

# 150 YEARS



## Seafarers International House

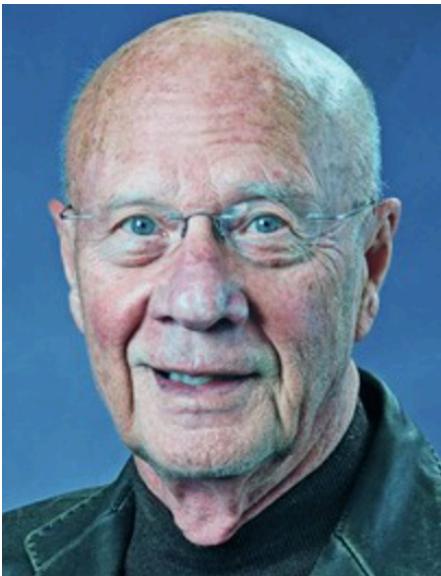
**Lighting the way for seafarers and  
immigrants since 1873**

## 150th Anniversary Commemoration



# DEDICATIONS

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In Memory of Rev. Dr. Dennis "Denny" A. Anderson (1937 – 2021)

This commemoration is dedicated to over 2 million people, who were or are on the way and have received our care since 1873. These include seafarers and immigrants and everyone who sought shelter or human services, or just a prayer.

This publication is also dedicated to the hundreds of board members who have served Seafarers International House over the past 150 years with unparalleled commitment, legendary integrity, and faithful advocacy. These volunteers have given of their time, talent and treasure as members of our board of directors and various committees, contributing reserves of passion and unending steadfastness especially during lean and challenging times. This mission would not have been able to thrive as it has without these saints - both living and eternal - and we thank them.

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Immanuel Communities  
and  
Seafarers International Union (SIU)



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This text originates from "An Evolution of Service: Seafarers International House 1873 – 1998" written by Rev. Serge A. Castigliano and his team, including research from a 1973 text by Rev. Dr. Charles B. Foelsch.

Additional material and research was compiled and provided by Henryk Behnke (SIH Development & Communications), Rev. Gary A. Grindeland (former SIH Executive Director), Andrew E. V. Krey (former SIH Port Chaplain), J. Nicholas Suhr (German Society of the City of New York), Dr. Jason Zuidema (Executive Director of North American Maritime Ministries Association (NAMMA). Judith Diers and Liv Parsons provided the photo of Dr. Berkemeier, their ancestor. Rev. Dr. Kim Eric Williams translated parts of the Julhälsning från Sv. Luth. Immigrant-hemmet i New York of 1912. SIH board member and former New Jersey Synod Bishop Rev. E. Roy Riley edited the complete text, while former board member Kelly Kandler provided logo options celebrating 150 years of service.

The production and research for this commemoration was supported by Immanuel Communities, in memory of former Nebraska Synod Bishop and SIH board member Rev. Dr. Dennis "Denny" Anderson. Additional funding came from Seafarers International Union through secretary-treasurer David Heindel, a 2003 Outstanding Friend of Seafarers awardee, and true supporter of seafarers' welfare. As Chairman of the Seafarers Section at International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), he endorsed requests SIH made over the past two decades to the ITF Seafarers' Trust to fund guesthouse capital improvements, accommodations to mariners during the pandemic, and vehicles to transport crew members. 

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Ruth Setaro, Coordinator & Port  
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Port Chaplain, Baltimore

# MISSION & PEOPLE SERVED

*Seafarers International House (SIH) is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants since 1873.*

SIH offers hospitality, social assistance, and advocacy in maritime ports on the Eastern Seaboard and Albany. In 2022, SIH served a total of 19,920 people. This includes boarding 1,368 vessels, visiting 15,135 seafarers and transporting 1,701 while providing 2,301 lodging nights for seafarers and immigrants in Manhattan.

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.

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# INTRODUCTION

**M**eet Seafarers International House (SIH). This is the year of its 150th anniversary, celebrating fifteen decades of uninterrupted services to over 2 million seafarers and immigrants in New York City and beyond! SIH is not a place, but rather a service to people on the way.

SIH's services are more urgently needed today than ever before. From merchant mariners caught in the crew change crisis of a pandemic and supply chain disruptions, to refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine needing a safe place to be, to asylum seekers arbitrarily transported from the southern border to New York City – Seafarers International House always stands ready to serve.

Founded in 1873 as a Lutheran maritime ministry, Seafarers International House today is an affiliate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). SIH is one of the largest shore-based ministries dedicated to the welfare of active merchant mariners, including crew members on today's container ships entering ports along the Eastern Seaboard and since winter 2023 to seafarers in the Port of Albany. Since its inception, SIH has cared for the needs of seafarers and vulnerable immigrants.

Commissioned by the Church of Sweden, Pastor Per Johan Swärd arrived in the United States in 1873 at the invitation of the Augustana Lutheran Synod to serve seafarers. Around the same time, the General Council of the Lutheran Church in the USA established Das Deutsche Emigranten Haus (German Immigrants House) and from this base Pastor Swärd conducted a ministry to seafarers and soon after to immigrants. In 1895, two houses on Moore Street in lower Manhattan were rented. One year later, 5 Water Street next door was added. A growing demand for space led to the purchase of a five-story building at 6 Water Street in 1927. It was then renamed the Lutheran Seamen's Center.

More space was needed. So, on September 24, 1964, a new 11-story building was dedicated at 123 East 15th Street. Named the Seaman and International House, the new facility provided services to seafarers, to immigrants, and to travelers, who through their room fees supported the mission.

With the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, that business model had to be ad-

justed. New income was derived from the lease of the building to social service organizations that share the mission of caring for people with temporary housing needs. An alternate location for the lodging of seafarers and immigrants was found in 2021 with "overflow" provided in mid-town hotels.

As of spring 2023, Seafarers International House continues to look for a suitable permanent home in New York City with mission-based guestrooms and administrative offices. SIH continues to serve mariners in the ports of Albany, Baltimore, New Haven, and New York & New Jersey. 



*SIH Port Chaplains assist seafarers almost around the clock including weekends, when other agencies are closed. Here is Port Chaplain Ruth Setaro welcoming all to the Port of New Haven in 2015. SIH Archives.*

# OVERVIEW

From its beginning in 1873 Seafarers International House has been willing and able to adapt to serve the needs of people on the move. This includes the ability to recognize when needs have been met and then to refocus and retool to meet new circumstances and challenges. This creative adaptability is reflected in the changing facilities and in the names by which the ministry has been identified:



Rev. Marsh Luther Drege at the temporary home. Summer 2021.



Reception area at 5 Water Street around 1912.

# NAMES & LOCATIONS

1873 - 1898	Ministry to Swedish seafarers and immigrants at German Lutheran Immigrants House, 26 State Street; ship visits in port
1898 - 1906	Incorporated as the <i>Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod's Immigrant Home in NYC</i> (12-14 Moore Street and 5 Water Street)
1906 - 1926	<i>The Swedish Lutheran Immigrant Home in NYC</i> (5 Water Street)
1927 - 1949	<i>The Swedish Lutheran Immigrant and Seamen's Home</i> (5 Water Street for immigrants and 6 Water Street for seafarers)
1949 - 1960	<i>Lutheran Seamen's Center of the Augustana Lutheran Church</i> (6 Water Street)
1961 - 1965	<i>Seaman's Center of the Augustana Lutheran Church</i> (6 Water Street; since 1964 123 East 15th Street)
1965 - 1986	<i>Seamen and International House</i> (123 East 15th Street)
1986 - present	<i>Seafarers and International House, Inc.</i> dba "Seafarers International House" (123 East 15th Street through 2020 and presently using rooms at mid-town hotels and the temporary home)



Reception area at 123 15th Street in the 1980s with Murray Barr, who volunteered until the pandemic.

