

PORTCALL

Seafarers International House

MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: *Angels Unawares*

Where has "summertime and the living is easy" gone? For us at Seafarers International House (SIH) it was a busy summer with our port chaplains visiting seafarers in the ports of Albany, Baltimore, Duluth, Houston, New Haven, and New York/New Jersey. They heard of the trauma of mariners stuck in the Strait of Hormuz. In the best of times, seafaring is a hard and dangerous profession as the article on page 5 describes. Add to that being amid a war zone fearing drone attacks while operating a vessel transporting crude oil ... Thanks to your support our port chaplains can lend an ear, counsel, and pray with the distressed.

To show all mariners that we care, our port chaplains will soon spread the joy of Christmas when they deliver Christmas-at-Sea satchels including those that members of the Propeller Club of NY/NJ and many congregations assembled this summer and fall. If you would like to surprise a seafarer this Christmas, you can participate (see page 4). One port chaplain will be missing this fall. Pastor Arnd Braun-Storck is retiring after years of caring for seafarers. See the announcement "Gute Reise" on page 7.

I would be remiss to not include a thank you all participants and awardees of the 2026 Setting the Course Reception (check out page 6 "In Their Words"). Please mark your calendars

for the 2027 Setting the Course Reception on Thursday, April 22.

This past July has been horrific for the immigrant community. Within just one week, ICE agents shot and killed Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, 52 and Johan Sebastián, 25, who were both hard-working fathers and who were not the intended targets of the enforcement operations. Then a third man died in Florida after an aggressive enforcement stop went wrong. During the same week, DHS reported its 22nd death in ICE custody. All together through mid-July, 32 people died so far this year. The article "Why they must flee their homeland" on pages 2-3 looks at general reasons by country of origin of last year's asylee guests. It includes a photo of the sculpture *Angels Unawares* that Ann and I saw in Rome in 2022. This summer, our Operations Director, Lucas Mietlowski, found a replica in Montreal (see cover photo). Fittingly, for the 40th anniversary of my ordination last year, the board presented me with a miniature as you can see in the photo to the right. It is inspired by one of my favourite bible verses:

"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some have unknowingly entertained angels." Hebrews 13:2

To better show that hospitality to immigrants and to seafarers, this summer, we continued the renovation of our right-sized home on Vesey Street in

Lower Manhattan. The initial phase of our capital campaign *Building a Longer Table* has begun with the leadership of our immediate past board president Captain Richard "Rick" Schoenlank. As he has piloted huge containerships through the Narrows of New York Harbor and SIH through the troubled waters of the pandemic, he will now steer the campaign with a committee that includes dear friends: Capt. Willie Barberre, Dcn. Sara Jane Baublitz, Conor Brooks, Eric Ebeling, Mary Heller, Rev. E. Roy Riley, Andrew Steele, and Rev. Margay Whitlock. Stay tuned.

Peace,



Marsh Luther Dreyer



WHY THEY MUST FLEE FROM THEIR HOMELAND

By Henryk Behnke, Seafarers International House

Seamen's International House (SIH) has its origin when in 1873 the Augustana Lutheran Synod invited the 28-year-old pastor Per Johan Swärd of the Church of Sweden (with his wife and son), to serve Swedish seafarers, sailors who had earned a living on a ship and were easily taken advantage of in the bustling port of New York. Using the Deutsche Emigranten Haus (German Immigrants House) as a base, Pastor Swärd, an immigrant himself, conducted a ministry to Swedish seafarers and soon noticed the struggles of Swedish immigrants in Brooklyn. He counseled both groups, creating today's Immigrant and Port Mission.

With changing needs of immigrants over time, SIH now focuses on legal asylum seekers, individuals who must be physically present in the country or at a U.S. port of entry. Thanks to funding from ELCA AMMPARO, St. Peter's Fund for Social Ministry, and generous donors, last year alone we were able to provide a safe place for 19 asylum seekers who hailed from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Cuba (3), Haiti (5), Nigeria, Peru, Ukraine, and Venezuela. They received free lodging for a total of 1,328 nights, often free meals, and social work assistance to help them settle in. With the traumas our guests may have suffered back home, on the way here, or in a U.S. detention center, very few want to go on record and tell their story. But there are trends and reasons why they would dare to leave their families, friends and community that differ from country to country. To qualify for asylum, they all have to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

Let's look at why last year's asylum seekers may have left their homelands by country. Please note that these are generalizations at best, but they may provide us with a glimpse of the dangers our guests may have escaped.

