

PORTCALL

Seafarers International House

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: MENTAL HEALTH OF SEAFARERS

Let's talk about the invisible issue among already invisible seafarers: mental health. Our port chaplains and I have witnessed a disturbing increase in depression and suicide ideation in the past year.

In March, Sailor's Society and Yale University presented a study which found that, out of 1,000 seafarers surveyed, 25% suffer from some sort of depression. That's 25% when the average occurrence of depression among the general population is anywhere from 3-6%. And indeed nearly half (45%) of the seafarers who reported symptoms of depression said they had not asked anybody for help. There is a fear of talking about it openly, for fear of losing their job.

This is where our port chaplains can provide such vital help: they can assure the seafarer that any disclosure of mental health vulnerability is confidential. They can also direct a depressed seafarer to help while at the same time providing them assurance of God's presence and care.

Depression can lead to suicide yet, like depression statistics, the prevalence of suicide is hard to determine. First of all we need to emphasize mental "health" over the pejorative term mental "illness" among seafarers. This effort emphasizes that suicide can be preventable with properly implemented wellness programs. The point is made that the economic impact of mental

health problems going untreated can be much greater than identifying and treating it as it occurs.

Secondly, we need to continue to advocate for reducing seafarers' isolation, increasing good and healthy food on board, appropriate breaks, intentional socialization, access to shore leave as much as possible, access to port chaplains and others concerned for their welfare and, of course, access to free or reasonably-priced internet.

The Futureautics Group recently reported that seafarers who now use the internet at sea has increased by over half a million in three years. The "Catch 22" of this report is this: 53% of seafarers believed that this increase in crew internet connectivity has actually led to a decline in social interaction on board and, we might surmise, an unwitting breeding ground for more depression.

Thankfully, we emphasize a Ministry of Presence here at SIH, which assures seafarers that they are never alone. ⚓



A happy third officer gets a SIM card and talks with Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Summer Intern Zachary Dean and SIH Executive Director Pastor Marsh Luther Drege. Photo by Henryk Behnke.



Marsh Luther Drege

ASYLEE HARRY'S STORY

THE ASYLUM SEEKER'S JOURNEY IS FRAUGHT WITH DANGER, FEAR, AND UNCERTAINTY

Harry was forced to flee from Nigeria after his best friend was slaughtered by vigilante mobs for violating perceived tribal customs, and the word on the streets was that the mobs were coming after Harry, too. He closed his business, packed some clothes, said goodbye to his parents, and fled Nigeria. He arrived at Newark Liberty International Airport in December, approached the Customs Border Patrol (CBP) booth, presented his passport and asked for asylum.

Harry was baffled and frightened when CBP placed him in handcuffs and leg-shackles and drove him to the Elizabeth Detention Center, a privately operated immigrant warehouse.

In 2017, SIH provided 31 Asylees with 1,971 nights of lodging and social assistance free of charge.

Here, about 30 detainees share a dormitory room with bunk beds only inches apart. The space is always noisy, cold, air-conditioned, and lit with florescent lighting, - without access to fresh air, windows, or natural light. After a few weeks, Harry started to receive weekly visits from Seafarers International House (SIH) volunteers - total strangers, who got his name from a partner agency. Then Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) suddenly moved him one evening to the Essex County Jail without any explanation. The jail is a forbidding structure.

When the volunteers finally tracked him down and tried to visit him there, they were told that Harry first had to put them on his "approved visitor list" before they could see him. Of course, nobody told Harry about this prerequisite, and he was left to wonder what had happened to his visitors. He wasn't allowed to receive incoming calls from the volunteers, and the jail guards wouldn't deliver any messages from them. Harry became worried that something had happened to his visitors. Finally, he was allowed to make a collect call to them.

The SIH volunteers told him about the "approved visitor list" and he quickly rectified this and the visits resumed. Ultimately, ten months after he arrived in the United States and several court adjournments requested by his less-than-zealous attorney, the Immigration Court granted Harry his asylum on August 1.