# STAFF LEADERSHIP

Since 1952 there have been only 7 directors in 70 years.

1873 - 77	Rev. Per Johan Swärd (photos page 8)
1877 - 79	Rev. Erik Alfred Fogelstrom
1879	M. J. Englund
1880 - 82	Rev. Albert Rodell
1882 - 92	Rev. A. B. Lilja
1892 - 97	Carl G. Schuck
1897 - 1900	Edmund Bingberg
1900 - 03	C. G. Thulin, Victor Boren, and J. Aaron Johnson
1903	Nils Gustafson
1899 - 1902	Rev. S. B. Pearson
1902 - 12	Rev. A. B. Lilja (second term)
1912 - 14	C. Thurstone
1914 - 47	Rev. Axel C. H. Helander
1948	Rev. Dr. Carl G. Ohman
1948 - 50	Rev. Aron Theodore Johnson Hjerpe
1952 - 65	Rev. Dr. J. Vincent Nordgren
1965 - 73	Rev. Bernard Spong
1973 - 83	Rev. John Robert Nordlander
1984 - 93	Rev. J. Gordon Swanson
1994 - 2005	Rev. Dr. Serge Castigliano
2005 - 07	Rev. Gary A. Grindeland
2008 - present	Rev. Marsh Luther Drege (photo opposite page)



Rev. Erik Alfred Fogelstrom



Rev. Albert Rodell



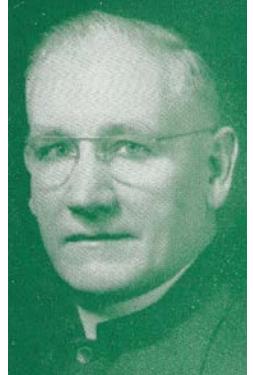
Rev. A. B. Lilja



C. Thurstone



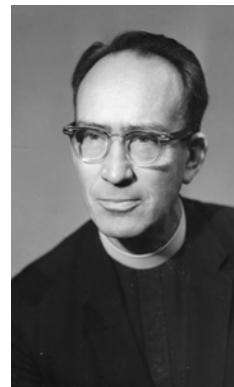
Rev. Axel C. H. Helander



Rev. Aron Theodore Johnson Hjerpe



Rev. Dr. J. Vincent Nordgren



Rev. Bernard Spong



Rev. John Robert Nordlander



Rev. J. Gordon Swanson



Rev. Dr. Serge Castigliano



Rev. Gary A. Grindeland

# THE NEEDS OF SEAFARERS ...

The roots of shore-based services to seafarers can be traced to the ports of England in the early nineteenth century. Men who had fought aboard warships in the Napoleonic Wars (1803 - 1815) came home to seek employment on merchant ships and on the docks. Soon the appalling conditions aboard ships and in port propelled individuals and groups to action. Organizations, often religious, emerged to address specific needs by providing safe lodging in the vicinity of the ports and to fight injustices in the treatment of seafarers.

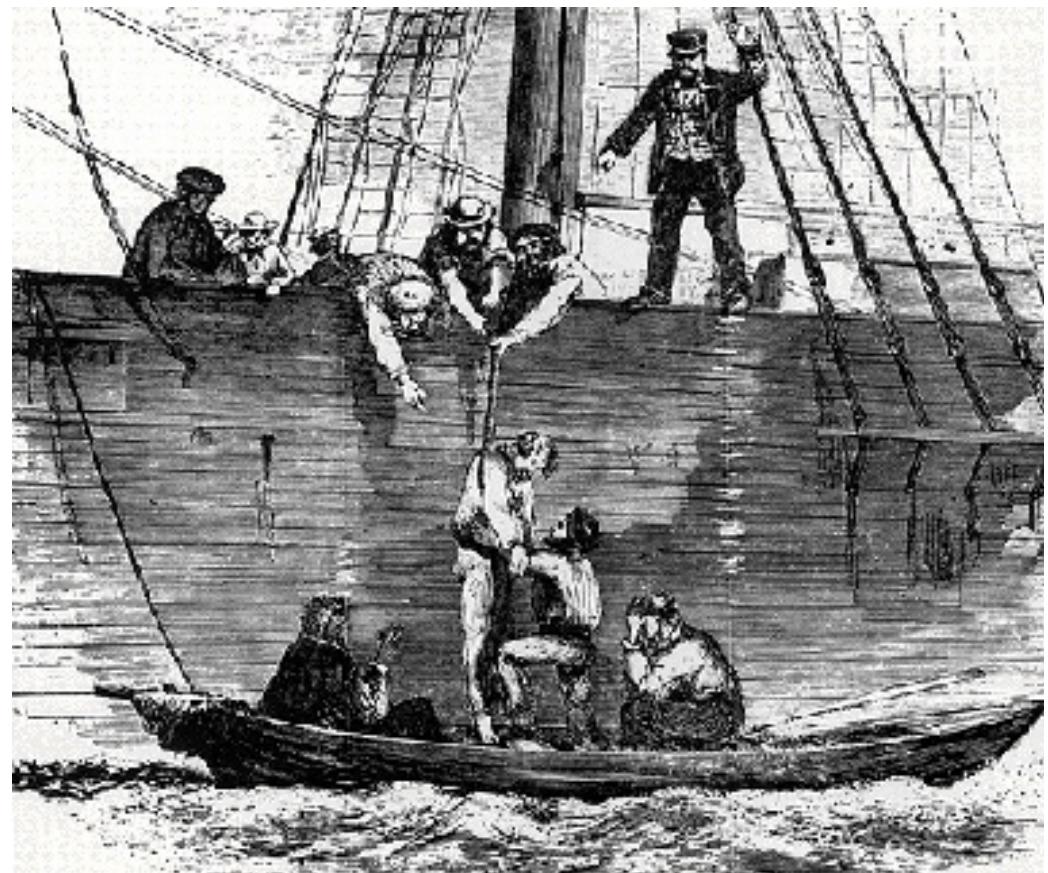
Sometime between the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam and the founding of the American Republic, New York became a major port. Sails filled the lower harbor and pioneered the development that would turn New York City into the center of world trade that it is today.

During the first half of the Nineteenth Century mariners had a vital role in the transformation of New York City and of America. Transportation and communication were critical elements in a new economic order and the pressure for faster, more efficient, economical shipping changed the seafarers' way of life. This new emphasis on shipping tested the resilience and resources of port cities like New York.

New York City was a frequent port of call for Scandinavian ships and the docks were bustling, noisy places. The confusion of activity and of languages, the sudden release from mandatory discipline aboard ships, and pockets full of cash wages made seafarers easy prey for hard drinking companions, prostitutes and other 'friends' waiting to relieve the seafarer of his money. When he overspent, the seafarer might be sold ("shanghaied") to an unscrupulous captain until he could pay his debt. Extended periods of unemployment also threatened to drain the morale and resources of career seafarers.

