank you cordially for your effort to make a reservation for me at 'Seafarers International House Relocated'. I cannot express the relief I feel after you removed that burden from my shoulders. Without help from you I would be more nervous with each day closer to getting off the vessel. Thank you very much and see you soon."*

This seafarer is referring to the fact that even though our guesthouse is temporarily closed we are still able to house seafarers (and some asylees) at "SIH Relocated" and this has been a lifeline for stressed seafarers as of late who have very little idea of when they are getting off or on to ships. This "storm" has revealed more than ever how important it is to have an anchor

for seafarers who need a port in the storm here in New York City.

Our Needs Assessment "Dreamteam" has taken advantage of working throughout the pandemic to interview dozens of our seafarers, asylees, union officials, port personnel, and maritime partners. The conclusion that we will be sharing with our board in September is that, what *Seafarers International House* has been doing all along continues to be essential for the future: rehumanizing those seafarers and asylees who are dehumanized by housing instability through enhancing hospitality at our guesthouse as well as continuing our re-humanizing ministry on-board ships.

Right now our guesthouse is "on sabbatical"... taking a breath while we wait to safely re-open. Thankfully, our port chaplains are able to continue to call on ships in the ports of New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New Haven, CT.

We need your prayers and financial support more than ever. Please continue being anchors for seafarers and asylees during this storm.

Peace. 

*Marsh Luther Dregle*

*Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.  
Acts 27:29*



*Pastor Marsh took the helm of a sailboat on the Hudson River last summer and looks optimistically into the future. With you, our supporters and friends, we will weather this storm.*



*Detention Center Visitors including Maryam Zoma Kiefer (second from left) meet at the Guesthouse in Manhattan for the trip to Elizabeth Detention Center.*

# Witnessing the Systematic Dismantlement of Asylum

By Kelly Agnew-Barajas, Director of Refugee Resettlement, Catholic Charities NY

Refugee Resettlement used to be considered a non-partisan humanitarian program which had broad support from both political parties and was viewed as a symbol of our country's leadership internationally, as well as a way to encourage other nations to share the responsibility of refugee protection.

All of that has changed dramatically. The rhetoric has encouraged fear of the "other" and criminalization of the very people fleeing terror and seeking safety here. We've witnessed the systematic dismantling of the infrastructure used to resettle refugees. Each of the past year's announcements of the Presidential Determination on has been another blow to the resettlement infrastructure and its life-saving mission. At the end of 2016 the US resettled 85,000 refugees. This year, even before the advent of the global pandemic, the US was on track to welcome less than 8,000 refugees. In addition to the attacks on the US Refugee Resettlement system, there have been relentless efforts to dismantle humanitarian protections afforded to those fleeing persecution who make it to our shores on their own.

What's more we've faced increasing efforts to curb asylum seekers – deterrence measures seem to have been cooked up to be as cruel and inhumane as possible and most notably have included forcible separations of children – some of who were too little to have language – from their mothers and fathers. The "Remain in Mexico" program, and the latest all-out effort to shut down asylum using the pandemic as a false justification, have been hallmarks of this administra-

tion's attitude toward refugees and asylum seekers. I want to highlight one bright spot though – which is that volunteers and groups are not letting this stand.

Before the pandemic – and even now, every day I got calls from neighborhood groups, synagogues, mosques, college clubs – they are all horrified by what they see and hear and want to find ways to help that are concrete. I got a call from a Sunday school teacher wanting to have her 5-year-old students make welcome cards for our clients. These efforts lift our spirits and help us go on. 🚢



**Seafarers International House usually organizes monthly trips to detention centers to bring hope to detained asylum seekers, but no visits are allowed at this time. Check out this web page to find out when these trips will resume: [www.sihnyc.org/volunteer](http://www.sihnyc.org/volunteer)**





Christopher speaks at the 2019 MNYS Assembly.