Angolans seek asylum in the U.S. chiefly to escape political persecution, human rights abuses, and state-sponsored violence. Many, frequently from the oil-rich but conflict-ridden northern territory of Cabinda, face deadly crackdowns and imprisonment from Angolan armed forces for their political activism or separatist views. Others flee extreme religious persecution or targeted violence as severe crackdowns have focused upon Islam (which remains legally unrecognized) and certain fringe Christian movements.

Because direct routes to the U.S. are limited, some Angolan migrants, as well as those from other countries, endure long, dangerous journeys. They often fly into countries with



The map shows the countries of origin of our asylee guests in blue.

less restrictive visa requirements, such as Morocco or Turkey, before traveling to Central America and trekking over land to the U.S.-Mexico border to request asylum. **Since the June 2026 Supreme Court ruling allows the government to turn back migrants while they are still in Mexico this "entry" is no longer available for most who seek asylum – regardless of country of origin and circumstances.**

Cameroonians are a highly diverse people representing over 200 distinct ethnic groups, speaking French and English as official languages. A main reason for them to seek asylum is the Anglophone Crisis that started in 2016 when violence escalated between government security forces and armed separatist groups in the Northwest and Southwest regions. Civilians face arbitrary arrests, torture, extra-judicial killings, and widespread property destruction. In addition, supporters of opposition political parties, as well as journalists, lawyers, and human rights activists, are often targeted for opposing the long-standing government of President Paul Biya.

Furthermore, **as in a total of 66 countries worldwide, homosexuality is criminalized** in Cameroon, leading to severe social stigma, mob violence, and state-sanctioned persecution targeting LGBTQ+ individuals. **In Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and specific states in Nigeria and Pakistan same-sex activity is punishable by death.**

For **Chileans**, the U.S. asylum process is exceptionally difficult to navigate because Chile generally has a stable democratic government and a strong economy compared to many other Latin American countries. However, some still seek asylum based on individualized claims of political

persecution, discrimination (such as based on sexual orientation), or escaping severe domestic violence.

Cubans apply for asylum in the U.S. to escape severe economic hardship, systemic shortages of basic goods, and political repression under the country's one-party communist system. Their decision is driven by deteriorating living standards, chronic power outages, hyperinflation, and a lack of political and personal freedoms.

While Cubans have historically received preferential treatment through pathways like the Cuban Adjustment Act, U.S. policies have recently become much more restrictive. Programs like the CHNV (Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela) humanitarian parole were terminated effective March 25, 2025, prompting a surge in Cubans pursuing standard asylum processes at the U.S. border.

Conditions in **Haiti** are so perilous that the U.S. State Department has issued its highest-level Do Not Travel advisory to people wanting to visit. These are the same factors that have Haitians seek asylum: Armed criminal gangs control large portions of the country, leading to soaring rates of extortion, kidnappings, and deadly violence, which the UNHCR recognizes as valid grounds for international protection. For years, there have been severe shortages of food, medicine, and healthcare as well as political turmoil with prolonged crises and assassinations.

Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2013 criminalizes homosexuality, leaving queer individuals vulnerable to mob violence, police abuse, and systemic discrimination. LGBTQ+ asylum seekers are at risk of facing the capital punishment.

Another reason for seeking asylum is that many applicants flee regions terrorized by Islamic extremist groups like Boko Haram, where civilians face kidnappings, targeted killings, and the destruction of villages. Christians in Nigeria face severe persecution, primarily in the northern and central regions.

Peruvian asylum seekers face political instability, systemic government corruption, and rampant internal violence. Moreover, many leave due to widespread domestic violence (mostly against women who cannot count on local authorities) and a lack of legal protection, or because

Right: Ann and Pastor Marsh Drege in front of the original Angels Unawares by Timothy Schmalz on St. Peter's Square at the Vatican in 2022.

The ship carries diverse historical figures including a Jewish man fleeing Nazi Germany, a Syrian refugee escaping civil war, a boy from the 1840s Irish Famine, a Cherokee on the Trail of Tears, and the Holy Family (Mary, Joseph, and Jesus). Hidden in the middle of the crowd are a pair of angel wings.

threats from criminal organizations (like extortion and kidnappings) endanger their safety. Furthermore, in regions like the Amazon (e.g., Madre de Dios), Indigenous communities have faced harassment, displacement, and threats due to illegal mining and deforestation.

Ukrainians try to escape the devastating violence, destruction, and humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Many are also applying for formal asylum because previous temporary protection programs (such as Uniting for Ukraine and Temporary Protected Status) do not provide a clear path to permanent U.S. residency or citizenship.

Venezuelans flee severe political persecution, escalating gang violence, and widespread economic collapse. Opponents of the Maduro regime faced targeted human rights abuses and detainment, compounded by crippling shortages of food and medical supplies.