Concerned citizens began to address the emerging problems in American port cities using some of the strategies that had proved effective in England. Seamen's homes were opened near the ports, some sponsored by the temperance and the revivalism movements that were sweeping the country.

Libraries and soup kitchens proliferated. Churches were established specifically for seafarers in New York, Philadelphia, and other port cities. Ethnic missions emerged to assist seafarers in their native languages and to provide a sense of home for those who seldom saw their native lands.



Shanghaied sailors being lifted onto a ship. Image: Bill Pickelhaupt, Flyblister Press.

## ... AND NEEDS OF IMMIGRANTS, PARTICULARLY FROM SWEDEN

According to Wikipedia, during the Swedish emigration to the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries, about 1.3 million people left Sweden. While the land of the U.S. frontier was a magnet for the rural poor all over Europe, some other factors particularly encouraged Swedish emigration.

The Lutheran Church of Sweden supported the government by opposing both emigration and clergy efforts to preach sobriety. Some priests and congregations perceived this opposition as religious persecution. Coupled with crop failures, the slow pace of industrialization, and population growth in the Swedish countryside, the idea of emigration to America (even though prohibited by Swedish law until 1840) became a hopeful option for many.

Swedish migration to the U.S. peaked in the decades after the Civil War (1861 – 1865). By 1890, the U.S. census reported a Swedish-American population of nearly 800,000. Most of these immigrants arrived in New York harbor, entering through Castle Garden (today's Castle Clinton at the southern tip of Manhattan) until 1892, and thereafter through Ellis Island. From there they found initial places to stay in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn.



## SERVICES TO SEAFARERS - AND TO IMMIGRANTS - FOUNDING OF THE MINISTRY OF SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

From early times there were Swedish Lutherans in New York, but their number was undoubtedly small before 1840. Services to Scandinavian seafarers in New York start with Swedish born Olof Gustaf Hedström (1803 – 1877). Hedström became a Methodist in America and established the "North River Mission" on a Bethel ship named John Wesley in **1845**.

The work of the Lutheran Church began later. In **1865**, Gustavus Adolphus church was established, and is still operating at 22nd Street in Manhattan. It has been the site of many Seafarers International House milestone events throughout the years.

Our voyage, the ministry of Seafarers International House began in **1873**. **Pastor Per Johan Swärd** (or Svärd) (1845 – 1901) was sent by the Lutheran Church of Sweden at the invitation of the Augustana Lutheran Church in America, (which was part of the General Council of the Lutheran Church of which Das Deutsche Emigraten Haus was also a member) to initiate a ministry to Swedish seafarers in New York City.

Pastor Swärd was no stranger to this type of work having served for four years in the busy port of Constantinople after the opening of the Suez Canal. He had been sent there by the Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen, a Swedish Mission organized to renew the Swedish Church.

Arriving in New York with his wife and son, Pastor Swärd began providing much needed assistance to Scandinavian seafarers in a language they understood. It was demanding work. But the 28-year-old pastor soon became aware of other needs. A flood of immigrants arrived at Castle Garden and later at Ellis Island. Many were Swedes, exhausted by the journey and in need of practical and spiritual help. Pastor Swärd felt called to minister to these individuals and families in addition to his work with seafarers.

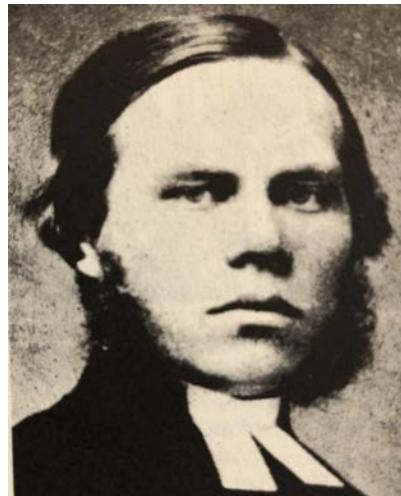
*In the Land of Promise, Castle Garden. Oil on Wood by Charles Frederic Ulrich, 1884. National Gallery of Art, Public Domain.*

**S**wärd's base of operation was an immigrant home on State Street across from Castle Garden. The property was purchased by the General Council of the Lutheran Church in 1873. For the next twenty years, the two predecessor organizations to Seafarers International House - the ministry to Swedish seafarers and the future German Seamen's Mission of New York - shared the Deutsche Emigranten Haus (German Emigrants House) as a ministry to Swedish and German seafarers and immigrants.

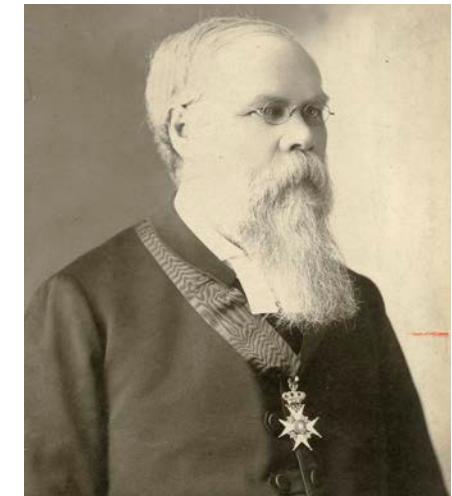
As more Swedish immigrants came pouring into the city, Swärd was approached by members of Gustavus Adolphus Church in Manhattan who were living in Brooklyn and wanted to establish their own Swedish congregation there. Stretched between service to seafarers and the growing tide of immigrants, Swärd decided to focus his ministry on those who had begun to establish themselves in this new land. In 1874, Swärd started a mission at Bethlehem Church in Brooklyn, while continuing to aid seafarers.



*Das Deutsche Emigranten Haus. SIH Archives.*



*Left: Rev. Per Johan Swärd. No date. From Seamen's Missions by Roald Kverndal 2013.  
Right: Swärd ca. 1895. He served as president of the Augustana Synod from 1891-1899 and was made commander of the Order of the North Star, second class by King Oscar II of Sweden in 1894.  
Photo by Hughes & Sandberg, 205 N. 16th St., Omaha, Neb. ELCA Archives image.*



**A**fter four years, Pastor Swärd was called to a church in Baltimore in 1877. Later that same year, recently ordained **Pastor Erik Alfred Fogelstrom** (or Ernest A. Fogelstrom) (1850 – 1909) picked up where Swärd left off. Raised in a seafaring family and a former seafarer himself, Fogelstrom was the perfect match for ministry to seafarers and immigrants.

But in 1879, Pastor Fogelstrom was called to Immanuel Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska, to serve the Swedish community. There he founded Immanuel Deaconess Institute, which turned into Immanuel Medical Center, today's CHI (Catholic Health Initiative) Health Immanuel, which is part of CommonSpirit Health, a non-profit, Catholic health system.

While Fogelstrom left after only two years, his legacy in New York continued through at least three people over the decades: First, thirty-five years after his departure, in 1904, when one of his Immanuel Institute's deaconesses, **Sister Hulda Hultquist**, came to serve immigrants.