Kwasi, a First Friend and former SIH resident demonstrates with Lorna in Selma AL this March.

## RIGHT OF ASYLUM ONLINE ADVOCACY EVENT

### OCTOBER 13, 2020, 6:00 – 6:45 PM - FREE

Please join us as we celebrate this year's **Outstanding Friends of Immigrants** in an online event free for all (check out how to join at [www.sihnyc.org/upcoming-events](http://www.sihnyc.org/upcoming-events)):

**Christopher Vergara** is the Chair of the Metropolitan New York Synod's Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Sanctuary/AMMPARO Ministry, and Chair of the Metropolitan New York Synod Advocacy Task-Force. As a lay leader of social justice change, Christopher has made aiding and fighting for immigrants and immigrant children his priority through life-changing work that includes convincing the ELCA Church-wide Assembly to declare itself a sanctuary church. ELCA is the first North American denomination to declare itself a sanctuary church-body. As a sanctuary church the ELCA is committed to serving and supporting migrant children and families in communities across the country. Coordinating the Sanctuary Youth Group, Christopher provides children in detention with recreational, cultural, educational, and artistic outings, while providing them access to pastoral care. Christopher also helped make it possible for individual congregations to partner with the Sanctuary/AMMPARO Ministry.



**Kelly Agnew-Barajas** is the Director of Refugee Resettlement of Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of NY. A refugee resettlement professional, advocate and non-profit leader, Kelly has worked in refugee resettlement since 2006 overseeing services and support systems to thousands of refugee and asylee families. Kelly is experienced in program development, multi-level advocacy, and raising awareness around engaging and serving asylees, survivors of human trafficking, and other special populations. Kelly was previously a middle school Humanities teacher in NYC, and also worked at the San Diego Job Corps providing youth with educational and vocational programming. Kelly earned her BA in Cultural Studies, Education and Latin American Studies from Eugene Lang College of the New School for Social Research and has completed her MA coursework in Cultural Anthropology at Hunter College, CUNY. She is bilingual in English and Spanish.



**Lorna Henkel** serves as Trustee on the Board of First Friends of NJ & NY and is a past president. First Friends advocates for immigrant rights and provides vol-



unteer visits and assistance to detainees at the Elizabeth Detention Center, Hudson County and Essex Correctional Centers, and Bergen County Jail. Lorna has been visiting asylum seekers at EDC since 2008 and at HCCC since 2009 and has since visited 'friends' at Essex and Bergen. First Friends, with the help of other agencies, assists asylees with housing, job placement, counselling etc. upon their release. Several of the people Lorna visited have received assistance at *Seafarers International House*.

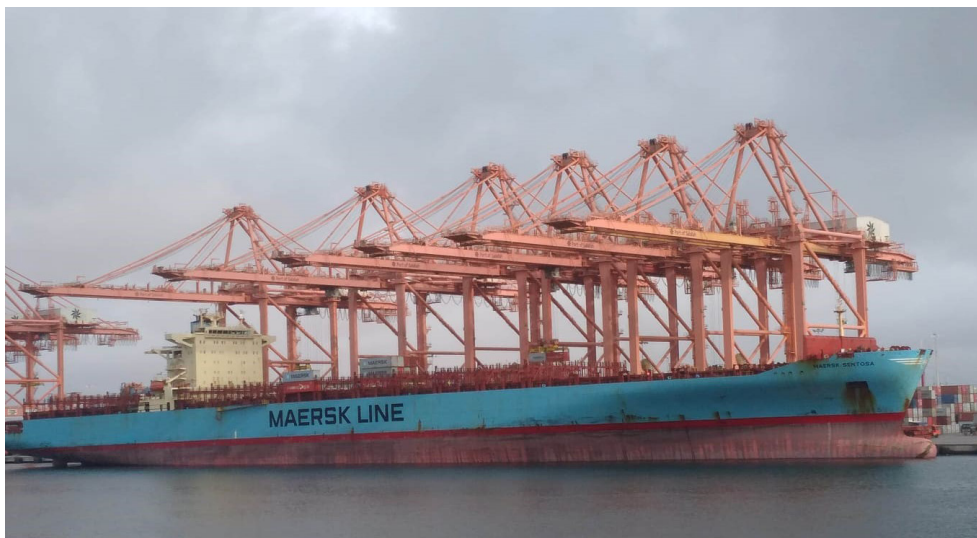
**Maryam Zoma Kiefer**, LMSW, is the social work intern supervisor at *Seafarers International House* and is the Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy at The Coalition for Behavioral Health. She has previously worked at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Catholic Charities. Maryam began working with immigrants and refugees during her U.S. Fulbright Fellowship to Jordan, where she conducted a qualitative research study analyzing the ways participation in faith-based organizations help improve the psychosocial well-being of Iraqi widow refugees. She received her BA in Middle East Studies and Political Science from Fordham University and MSW from the Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College. 