The U.S. currently remains an option for legal protection for those who can prove a credible fear of persecution. However, the landscape for Venezuelan and most other immigrants in the U.S. has grown complex and uncertain following major policy shifts, such as **the termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haiti and Syria by the Supreme Court in June 2026, which can be used as precedent for other further terminations.**

As we continue to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the "experiment in democracy" in the U.S., we should celebrate the diversity, strength, imagination, endurance, and resilience that immigrants brought to our country. As a society we should recreate ways to welcome the stranger, especially if they are facing perils at home. 



WHAT IS NEVER PAID FOR AT SEA

By Captain Alexandros Lignos, Master Mariner

People think seafarers are well paid. They are not. What they are really paid for is living where most people would refuse to spend a single night.

In 2026, we have satellites, AI, sensors, predictive maintenance, and digitalization. Yet none of them changed one simple fact. The sea remains one of the most hostile environments on Earth.

Right now, beneath thousands of ships crossing the oceans, there are thousands of meters of darkness below the keel. A cold, silent, liquid grave capable of erasing every trace of your existence within minutes. And that is where a seafarer goes to work.

A wet deck can break a career. A dropped shackle can crush a skull. A swinging load can end a life. A rotating machine cannot tell the difference between steel and human flesh. A mooring line under extreme tension can snap the life out of you in a blink of an eye.

Then comes the danger nobody sees. The danger inside the mind. A heart attack ashore is minutes from help. In the middle of the Pacific, it can be days away. Fatigue becomes normal. Sleep fragmented. Stress routine. Isolation a silent companion. Birthdays, anniversaries, and funerals are missed. Life continues without you. Mental health organizations identify depression and psychological exhaustion as the fastest-growing challenges facing seafarers. Some wounds heal. Some never do.

Then comes the nightmare every seafarer respects. Fire. More than 250 shipboard fires were reported globally in recent reviews. At sea, there is no fire station coming. Only the crew. Only the training. Only the courage of the people standing next to you.

Then come explosions, flooding, loss of stability, groundings, and collisions. Rogue waves appearing from nowhere. Storms powerful enough to remind every Master that technology can predict the weather but cannot negotiate with it.

Beyond all that wait dangers no radar can fully identify. Piracy. Kidnappings. Missiles. Drones. War. Recent attacks prove innocent seafarers can become targets of conflicts they never created and never chose.

And if that was not enough, thousands are still abandoned by employers, stranded in foreign ports without wages or far away from home.

So no. Seafarers are not paid for their labor alone. They are paid to remain alert when fatigue says sleep. To remain calm when fear says run. To make decisions when mistakes cost lives. To stand watch above a liquid abyss while carrying the weight of global trade on their shoulders.

Technology reduced some risks. The ocean never signed that agreement. The world pays for cargo. But tell me honestly ... If your office floor could kill you, your workplace catch fire, your nearest hospital was days away, missiles crossed your route, and beneath your feet lay thousands of meters of darkness ...

What salary would you consider enough?

Note from the author:

I truly appreciate the work Seafarers International House has been doing for seafarers and vulnerable communities for so many years. I would be honored to have "WHAT IS NEVER PAID FOR AT SEA" [previously posted on LinkedIn] included in your Port Call Newsletter. Thank you for helping its message reach people who genuinely care about the lives and welfare of seafarers. 🚢



SIH Port Chaplain Pastor Tammy Sharp (left) visited this crew while they were in the port of Houston in July 2026.



Top: Seafarers on the Hapag Lloyd Antwerp Express with Christmas-at-Sea satchels delivered by Port Chaplain Pastor Arnd Braun-Storck.
Below: Members of the Propeller Club of NY/NJ volunteered for a satchel packing party on July 14, 2026. Photo by Pastor Marsh Drege.

CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA: SPREADING JOY

By Henryk Behnke, Seafarers International House

As you may have read in the article by Captain Lignos, life at sea is no picnic, but full of sacrifices and dangers and the compensation is often low, especially for most crews who come from low-wage countries. To spread the joy of Christmas among these strangers who we all depend on, we invite you to participate in Christmas-at-Sea. Soon, our port chaplains will start delivering satchels filled with gifts from you. Mariners regardless of their faith or nationality will receive satchels filled with:

- One Sweatshirt – hooded or unhooded (size M-L)
- Three Pairs of Socks – thermal or gym
- One T- Shirt (size M-L)
- One Knitted Winter Cap (coordinating scarf optional; no pastels please),
- A Can of Nuts, Bar of Chocolate, or Healthy Snack
- A Holiday or Christmas card from YOU!