Second, more recently, when **Rev. Dr. Dennis "Denny" A. Anderson** (1937 – 2021), a former bishop of Nebraska, joined the SIH board for the first time in the 1990s. Denny was involved in Immanuel and the alliance of health systems in 1996.

He had a second term on the SIH board until his passing in 2021. His place on the SIH board was assumed by the third person connected to Fogelstrom, **Rev. Mark Grorud**, who was called to be the first Executive Director of Immanuel Vision Foundation, a charitable entity, which had its roots in the 1996 alliance.

After Pastor Fogelstrom's departure, a seminary student named **M. J. Englund** continued the ministry to seafarers and immigrants. From **1880** to **1882**, **Rev. Albert Rodell** took up this ministry. Rodell reported to the Board that he visited the heavy-hearted newcomers at Castle Garden nearly every day. As the demands on his time and energies grew, additional help was needed. Emma von Roxendorf, a noble Christian-spirited woman, was engaged to assist with the sick and troubled immigrants.

In **1882**, **A. B. Lilja**, a Christian layman from Philadelphia served as immigrant missionary, a post he held for ten years until **1891**. He was ordained in **1889**. Testifying before a U.S. Senate Committee hearing in **1891**, Lilja described the conditions at Castle Garden; how he would attend to Scandinavian immigrants, who were processed and sometimes detained overnight at the barge office. He stated that while "as general rule most Scandinavians had money enough to help themselves" some needed his assistance. With 600 to 800 immigrants passing through per hour, there were always some who fell on hard times, especially young women with children, who relied on the aid provided by his organization to help them settle into their new homeland. After his first stint, Pastor Lilja returned for another ten-year term from **1902** until **1912** as Scandinavian immigration peaked.

As the influx of immigrants intensified, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration developed Ellis Island in **1892** to receive and process arrivals. Those who had family in the U.S. or job prospects moved rapidly through New York to other destinations. Immigrants without such connections often required extensive and protracted assistance provided by organizations such as SIH.

For two decades, the German and Swedish ministry collaboration within the General Council's Haus was fruitful. But the tide of immigrants showed no sign of diminishing and the need for adequate lodging facilities was growing urgent.



*Detail: Immigrants landing at Castle Garden. Etching by A. B. Shults, 1880. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection of the NY Public Library.*

At the **1892** Augustana Synod Convention, Pastor Swärd, who had become President of the Synod, boldly declared "We must secure an immigrants' home of our own." It took three years from idea to fruition. A day after Independence Day **1895**, a new board for the Immigrant Home or Home was formed at Gustavus Adolphus church and the work among immigrants began.

Two small houses on 12-14 Moore Street were rented, providing a total of eighteen rooms. Each of the brick buildings was about 22 by 25 feet and stood about four stories high.

While the mission to seafarers remained the primary focus, during the first ten months of **1895**, twenty-three hundred and eleven immigrants were logged into the register. Like today's asylum seekers, some guests would stay for a day or two, some for a week or a month and longer as they settled into their new homeland.

The contemporary, William Alfred Passavant observed the work of that "Haus" while Augustana had a part in it and gave it lavish praise: *"To see hundreds of these weary travelers at rest at the Home,"* he wrote, *"their wants attended to, their baggage safely guarded, their evening worship over and the stillness of a Christian household settling on the quiet sleepers is a sight to thank God for."* He counted the Home a *Bethesda, a healing place for the bodies and souls of all.*

By Rev. Dr. Charles B. Foelsch

# SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS

Managing this relocation and expansion was **Carl G. Schuck**, a lay minister, who became missionary at the Immigrant Hemet from **1891** to 1898. With the help of **Mrs. Schuck** who cooked wholesome meals for the guests and made them comfortable in the small, clean rooms, this husband-and-wife team worked miracles.

By 1896, with the Immigrant Hemet serving more than 40,000 Swedish newcomers a year, the need for additional space had become acute and the next-door building, 5 Water Street, was rented. Soon the three buildings were remodeled into a single unit with an entrance at Water Street, just a few minutes' walk from the Battery.

In spring **1898**, the ministry was incorporated by the Augustana Lutheran Synod. The chosen name, **Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod's Immigrant Home in New York City**, reflected the evolution of service that had already taken place. From its original focus on ministry to seafarers, to a parish-based ministry for Swedish immigrants, the emphasis was now primarily on serving immigrants at their port of entry.

In 1900, the board of the Immigrant Home appealed to the Synod for the permission to purchase the rented facilities on Water and Moore Streets. That would be a big financial step for the Augustana Synod! Then, in November 1906, the owner of the building wanted to increase the rent significantly or sell the property for \$60,000. The members of the General Council raised \$10,000 as a down payment. By 1908, the Augustana Church had raised another \$10,000. Later, an additional \$2,500 was paid and a loan secured for \$37,500. By 1912, repairs had been completed in the amount of \$6,000 making the Home a tidy and proper place to fulfill the needs its lodgers.

With the purchase of 5 Water Street in **1906**, the name of the Immigrant Home was changed to reflect its ethnic emphasis. For over forty years it would be known as the **Swedish Lutheran Immigrant Home of New York City**. By 1900, what had begun as a Lutheran maritime ministry to seamen and immigrants had become largely a response to a tide of Swedish immigration. In **1908**, deaconess **Sister Hulda Hultquist** arrived from Omaha and helped to meet the needs of the residents including their children..

*April 4, 1898: Incorporated as the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod's Immigrant Home in New York City. The particular objects for which the corporation is to be formed are:*

- a) *To serve the interests of the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod by spreading knowledge of its blissful and numerous functions and to recommend its congregations to immigrants.*
- b) *To aid Lutherans and others who pass through New York, but more especially to provide lodging and board at exceedingly low rates to Scandinavian and Finnish immigrants.*
- c) *To give to travelers advice and information through its missionary and Superintendent.*
- d) *To provide the stressed immigrants of above named nationalities with temporary means of support and the means wherewith to continue their journey.*

Four years later, in **1912**, Sister Hulda and Pastor Lilja left. The General Council chose **C. Thurstone** from Jamestown, NY as superintendent and missionary. Once again, a wife, **Mrs. C. Thurstone** became "matron" of the Home, which had 27 rooms for 75 guests. On staff were an office manager, a receptionist, and 6 employees of both sexes: two in the kitchen, two in the dining room and two for cleaning the rooms.



Immigrant Home at 5 Water Street. SIH Archives.