# CREW CHANGE CRISIS: ODYSSEY OF THE SENTOSA

By Henryk Behnke with photos from seafarer Michael "Mike" Penkwitz on the Sentosa

In early March, I ran into Michael Penkwitz, one of the American seafarers lodging at *Seafarers International House* (SIH). Mike was getting ready for his next assignment on the container ship *Sentosa* operated by Maersk Line, Limited. I thought it would be interesting for our friends and supporters to follow this ship's voyage across the world's oceans and post it on our social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter). I was looking forward to chatting with Mike after his return in a couple of months.



Maersk Sentosa in Port Salalah, Oman, July 29, 2020. Photo by Michael Penkwitz.

The *Sentosa* and its crew left the Port of New Jersey/New York on March 10. Just two days later, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. The 2,000,000 seafarers that transport about 90% of the world's trade including raw materials, food, medication and other vital goods, continued to perform their duties, as unions and shipping companies agreed to extend a month-long extension to crew contracts through April 16.

It would not be the last extension and eventually it resulted in seafarers becoming the "invisible essential workers," only without that official "key worker" status that would have allowed crew changes. At least 200,000 seafarers were estimated to be stranded on ships amid government-imposed COVID-19 travel restrictions.

In May and June, unions and shipping companies urged governments to allow crew changes to avoid a humanitarian crisis in shipping, in addition to concerns that seafarer fatigue, and mental health issues may

lead to serious maritime accidents. To assist distressed seafarers, SIH promoted the International Christian Maritime Association's "Chat with a Chaplain" free service ([www.sihnyc.org/chat-with-a-chaplain](http://www.sihnyc.org/chat-with-a-chaplain)).

Around that time, *Seafarers International House's* pastor, Marsh Drege, was in touch with Mike on board the *Sentosa* and checked in with the Seafarers International Union (SIU) and Maersk Line, Limited, who all did their best to facilitate crew changes. In the meantime, *Seafarers International House* shared appeals to alert the public about the growing crew change crisis and started to champion seafarers as "invisible essential workers."

By July, some crew members on the *Sentosa* had been on duty for over 190 days. On other ships, crews have been on vessels for up to a year.

Finally, on August 5, Mike arrived home after 149 days, over double the time he had signed up for - after spending major holidays on sea without any shore leave. Sadly, thousands of seafarers remain stuck at sea. ⚓

Here is a **timeline in social media posts** of the Odyssey of the *Sentosa*, a name that ironically translates as "peace and tranquility" in Malay.

## March 10 – Port of Newark

For the next 70+ days we will follow the Container Ship Maersk Line, Limited #SENTOSA built in 2007, sailing under the US flag. The trip goes to #Charleston, #Savannah, #Houston Bon voyage to the crew!

## March 18 – Houston, TX

Remember the adventure we started - before the challenges we all face? Everyday our port chaplains assist seafarers, who are essential in maintaining our supply chains. As an example, we follow the #Sentosa. The vessel will reach #Houston tomorrow.