From August 2 on, Harry stayed in one of the five rooms Seafarers International House has set aside for asylees and immigrants. With the help of SIH's social worker intern, he navigated the red-tape and soon found a place of his own and employment, - all within only 63 days at SIH.

To this day, Harry visits SIH periodically to say hi to staff and to counsel new arrivals, who share similar experiences. 

Disclosure: To ensure Harry's privacy, his name and any dates were changed. This is an edited version of an original article by Christopher V. Roehrer.

DETENTION CENTER VISITATION PROGRAM: A LINK TO HOPE

By the Rev. E. Roy Riley,
SIH Board Member, May 2018

Ten years ago, on May 21, 2008, NJ Senator Bob Menendez invited me to participate in a news conference in Washington D.C. with the aim to improve health care in the immigration detention facilities in the US. The catalyst for the press conference was the increasing number of reported deaths in detention facilities, most apparently due to inadequate health care for the detainees.

In July of that year, Senator Menendez and I, along with a small group of advocates, visited the Elizabeth Detention Center (EDC) in New Jersey. We went to see for ourselves the space and care provided for detainees. We spoke with the health services and dietary staff, the administrators and guards, and most importantly the detainees.

In the years that followed some important improvements were made in detention health care. But health care is only one piece of the immigrant and asylee detention experience. Legal representation, overloaded immigration judges, lack of ability to locate or contact detainees, separation of families - especially mothers with children, cultural and religious insensitivity, overcrowding and lack of privacy ... the list goes on and on. These issues are further complicated by the increasing for-profit privatization of the detention system.



Asylees and supporters celebrate a Proclamation welcoming new Americans.

Caught up in our country's broken immigration system are human beings who have come seeking a better life, or as refugees and asylum seekers seeking safety and protection. The great majority are not criminals. For most their only offense is a failure to have the necessary legal documents (a misdemeanor, not a felony). Some are victims of human trafficking. For all, the response to their situation is the same: incarceration for weeks or months or even years.

The July 2008 visit to the Elizabeth Detention Center (EDC) was not our last. In fact, SIH volunteers and like-minded

individuals and organizations have continued these visits across the country. For many of the detainees these visits are their link to hope.

Immigration is complicated. Comprehensive immigration reform must come from the Congress. In the meantime the church and faith-based agencies will try to address the pieces of the immigrant detainee experience like providing adequate healthcare, identifying and supporting immigration attorneys, and keeping hope alive with visits and prayers.

In addition to detention center visits, SIH has taken on another critical and underserved need: providing transitional housing and social assistance for those released from detention. This "new" dimension of our mission and ministry has already become as much blessing to us as for those we have served. We should not be surprised.

The problem is far from over. According to Immigration & Customs Enforcement just between January and July 12, 2018, eight people died while held in detention. ⚓

OCTOBER 23, 2018, 6 – 8PM RIGHT OF ASYLUM RECEPTION



Seafarers International House will honor Congressman **Adriano Espailat** (pictured left), a former un-

documented immigrant, who this past Father's Day visited the Elizabeth Detention Center to draw attention to the separation of families, and **Ravi Ragbir** (photo right), the Executive Director of

New Sanctuary Coalition, who himself was threatened with deportation. Join us for the cocktail reception at Battery Gardens Restaurant to celebrate their work on behalf of asylum seekers and other immigrants.

Tickets are \$125. Call (212) 677-4800 ext. 1203, email henryk@sihnyc.org or visit www.sihnyc.org/upcoming-events.





Rev. Dr. K. Robert Schmitt hidden behind seafarers after Holy Week worship, requested by the crew.

REFLECTIONS: “ZAKAR” (REMEMBER)

By the Rev. Dr. K. Robert Schmitt, SIH Port Chaplain

In my button collection from college (1975-79) there is a white button with a yellow Star of David on it and in Hebrew “ZAKAR” (remember). It was given to us students for Holocaust Remembrance Day. As Christians we also remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor, member of the resistance against Nazi Germany, who was put to death in a concentration camp in April 1945.