*The missionary led the way, but everybody on the Board helped in the service to immigrants and to an occasional seaman too, both in the Home and among the new Ellis Island arrivals from Sweden.*

*The pleas for assistance were myriad. No wonder. In one year of the eighteen nineties more than 40,000 Swedish newcomers came ashore here. All of them sooner or later, needed help, most of them, it seemed, the very moment they set foot upon the new world's soil ... railroad ticket lost ... money stolen ... baggage gone ... illness demanding hospitalization ... desperate homesickness ... worries about kinsfolk failing to meet their people as agreed ... contentions with the guards or immigration authorities ...*

*Then the problems at the home itself ... keeping its larder stocked (so many mouths to feed, so little money to pay shopkeeper and butcher) ... cleaning all those rooms and lounges and chapel and hallways and so few hands to do it ... replenishing the shelves of the linen closets and keeping the linens snowy white and well-mended ... securing and handing out tracts and pamphlets and scripture portions ... sharing the burdens and the problems of the guests ... holding family prayers and worship periods ... guarding against the wiles of imposters looking for undeserved free meals and lodgings ... teaching the newcomers their new land's ways and manners and customs ... running here and there to the churches to beg for donations for the immigrants and money offerings for the support of the Home. So many matters required the Board's special attention.*

By Rev. Dr. Charles B. Foelsch

## GERMAN SEAMEN'S MISSION

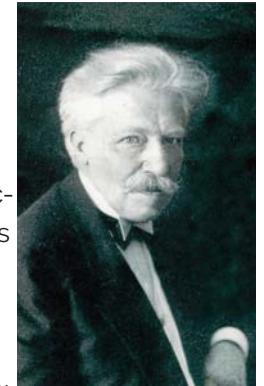
In 1905, Dr. Gottlieb C. Berkemeier (1855 – 1924), pictured right, the son of the German Emigrant House's director, became interested in seamen's welfare. Dr. Berkemeier persuaded a Lutheran organization in Hanover, Germany, to send a representative to found a German seamen's mission in the Port of New York. Pastor Wilhelm Thun (1872 - 1969) arrived with this assignment in September 1906. Early meetings of the German Seamen's Mission in the Port of New York were held at the Imperial German General Consulate (11 Broadway) and at the Emigrant House in lower Manhattan.

In 1907, the work of the German Seamen's Mission began in Hoboken, N.J., a municipality directly across from New York City. The fledgling Mission bought the building at 64 Hudson Street in Hoboken on credit, for a sum of \$12,000. From January 21 to April 26, 1908, the Mission was visited by 7,575 seamen. In the same period, 824 seamen attended religious services, while 279 received sick visits. There were 121 visits to ships.

The German Seamen's Mission endured the fallout of two World Wars, the depression, and the changing demographics of Hoboken. In 1979 the Hoboken facility was sold, and mission work was consolidated first to a building at West 22nd Street and starting in 1983 in the offices of Seafarers International House.

From 1978 until his retirement in 2011, Rev. Clint Padgett steered the German Seamen's Mission through challenging times that culminated with the financial crisis of 2008.

After 125 years of working collaboratively in the service to seafarers in the Port of New York and New Jersey, the board of directors of the German Seamen's Mission of New York determined that its mission would best be achieved through its merger into Seafarers International House in 2012. Today, SIH remains a partner of the umbrella organization, Deutsche Seemannsmission e. V., and has German speaking staff in the port of New York that serves German as well as non-German-speaking flagged vessels



Dedication of the expanded Seamen's House of the German Seamen's Mission in 1925.  
Newspaper article. SIH Archives.

# IMMIGRANTS, SEAMEN, UNEMPLOYED, AND SERVICE PERSONNEL

In 1914, Rev. Axel C. H. Helander (1871 - 1950) took the helm and steered the organization through the choppy waters of the great depression and two world wars and their aftermaths serving through 1947.

At about the same time, as Europe became embroiled in what would be known as World War I, the tide of immigrants into the U.S. lessened dramatically. Immigration came to an end when America declared war on Germany in 1917. Ellis Island was closed as a port of entry and the need for a Swedish Immigrant Home significantly diminished.

Helander and the board saw the critical role of supply and troop ships in the war effort and the needs of seafarers. In 1917, as America entered the War, a worship service specifically for seafarers was held at Gustavus Adolphus Church "to dramatize the perils of the deep that the seamen were facing."

In Hoboken, German sailors at the German Seamen's Mission were taken to Ellis Island and held there. In the spring of 1918, the Seamen's Mission was confiscated and occupied by 300 American soldiers. Roughly 40,000 German seafarers had been stranded in the United States by the outbreak of World War I. After the Armistice in 1918, some 30,000, stayed in the United States.

Concurrently, America's shipping industry was enjoying its record-breaking post-war boom. Seafarers, sometimes on lengthy leave, sometimes only briefly ashore, were knocking at the door of the Home in Manhattan. They were looking for lodging and counsel and recreation for the duration of their stay in port. Now, the Home was again devoting its service to those for whom the ministry began in 1873: seafarers!

By the end of the First World War, the Home had been expanded to serve both immigrants and sailors. In 1926, the new name reflected this: **The Swedish Lutheran Immigrant and Seamen's Home**.

In 1927, the Augustana Synod purchased the five-story warehouse at **6 Water Street**, directly across the street from the outgrown and outmoded structures purchased two decades earlier. Funds were raised to modernize the warehouse to provide 34 rooms for lodging, a social room, a reading

room, offices, and kitchen facilities. This building was designated specifically to assist seafarers while they were in port.

After the collapse of the Stock Market in 1929, the scope of the ministry was expanded to include services to homeless, mostly destitute men caught in the throes of the great depression and unemployed seamen.

To assist a struggling female population, in 1930 the Woman's Missionary Society of the Augustana Synod was founded and in 1960 renamed the Augustana Lutheran Church Women with the purpose "to establish and maintain a tiding over home for women out of employment or without friends or means." From 1930 to 1961 the Church Women operated the **Lutheran Home for Women** at 318-20 East 82nd Street. This Home served transients and working women, some staying up to several years.

The influence of Helander was critical during the depression years of 1929 - 1933. He was described as an "inspired preacher to thousands of downhearted and disappointed immigrants"; as a sympathetic listener who provided help to "those who were stranded or in trouble with the immigration authorities"; solicitous "to those who had fallen upon evil times". The workload grew enormously with the collection of funds that would help a couple of hundred people get two meals a day and shelter at night. These relief efforts cost the Home about \$200,000. To stretch resources, routine maintenance on the two Water Street properties and non-essential expenditures were deferred.



Unemployed single women in New York demonstrate for public works jobs. Some placards read "Forgotten women," because public policy focused only on men's unemployment. Dec. 7, 1933. (Photograph Everett on Fine Art America).

Helander organized an extensive relief program in cooperation with the City of New York and representatives of the Swedish government. Later as work and welfare programs were instituted by federal and state governments, some of the burden for service to homeless men was relieved and the Home could turn its attention to other emerging needs arising with the Second World War.

When America entered World War II in 1941, most of the male population was drawn into military service and the focus of service at the Home shifted once again. Rather than a port of entry, New York became a point of debarkation for service men and women.

Staff assignments and priorities were adjusted to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of brave young service personnel who were shipping out to fight for their country. The organizing principles of Scandinavian heritage, language or Lutheran doctrine blurred as the chaplains welcomed, comforted, and prayed with all. For the next five years the needs of America's young fighting men and women were a priority for the Home.

In Hoboken, in contrast to 1914, there were no German ships in the harbor when hostilities started. As the Second World War came to an end, the German Seamen's Mission saw its decades of work on behalf of German seamen in the Port of New York collapse. Many years would pass before German shipping recovered. The Mission rented out some rooms to longshoremen. Doing so kept the Mission solvent. After 1950, German ships again sailed into the harbor of New York and with them services to German seafarers resumed.



Immigration and Naturalization Service agents ferret out Germans who have overstayed leaves in the US. Some are shown leaving the German Seamen's Mission. Hoboken History Museum. May 17, 1941.