## March 27 – Norfolk, VA

To the Crew: Thanks for keeping our supply chains moving!

## April 10 – Algeciras, Spain

#Sentosa has been to Malaga. Happy Passover & Happy Easter to the crew!

## April 15 – Port Said, Egypt

Unfortunately, the crew cannot



be relieved of their duty as their replacements are stranded.

*April 25 - Salalah, Oman*

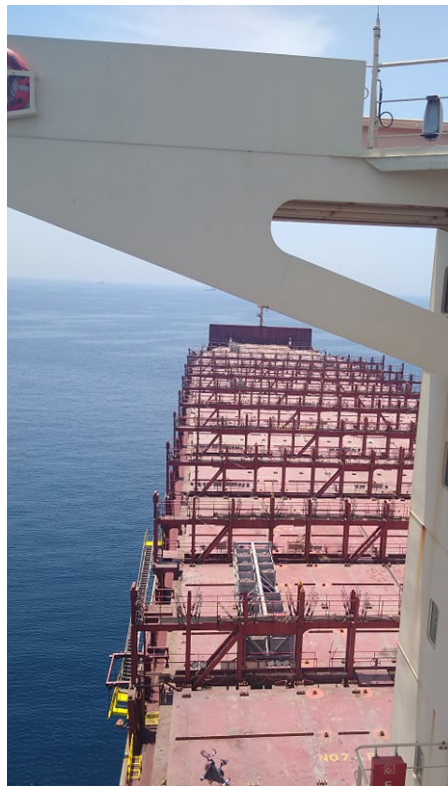
Thank you for your extended service to the crew of #Sentosa - And Ramadan Kareem to all celebrants.

*May 7 - Jebel Ali, Dubai, UAE*

International Maritime Organization called on governments to recognize seafarers as essential workers for global supply chains and exempt them from travel barriers.

*May 31 - Jebel Ali, Dubai, UAE*

They sailed across the Atlantic, into the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal and on May 5 they reached Jebel Ali. There they are now idled due to lack of cargo from the COVID-19 economic contraction. It is the same sad story affecting hundreds of ships, thousands of mariners. We are glad Maersk provides the stuck seafarers with increased internet access.



*July 4 - Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Happy 4th of July to the all seafarers stuck at sea including the crew of the #Sentosa ... The ship has no cargo due COVID-19 economic contraction. Governments need to help seafarers, the invisible essential workers. #crewchange crisis

July 10 - Finally, 13 governments including the US back crew changes. #Seafarers on vessels like the #Sentosa have been out there since March 10 or even longer with no shore leave at all.

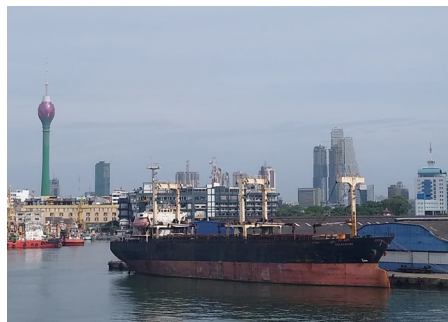
*July 21 - Kattupalli, India*

*July 23- Colombo, Sri Lanka (photo)*

*July 29 - Salalah, Oman*

*August 4 - Jebel Ali, Dubai, UAE*

Mike is traveling home! Yet, the crew change crisis is far from over .... ⚓



## CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA: A HOLIDAY INITIATIVE

This past Holiday Season, a record breaking 2,601 crew members regardless of their faith or nationality received satchels filled with a sweatshirt, socks, a T-shirt, a knitted cap & scarf, nuts or chocolate and a Holiday Greetings card.

To participate please visit [www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea](http://www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea) or email [jeni@sihnyc.org](mailto:jeni@sihnyc.org)



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Joyful seafarers on board the Atlantica Bay Tanker. December 2019. Selfie.