You pick the colors, styles, and brands, but please no substitutions from the list. For the safety of seafarers, please do not add fringes or pom-poms to the hats and scarves. The Christmas-at-Sea satchels should be comparable for each member of the crew.

Please assemble each satchel with sweatshirts and T-shirts of the same size and label the satchel with a M or L on the back side.

All links including knitting patterns and how to participate are easily accessible on our web page: use the QR code or visit <https://www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea>



If it is more convenient, you may donate and we purchase the items for you. Typically, a filled satchel costs about \$40. Or you may order items for seafarers on Amazon on the Christmas-at-Sea wish list: <https://a.co/bHHEzEZ>

If you are a Thrivent client, you may apply for \$250 in seed money for your Christmas-at-Sea team at www.thrivent.com/about-us/membership/thrivent-action-teams

To order empty satchels and to coordinate delivery or pick up, please contact: Jeni Janis at jeni@sihny.org or (212) 677-4800 ext. 7218.

Filled satchels may also be mailed by **Tuesday, December 1, 2026**, to: Seafarers International House, 120 West 14th St., New York, NY 10011. 



From left to right: Frederick "Fred" Finger; Thomas "Tommy" Orzechowski, Jr.; and Rear Admiral John A. Okon 'g1, USN (ret). Photo by Henryk Behnke. April 23, 2026.

IN THEIR WORDS

Thank you to all participants who made the **2026 Setting the Course Reception** a phenomenal success for the Port Mission. Instrumental were our honorees who are now all members of our Leadership Council, which helps select next year's awardees. Here are quotes from their acceptance remarks:

That is why Seafarers International House matters. You provide more than support.... you provide connection, dignity, spiritual support, and a reminder that every seafarer belongs to something larger than themselves: a family.

Rear Admiral John A. Okon 'g1, USN (ret), President, SUNY Maritime College

I'm confident we all agree that Seafarers International House is doing vital, humane, indispensable work on behalf of mariners. And to me, there's no greater calling.

Thomas "Tommy" Orzechowski, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer, Seafarers International Union of North America

I'd like to say a few words about Seafarers International House and the work they do every day—often quietly and always away from the spotlight. In 2025 alone, SIH made 1,347 ship visits, met with more than 14,000 seafarers, and provided transportation for shopping and medical services to nearly 1,900 mariners. With a staff as small as theirs, that level of outreach is truly remarkable.

Frederick "Fred" Finger, Senior VP for Fleet Strategy, American Roll-on Roll-off Carrier Group (ARC)



SAVE THE DATE:
APRIL 22, 5 - 8:00 PM
2027 SETTING THE
COURSE RECEPTION
NEW YORK ATHLETIC CLUB

PLAN YOUR GIVING

Planned giving is a highly effective, tax-smart way to leave a lasting charitable legacy. Contrary to popular belief, nearly 90% of planned gifts are simple bequests made through a will or by naming a charity as a beneficiary on a retirement or insurance account.

While you should consult an attorney, sentences like the following can help establish your wishes: "I give to Seafarers International House, federal tax ID is 13-5562413, (the sum of \$___ or ___ percent of the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate/trust) for its general purposes." Of course, you can use similar language for your family and friends.

If you die without a will, your estate will be divided according to laws in the state where you lived. Planning allows you to make an impact on causes and people you care about. And it might provide financial benefits, such as reduced income tax, avoided capital gains tax, and lower estate taxes.

If you have included Seafarers International House in your planned planning, please let us know so that we may thank you and acknowledge you as a member of our Homeport Society. To do so or for any assistance, please contact Henryk, Director of Development. You can reach him at (212) 677-4800 ext. 7203 or henryk@sihnyc.org. 



Pastor Marsh Drege, left, [and Ann Siegle Drege, not pictured] and Laura and Hans Vogel are members of the Homeport Society having remembered SIH in their planned giving.

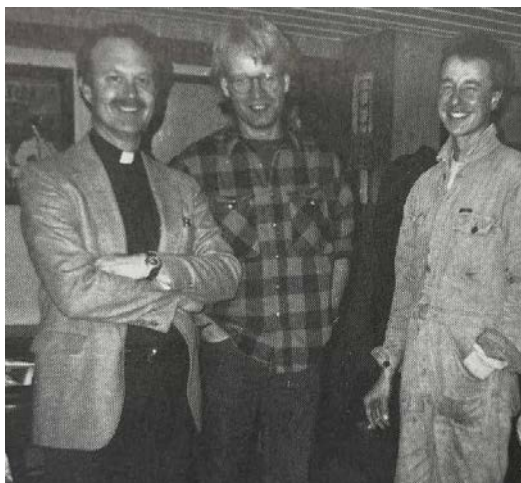
Photo by Henryk Behnke, Sunset Cruise June 2023.