6 Water Street in 1927. SIH Archives.

In 1947, on the other side of the Hudson in Manhattan, Pastor Helander retired after 33 years of service and left the interim leadership to **Dr. Carl G. Ohman**. Helander is remembered with reverence and respect for his many years of service. As his obituary reflected, "He was a person who always could be called at any time - a man always willing and ready to help." Pastor Axel Helander regarded his own work as that of a servant on a humanitarian mission in the true Christian spirit.

From 1873 to 1948 \$1,368,000 was spent on hospitality, visits to sick seamen in hospitals and immigrants, especially those, who were detained as well as to the seafarers aboard ships in port. During that period more than half a million people stayed from a few days to six months under the protection of the organization that would be named *Seafarers International House*.

# EXPANDING SERVICES

Rev. Aron Theodore Johnson Hjerpe (1886 – 1963) took charge as superintendent and missionary in 1948 and in 1949 combined the two functions to become the first Executive Director. Born in Sweden, his experience included heading the Lutheran Seamen's Home in East Boston, MA.

During Hjerpe's tenure, desperately needed repairs deferred during the depression and war had to be made on both 5 and 6 Water Street. Without those repairs the organization would have been forced to close. This was a leap of faith moment, literally relying on God and the goodwill of donors - and bank loans.

Improvements focused on 6 Water Street and included fixing the outside walls and repainting, redecorating, and refurnishing the rooms. A new roof had to be installed and the office, lobby, library, and reception rooms on the first floor were enlarged. The basement was converted into a recreation center and featured a kitchen and lunch room. Wash rooms were rebuilt on all five floors – each with a shower! Sprinklers and plumbing systems were upgraded, and the heating plant converted from coal to oil burner.

The 1950s brought significant changes to the shipping industry. Ships were larger, voyage times shorter, and the quality of shipboard life had improved. Seafarers became older than those of the pre-war periods. For the first time a large proportion of those who came to the Home were thirty years of age or older and about a fifth of the guests were technically not seafarers. Many guests were Scandinavian or of Scandinavian descent. Others came from different parts of the world. Acknowledging a practice that had been growing over several years, the Augustana Synod decided to officially welcome guests of all nationalities and creeds, changing the name in 1949 from Swedish Lutheran Immigrant Home in New York City to **Lutheran Seamen's Center of the Augustana Lutheran Church**.

The officially adopted purpose of the Seamen's Center was:

*“... to minister to seamen and transients of all nationalities by providing pastoral, ship and hospital visitation, social and other services and facilities for worship, housing, recreation and other services as needed from time to time.”*

## 1953 service numbers from a 1954 three-fold:

- 17,435 lodgings nights, 3,412 nights free or on credit (70% paid)
- 16,665 attendees in lounge; 598 attendees at worship;
- 2,125 telephone messages relayed or inquiries answered
- 1,392 social work assistance involving, referrals, translation of documents, writing of letters, personal loans, etc.
- 207 sick calls; 31 visits to Ellis Island

A “home away from home” for a seaman at a price that he can afford to pay. Often a seaman must wait a long time for his next job – sometimes several weeks – and he may find himself in need of credit to get over his low spot. Frequently we have seamen who are convalescing after an injury or illness while at sea. Occasionally such men need our help in securing just compensation and frequently they must depend on us to house and feed them until they are fit for duty again.

In 1952, Rev. Dr. J. Vincent Nordgren (1895–1966), a visionary and doer, became the Executive Director. Another husband-and-wife team, Rubyé Caroline Patton Nordgren (1896–1987) took a serious interest in the Center; serving in the office when the secretary was on vacation, hosting supper after Sunday services, and providing snacks for Tuesday movie times. The Center became increasingly popular with seafarers, immigrants, and international visitors. 5 Water Street was sold in 1953 and further improvements were made at 6 Water Street, which then featured five floors and a basement, an attractive lobby and reading room, game room, kitchen facilities, offices, and accommodations for 50 people.



Pastor Nordgren visiting sick Indian seafarer in the hospital. 1950s. SIH Archives.

Someday soon the Center has to expand," said Dr. Nordgren. "We should have room for 100 men. We would like to have a chapel and larger social room." The 1958 annual report showed that 14,692 nights of lodging were provided. "We have to turn men away often. There's a davenport in my office, and sometimes when a man comes who's been here before, we can't bear to turn him away. He gets the davenport, with the understanding that he'll be up and dressed by 9:30 when I come to the office."

The current **Ship Visitation Program** was launched in **1959**, when **Leslie F. Yelland**, a layman, started boarding about eight ships and talked with as many as 50 seamen a day. He distributed both religious and secular literature in many languages. Like the transportation our Port Chaplains provide today, he would escort crews around New York on sightseeing tours including trips to hear a choir in Harlem.

Yelland made purchases on behalf of seamen who asked him to buy anything from marine textbooks to lingerie for their wives. This activity became essential again during the pandemic of 2020 when SIH port chaplains received orders and requests by WhatsApp or email for deliveries which they carried to the seafarers on lock-down aboard their ships. In 1960, Yelland called on 1,151 vessels that came into the port from 37 countries.

Expanding 6 Water Street would have been exorbitantly expensive. According to Nordgren, a new building would be far more cost-effective. He boldly took the dream to the Augustana Synod's **1958** convention and was rewarded with a green light for the ambitious project. An intense search for an appropriate site resulted in the strategically located parcel near Union Square. Easily accessible to travelers and conveniently close to the seafarers' union halls, the new facility would be in one of the busiest areas of the city.

6 Water Street was sold for \$195,000 and the land on the northeast corner of Irving Place and 15th Street purchased for \$135,000. The projected cost of the new building was \$1.1 million, a sum that could not be obtained through the Augustana Synod or from other Lutheran bodies. An unprecedented fund-raising effort was launched by **Rev. Dr. Charles B. Foelsch** (1892 – 1974) and an Advisory Council comprised of more than 24 members, largely shipping industry leaders interested in the well-being of seamen.



Yelland second from left and other Center hosts took a Nigerian crew on a sightseeing tour of New York around 1960. From a newspaper article. SIH Archives.

*"One winter's day, while Ellis Island was still in operation, I was crossing the harbor in a small launch used temporarily as a ferry. Near me sat a young man whom I had noticed in detention. Evidently, he had been released and was on his way back to the city. He had no overcoat, and I soon noticed that he wore no socks.*

*When I engaged him in conversation, I learned he was a Norwegian seaman who had been too long ashore and after arrest and detention had been let out on parole with the stipulation that he leave the country within nine days. He had no baggage, no money, no other clothes. He also had other handicaps: a cleft pallet and a saucy if not sullen face.*

*Before the ferry docked, I had invited him to come with me to see if we could get him a pair of socks. We found two pairs of warm woolen ones, knitted by some kind friend. I also found him a heavy wool sweater and handed him money to cover subway fare to the hiring hall in Brooklyn and his next meal. When he left, there was a light in his eye and in spite of the cleft pallet I have never heard thanks more eloquently expressed."*

From Seamen's Friend newsletter, December 1955, by Pastor Nordgren.

# NEW BUILDING: 123 E 15TH ST.

While the capital funding campaign for the new Lutheran Seamen's Center continued, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church was in the process of merging with three other Lutheran churches to form the Lutheran Church in America [LCA], predecessor to the current Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Remarkably, the Seamen's Center was an unanticipated beneficiary of this reorganization.