What was drilled into me from that experience and later reading of Bonhoeffer’s works, was that we as Lutherans, especially those of us with German heritage, have a special responsibility to “ZAKAR” (remember) just as we come to the altar to remember the night Jesus was betrayed.

It is with that remembering that I reflect upon the Zero-Tolerance Policy of the US Government that separated

children from their parents at U.S. borders and that began in April 2018, just 73 years after many concentration camps were liberated, forgetting the past.

It is with that remembering that I call for your prayers and advocacy for those being gathered in modern day concentration camps of fenced cages in empty shopping centers and tent cities with barbed wire on military bases.

It is with that remembering that I call for you to love your neighbor, especially the crying and traumatized children being taken from parents and family members.

It is with that remembering that I ask for you do to whatever you feel is possible to help end this evil. “ZAKAR” (remember). 🚢



Dietrich Bonhoeffer, role model for many and one of the 20th century martyrs at Westminster Abby. Copyright Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

For more information about our social work outreach to seafarers, asylum seekers and trips to detention centers to visit with immigrant detainees, email Pastor Marsh Drege (drege@sihnyc.org) or call him at (212) 677-4800 X 1204.

CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA: A HOLIDAY INITIATIVE

Imagine you were alone on a major holiday like Ramadan, Thanksgiving or Hanukkah. Depressing. This is why we invite you and your congregation, business, or school group to bring joy to seafarers who will not be home with their loved ones for Christmas. Our port chaplains bring satchels filled with gifts to the ships for the holiday.

If it is more convenient, you may make a donation to "Christmas-at-Sea" and have us purchase the items for you. Typically, a completely filled satchel costs about \$25.

You pick the colors, styles and brands, but please no substitutions from the list. The Christmas-at-Sea satchels should be comparable for each member of the crew. And, please assemble each satchel with sweatshirts and T-shirts of the same size and label the satchel with a M, L, or XL.

What might otherwise have been another lonely night at sea becomes

a joyous occasion, because complete strangers ashore have taken the time to share the spirit of Christmas with these otherwise forgotten seafarers!

We are collecting the satchels throughout the year until December 10. Remember to put a return address on your Christmas cards, because occasionally crew members will send you a personal thank you.

For New England: Email Ruth Setaro (ruthsetaro@snet.net) or call her at 203-687-2177.

All other regions: Email Noreen Fleming (nfleming@sihny.org) or call her at 212-677-4800 (ext. 1218), or email Marsh Drege (drege@sihny.org) or call him at 212-677-4800 (ext. 1204).

Or mail satchels or your donation marked "Christmas-at-Sea" to:

Seafarers International House, 123 East 15th Street, New York, NY 10003.

Or visit www.SIHNYC.org to find out more or to make a donation online. ⚓



Seafarers with satchels. Photo by Pastor Arnd Braun-Storck.

Every crew member on a ship regardless of their faith or nationality will open their satchels, each containing:

ONE SWEATSHIRT
Hooded or unhooded
(size M-L-XL)

THREE PAIRS OF SOCKS
Thermal or white gym

ONE T-SHIRT
(size M-L-XL)

ONE KNITTED WINTER CAP
(matching scarf optional)

ONE CAN OF NUTS OR LARGE BAR OF CHOCOLATE

A HOLIDAY OR CHRISTMAS CARD FROM YOU!



Seafarers with satchels. Photo by Pastor Arnd Braun-Storck.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Book Launch: *Bed 26* A Memoir

Over 50 people attended the launch of Edafe Okporo's book *Bed 26: A Memoir of an African Man's Asylum in the United States* on June 22, 2018. Edafe talked about the experiences of Nigerian and West African gay or bisexual men and the reason they are forced to flee from their home country. The book informs about the experiences of immigrants in the Elizabeth NJ detention center and the gap between the perceived American dream and its reality of racism, discrimination and phobia for people of color in America. 🏳️‍🌈



Team work: Author Edafe Okporo, Aaron Morris of Immigration Equality, Sally Pillay of First Friends of NJ & NY, and Pastor Marsh Luther Drege of Seafarers International House. Photo by Henryk Behnke.