MISSION & PEOPLE SERVED

Seafarers International House (SIH) is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants. SIH offers pastoral/spiritual care, hospitality, social work assistance, and advocacy to a multi-national and multi-faith community in the ports of Albany, Baltimore, Duluth, Houston, New Haven, New York & New Jersey, and in NYC.

In 2025, SIH served 19,519 people. This includes boarding 1,347 vessels, visiting 14,078 seafarers and delivering 3,405 Christmas-at-Sea satchels assembled by volunteers. SIH also provided 3,679 lodging nights for seafarers and asylum seekers. 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.

Program services accounted for 67% of expenses with only 33% spent on supporting services (management, fundraising & communications).



This fall, we have to say “*Gute Reise*” (bon voyage) to one who wished it to thousands of mariners. SIH Port Chaplain Rev. **Arnd Braun-Storck is retiring**. Born in Germany, he interned with the German Seamen's Mission in New York in 1990/91 and returned in 1994 as a port chaplain, serving alongside his future wife, Beate, who is also a pastor.

During the pandemic and its “social distancing” he practiced what he coined “social closeness” and “physical distancing.” Accordingly, in 2021 he wrote: “... as chaplains, we do what we are called to do: we support seafarers in spiritual distress and help them to identify and draw upon their sources of spiritual strength, hoping that we can provide some relief from stress that they are experiencing on a daily basis.”

He will be missed by the crews and the whole team: “Ahoi, Arnd!”

Photo left: Rev. Clint Padgett with intern Arnd and a seafarer. 1991. Right: A mariner with Arnd, Dec. 2025.

With gratitude: The German Society of the City of New York supports SIH's German port chaplain position.

Seafarers International House now fulfills its mission by leasing out the guesthouse to a not-for-profit partner that aligns with our work. This helps us to focus on our original purpose: to care for the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and asylum seekers. Therefore, we are no longer taking reservations for accommodations from the public for either rooms or meeting space. We still receive your mail at our guesthouse address.

If you are a seafarer with a valid MMC in need of accommodation in Manhattan or other assistance, please email res@sihny.org or call us at (212) 677-4800. If you need to access mail or your locker, please make an appointment at least 24 hours in advance.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cecilia Aranzamendez, Esq.

Lisa G. Baltazar, Esq.

Dcn. Sara Jane Baublitz

Kay Bellor⁵

Stephen A. Bennett⁶

Keith Billotti, Esq.

Conor Patrick Brooks

Bishop Rev. Dr. Christa Compton[†]

Ralston Deffenbaugh

Jordan Esopa

Bishop Rev. Dr. Katrina D. Foster[†]

Rev. Mark A. Grorud

Richard Hendrick, Sr.

Rev. Louise N. Johnson

David Kingery

Capt. Tom Larkin

Rev. Sara E. Lilja

Rev. Linda Manson⁴

Blythe C. Miller, Esq.²

Bishop Rev. Taryn Montgomery

Leslie A. Neve⁵

Bishop Rev. Nathan Piphon[†]

Capt. Christopher J. Pitfick

Kurt B. Plankl, Esq.

Anthony Pruzinsky, Esq.

Rev. E. Roy Riley, Jr.

Rev. Joshua Rinas

Bethann Rooney

Andrew G. Steele⁵

Rev. Susan Tjornehoj[†]

Carol Trower³

1. President

2. Vice President

3. Treasurer

4. Secretary

5. Member at Large

6. Assistant Treasurer

† Ex Officio

PORTCALL

Seafarers International House

IN THIS ISSUE

ANGELS UNAWARES

WHY THEY MUST FLEE FROM THEIR
HOMELAND

WHAT IS NEVER PAID FOR AT SEA

CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA: SPREADING JOY

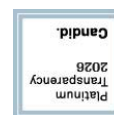
IN THEIR WORDS & 2027 SETTING THE
COURSE RECEPTION APRIL 22

PLAN YOUR GIVING

GUTE REISE (BON VOYAGE)



A replica of Angels Unawares by Timothy Schmalz photographed by SIH's Director of Operations, Lucas Mielowski, at the Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal in Montreal in July 2026.



 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

An Affiliate of the

Follow us on   

www.SIHNYC.org

212-677-4800

New York, NY 10011

Mailing address: 120 West 14th Street

Seafarers International House



NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
NEW YORK, NY
PERMIT NO. 8027