By 1960, the **Lutheran Home for Women** needed repairs and large infusions of money to remain viable as a safe haven for transient women. When the Augustana Synod and other Lutheran Church bodies merged, the Board of the Church Women decided that it was time to consolidate the work on behalf of women with other missions to transient populations. A combination of the Lutheran Home for Women and the Lutheran Seamen's Center would strengthen and broaden the care to both seafarers and women.

In an act of faith, the Church Women sold their Home. The building, which had been purchased for \$100,000 in 1931, sold for over \$300,000 and the proceeds were contributed to the capital campaign of the Lutheran Seamen's Center in return for these assurances:

- that accommodations for women would be available on two floors with additional space for male and female missionaries in the new facility
- that seats on the Board of Trustees be reserved for women
- that the name of the ministry be eventually changed to the Seamen and International House

The residual of the Church Women funds was put into a Women's Endowment Fund, which was designated to help women during crisis situations, and which still exists today as part of the organization's endowment.

With over half of the project costs covered, the Center obtained a mortgage. The new Home opened on Valentines' Day and the dedication followed on September 27, 1964, in its own chapel with crowds spilling over into the lobby and mezzanine of the 11-story, 84 guestroom building.

In 1960 nearly 15,000 men from virtually every major port in the world were overnight guests at the Center for the nominal charge of \$2.75 per night. About two thirds of the visitors are American citizens. Others come from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Latin America, Holland, Portugal and Japan.

About half the guests are officers and the rest crew members, from freighters and tankers that drop anchor along the Manhattan and Brooklyn waterfronts. About 1,000 ships with nearly 38,000 seamen arrive in the port every month.



*The guesthouse of Seafarers International House, mid-1960s. SIH Postcard.*

Current SIH board member Mary Heller was 30-years old when she attended the opening of 123 E. 15th St. as an Augustana Synod board member and has been a faithful advocate ever since. As past President, Mary was part of the Call committee for the current Executive Director and Pastor, Marsh Luther Drege, in 2008. Mary has served SIH, almost without interruption, for nearly 60 years.

# THE NAME

From 1961 to 1965, the ministry was identified as *Seaman's Center of the Augustana Lutheran Church*.

With the opening in 1964, **Evelyn A. Stark**, former Executive Director of Augustana Lutheran Church Women, joined the Center staff. She was tasked with building the expanded services of the Home especially relating to the two floors designated for women. Guests included students and young professionals like a "young woman from Berlin, beginning a new job in New York, waiting for a place in a woman's residence and a missionary wife from Norway, who served with her husband in South Africa, as well as pastors and leaders with home addresses in near and far away places."

In the spring of 1965, the 13 year tenure of Pastor Nordgren ended with a service of farewell at Gustavus Adolphus Church. Pastor Nordgren's retirement closed a dynamic chapter in the Center's history. He passed only a year later, and the board dedicated the chapel he helped to build in his memory: **J. Vincent Nordgren Chapel**. For about five years the chapel was the home of the **Swedish Seamen's Church** and was adorned with a hand wrought tapestry dossal, sent as a gift of the Church of Sweden.

**Pastor Bernard Spong** was called to serve as Director of the Seamen and International House from 1965 to 1973.



Left: Mary Heller attending the 125th anniversary celebration of SIH on October 18, 1998.



Right: Doris Spong was an influential member and leader in the Augustana Lutheran Church.

His wife, **Doris L. Spong** was a board member of the Lutheran Home for Women. As president of the Augustana Lutheran Church Women she signed the consolidation paper with the Seamen's Center in May 1962.

In the latter half of the twentieth century the size, speed and efficiency of vessels continued to increase. Container shipping and heavy dock side cranes reduced the number of hands required to load and unload a ship. Port time was reduced from a couple of days to a few hours for container ships. Unions and advocates for seafarers (including many maritime missions around the globe) prevailed in establishing an industry wide concern for safety and more standardized ways to reduce costs.

In the highly competitive market, shipping companies found two significant ways to reduce costs: reductions in the size of the crew and reduction in the time spent in port. Both factors influenced the ministry to seafarers. Reductions in the number of personnel resulted in decreased social interaction among crew members. Shore-based ministry traditionally had focused on helping individuals cope with the strangeness of a foreign port, but now many seafarers left the ship only briefly if at all. Adjusting to these changes, a new type of service evolved at the flagship guesthouse near Union Square. Hosting domestic and international travelers including exchange students and student groups, youth and senior groups, pastors, teachers and church workers along with professional single women and seafarers became a normal part of life at the Center.

Reflecting the focus on this international community, the name of the Seamen's Center was changed on **November 15, 1965**, to **Seamen and International House, Inc.** In **1986**, the more inclusive term seafarer was used and eventually the "and" dropped resulting in the current **Seafarers International House (SIH)**.

New name! In its wisdom, the board adopted the legal appellation, **Seamen and International House, Inc.** Thereby hangs a tale! When New York's Augustana Lutheran Home for Women closed its doors years ago, its residual assets of some \$275,000 came into the Seamen's Center Building Fund to make a very few rooms in the new Center available for missionaries and international students.

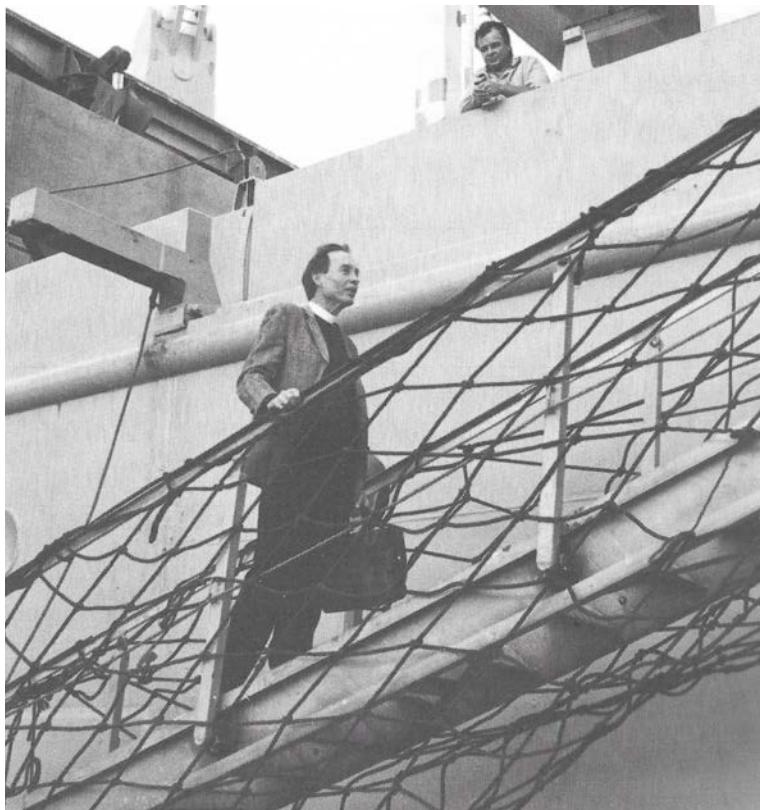
To make the institutions name say this plainly the word International was inserted and to underscore its "homey" character Center was changed to House. Small matter! Like the rose, whatever you name it, its service is fragrant, and now, as before – its chief concern is seafarers, of every nation and clime and creed, whom it warmly makes at home here, in this fine new "House" in America's greatest seaport.