SAVE THE DATE

SEPTEMBER 18, 5:30 – 9:30 PM
Sunset Cruise aboard
the Pilot Boat NEW YORK
\$200 per person

OCTOBER 23, 6 – 8 PM
Right of Asylum Reception
\$125 per person

APRIL 25, 2019, 6 – 10 PM
Setting the Course Banquet
New York Athletic Club
\$600 per person

To reserve your seats call
(212) 677-4800 ext. 1203, email
henryk@sihnyc.org,
or visit
www.sihnyc.org/
upcoming-events

In Their Words - Setting the Course 2018 Honorees



BILL VAN LOO,

Secretary Treasurer of Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association

"Seafarers International House chaplains board thousands of ships and transport thousands of seafarers to and from their vessels to medical care or malls. They deliver thousands of

Christmas-At-Sea satchels to seafarers and most importantly they provided yours truly with housing in the early 1990's when I was shipping out of the New York Union Hall. I could have stayed with friends, but SIH was the right fit for me and the neighborhood, Union Square is awesome. I will be back."



PHILIP W.J. FISHER,

President of Chas. Kurz & Co. and Executive Vice President of Keystone Shipping Co.

"One important consideration that Mr. Kurz always followed was the respect and dignity for our shore side staff and the men and women who sailed on our vessels. This philosophy blends very closely to the mission of the Seafarers International House where they provide care, hospitality, social assistance with a view toward nurturing the human spirit and fostering human dignity. It is important that we, management and labor, remember our roles in supporting the men and women who are sailing our vessels, and working with us. These men and women who sail worldwide are often away from their families for many months and truly need our support."

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 serving a total of about 29,000 people including over 17,000 seafarers visited and almost 6,000 lodging nights for seafarers, asylees, and domestic violence and local disaster victims. 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: 84% of our revenue is spent on programs, only 16% on administration and fundraising.

STEALING FROM ASYLUM SEEKERS

By Christopher V. Roehrer

As if fleeing the country of their birth to escape persecution, injury and death was not enough trauma, asylum seekers arrive in the United States with few, if any, local relatives or friends and wind up in an immigration prison, stripped of their clothes and belongings and assigned a bed and a number.

Unless they have money to deposit into the prison's telephone account, they cannot call their families back home. Even with money to open an account, they cannot leave messages, and they cannot receive any incoming calls.

The isolation is daunting. For over seven months, the family of one indigent asylum seeker in the Elizabeth Detention Center had no idea of the whereabouts of their relative or even whether he was still alive, until a volunteer from Seafarers International House visited him and deposited \$50 into his ac-

count, allowing him to call his family for the first time.

For the longest while, immigration detention centers in this country refused to offer free calls to indigent detainees for the purpose of securing legal representation. A class action against the Department of Justice ended that practice, but in the Elizabeth Detention Center operated by Core Civic, a major private prison operator, indigent asylum seekers are given only one, three-minute call, which hardly fosters a meaningful dialogue.

Then, when the detained persons are either granted asylum or deported, the balance in their telephone accounts is forfeited, benefitting the telephone provider and indirectly the private prison operator and possibly the government. There's no security rationale for the forfeiture; it's just plain thievery. ⚓

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Seafarers International House

 dear world



"Seeking Asylum Isn't A Crime" - Asylee and author Edafe Okporo. Photo Credit: @dear world

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CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA
INITIATIVE

STEALING FROM ASYLUM SEEKERS

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123 East 15th Street
New York, NY 10003-3557
212-677-4800
www.SIHNYC.org

Seafarers International House



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