After governments did not meet a June 15 deadline to enable crew changes, the International Transport Workers' Federation stated:

ITF and its affiliated seafarers' unions will now assist hundreds of thousands of seafarers to exercise their right to stop working, leave ships, and return home. "We are sending a very strong message to seafarers: you have selflessly extended and extended your contracts to do your part to keep critical supplies flowing around the world during this pandemic. Some seafarers have been on board for more than a year, and over the course of this pandemic many have been prevented by governments from coming ashore even for a walk and alarmingly refused emergency medical care. Frankly, we have seafarers killing themselves at the prospect of this misery continuing without end. They call them 'floating prisons'. This situation is intolerable to the ITF family," said ITF Seafarers' Section Chair Dave Heindel.

# SHIP VISITS DURING COVID

By SIH Port Chaplain Ruth Setaro and Henryk Behnke

Over 200,000 seafarers have been stuck on their ships during the COVID-19 pandemic because of travel restrictions. Yet, they are essential in keeping our supply chains moving. This has led to a crew change crisis with mariners having to remain on their ships for often over 190 days. Until July, governments did little to help while seafarers lacked “essential or key” worker status that would facilitate crew rotations.

The following encounter of Port Chaplain Ruth is just one of the countless examples of the stress many seafarers have to endure. It is also an example of how we operate beyond denominations and faith traditions.

On June 12, our Lutheran Port Chaplain Ruth received an email from Stella Maris, Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) in the United Kingdom. The AOS chaplain had visited a ship in Tyne, England, where a crew member had been found dead in his cabin of an apparent heart attack. The ship, the bulk carrier Rosalia, was now on its way to New Haven, CT, and the Stella Maris asked if we could possibly make a visit.

Ruth followed the ship's voyage to the United States of America, where it docked in the morning of June 24, a day before the official Day of the Seafarer. Ruth contacted the ship agent, terminal, Port Security and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to see if she would be allowed to visit the ship. After a 3-hour wait, she was given the permission from CBP in Boston to visit the ship with the understanding that it had been a 12-day crossing and not 14 days (and not fulfilling the mandatory quarantine time) so it was at Ruth's own risk to board. Because the vessel before the Rosalia had unloaded a tremendous amount of lumber cargo and the Rosalia was unloading copper plates, the terminal was very full. The terminal staff gave Ruth one hour, from 1 o'clock exactly, to drive in around all the cargo, visit the ship and be out by 2 o'clock when work would resume after lunch break.



The Rosalia leaving Tyne, UK, late May 2020. Photo by Neil C. McBride.



Crew of another vessel, the Maersk Karachi, took down their masks for a second to show off the baseball caps delivered by Chaplain Arnd Braun-Storck.

Ruth boarded the ship with mask and gloves and had a wonderful visit with six of the crew outside on the deck. Many of the other crew were sleeping as they had been up all-night traveling through the Long Island Sound. They talked about Alex, the fitter who had died. He was only 47 years old and was supposed to have gone home but because of the problem of getting seafarers off the ship, due to the mandatory extension of contracts during this pandemic, he was still on board. Ruth spoke with several of the crew who said they were supposed to go home at the same time but they are also still not able to leave. The crew was upset that they did not know the real cause of Alex's death as they said he seemed healthy. Stella Maris staff had blessed Alex's cabin but it was obvious that this Filipino crew were still very upset and were having sleepless nights.

After giving the crew gifts of playing cards, devotionals, rosaries and lots of chocolate, Ruth said some prayers and blessed the ship and crew. The vessel left that night for Wilmington, NC, and Ruth sent a message ahead to other chaplains along the Eastern Seaboard to look for the crew of the Rosalia and to continue the ministry started in England and continuing in New Haven and beyond.

The ship agent told Ruth that she cannot get crew members off ships to see a doctor and that they are often unable to refill their prescriptions. Seafarers have been on these ships so long that they are running out of their medication and she has heard of people dying because of that.

Because CBP is still not boarding ships in New Haven, SIH Port Chaplains there are still not allowed to routinely visit ships [as of mid-July 2020]. However, our Port Chaplains in Baltimore, New Jersey & New York and Philadelphia visit ships and bring Wi-Fi and essential items crews ordered.

Further, seafarers who are between jobs find a room in *Seafarers International House "Relocated"* – another mid-town hotel, where we rent rooms during the pandemic and already provided 407 lodging nights through August.





## MISSION & PEOPLE SERVED

Seafarers International House (SIH) is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants. SIH offers hospitality, social assistance, and advocacy to a multi-national and multi-faith community in maritime ports on the Eastern Seaboard and in an 84-room Guesthouse in New York City. This mission serves a total of over 38,000 people including over 31,000 seafarers visited and over 5,200 lodging nights provided for seafarers, asylees, and domestic violence and human trafficking survivors. SIH provides its services to all people regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, or family/parental status.

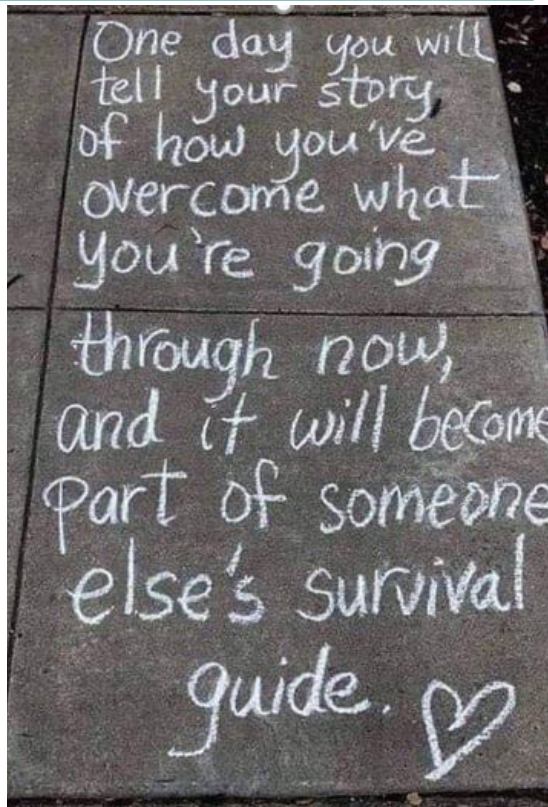
We are making the most of your contributions: 86% of our revenue is spent on programs, only 14% on administration and fundraising.

## FROM A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR

The following "thank you" email was sent by a young woman who stayed at Seafarers International House two years ago.

I sit here done praying and getting dressed to go to my job on the 2nd anniversary. I think of how Seafarers International House was instrumental in me getting myself together to get to this point. You guys helped me find out what I really do to make my life better. Every day I was there I did something to help me get ready for work.

You guys gave me a place to stay, Metro-Cards to go job hunting and appointments. Helped me with food when I had no income. The best way to pay you back is by always keeping you updated on my life. Because I want you guys to see that you really make a difference in people's lives. Thank you. 🚢



In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Seafarers International House is temporarily closed to the public. We do receive your mail.

We will reopen when it is safe for our guests and our employees to do so. Please check our website for updates [www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org) or email your inquiry to [res@sihnyc.org](mailto:res@sihnyc.org) or call us at (917) 284-2933.

If you are a seafarer with a valid MMC in need of accommodation, please also email [res@sihnyc.org](mailto:res@sihnyc.org) or call us at (917) 284-2933. We may be able to provide alternative lodging for you in Manhattan.

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*A deceptively idyllic view: With economic disruptions there is no cargo on the vessels, which during the crew change crisis that affects 200,000 seafarers have been described as "floating prisons." Photo by Michael Penkwitz from the deck of the Maersk Sentosa in the Indian Ocean.*

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