Shoreside Flashes, January 1966. By Rev. Dr. Charles B. Foelsch

# PORT MISSION

Under Pastor Spong's leadership the construction debt was cleared twenty years earlier than called for in the original mortgage. Spong also led SIH to greater cooperation with agencies serving America's seamen. He was instrumental in organizing the Associated Seamen's Agencies of the Port of New York and served as President of the International Council of Seamen's Agencies.

The work that Yelland had pioneered became an integral part of the work of SIH when the **Rev. William Fensterer** was called as the first ordained chaplain/ship visitor in **1965**. Fensterer, who had served as a Chaplain in the U.S. Air Force, had an empathetic understanding of the needs of seafarers. He would serve faithfully until the pandemic of 2020, devoting 55 years of his life to seafarers.



A seafarer awaits Bill Fensterer on one of his thousands of ship visits. SIH Archives.

*... the focus of my efforts was to develop personal and pastoral relationships with the men aboard the ships visited. To this end, visits to ships were regular, repeated, and lengthy. No value was seen in 'dive-bombing' visits to ships, dropping literature, 'religious' or otherwise, as a memento and hurrying away to the next target.*

*Pastoral services to seamen aboard ships entering the Port of New York included counseling, writing letters to families, providing assistance to cope with immigration regulations, finding employment ashore for those wishing to enter the country. Pastoral care also included conducting, or directing, foreign seamen to a different view of New York, one not bounded by Broadway and Times Square.*

*And on perhaps more occasions than one would imagine, there were the attempts to answer, or to guide, the sincere seeking quest of those trying to know and follow the Way."*

William Fensterer, Report of Chaplain for 1966.

The son of Swedish immigrants, **Rev. John Robert "Bob" Nordlander** (1919 – 2013), served as SIH Director from **1973** to 1983 and was a strong supporter of the on-board chaplaincy program. During these years, guesthouse occupancy by seafarers increased significantly. This shore-based service was supplemented by time spent with mariners who were unable to leave the ship while in the Port of New York and New Jersey.

The **SIH Chaplaincy and Ship Visitation** program rapidly became one of the major components of the SIH work and continued to be so today. In **1979**, **Rev. Clint Padgett**, who had served as Seaman's Pastor for **Die Deutsche Seemannsmission** in New York, started to work alongside SIH's port chaplains. German born **Rev. Dr. Heinrich P. Suhr** (1908 - 1990) as president of German Seamen's Mission of New York moved the Mission to offices at SIH in **1983**. In addition to the Mission, during the 1960s and 1990s, SIH was home to Metro NY Synod and other Lutheran organizations. When Pastor Padgett took a well-deserved sabbatical from the German Seamen's Mission in 1994, his former intern, German native Pastor Arnd Braun-Storck, filled the gap and was joined for two years by his future wife, **Rev. Beate Storck**. In **2012**, **Die Deutsche Seemannsmission** merged formally into SIH.

To this day, Seafarers International House is one of 16 seafarer centers outside Germany loosely organized under the umbrella of **Die Deutsche Seemannsmission e. V.**, Bremen, Germany, and continues to serve mariners on German-flagged vessels in the Port of New York and New Jersey. The work of Port Chaplain Arnd is partially supported financially by the **German Society of the City of New York**.

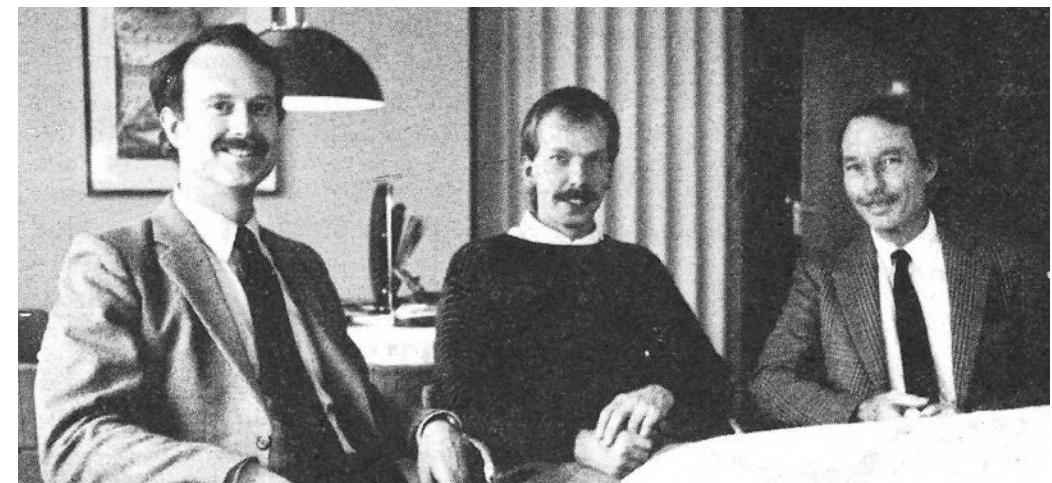
In 1984, the Rev. J. Gordon Swanson began serving as SIH Director. In 1985, demand for accommodations and hospitality increased significantly after the Seamen's Church Institute, SIH's "older brother" organization with similar services to mariners since 1834, closed its 18-story multi-service skyscraper built in 1968 at 15th State Street. Since then, SIH became the only remaining place with affordable guestrooms for seafarers in Manhattan. Pastor Swanson's message was carried to seafarers around the world: "We have a not-for-profit guest house in New York City, operated by the church but it is not exclusively for church people. It is a ministry of hospitality to the wayfarer, a component of world missions that makes possible a ministry to seafarers."

Pastor Swanson encouraged and coordinated this expanding service. His interest and skill in developing positive relationships with the **International Transport Workers' Federation** and other organizations that represented seafarers and dock workers made a lasting contribution to SIH's effectiveness.

SIH Port Chaplains are the seafarer's objective advocates and empathetic friends. They are outside the pecking order of the crew and not subject to the demands of rank. In times of individual or family crises the chaplains provide immediate assistance. In some circumstances they may contact the Coast Guard or the Center for Seafarers' Rights on behalf of a seafarer.

By networking within the **North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA)**, Port Chaplains in other ports can follow up on their contacts. A seafarer who is dealing with depression or trying to work through family problems can be supported by several chaplains as the ship travels from port to port. Through the coordinated efforts of NAMMA working conditions of seafarers can be observed at different times and in different locales and group concerns can be equitably addressed. SIH leaders like Pastor Swanson and decades later Pastor Marsh Drege served as presidents of NAMMA. SIH is also a member of the **International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA)**.

At his retirement in 1993, Swanson was prophetic: "We shall have seafarers as our guests for a long time to come, but we can believe their numbers will diminish yearly and that 'other guests' opportunities will increase."



Aboard the MS Nürnberg Express (Hapag-Lloyd) in Port Elizabeth, NJ, in 1985, from left to right: Pastor Clint Padgett of the German Seamen's Mission, Andreas Kern, and Pastor William Fensterer of Seafarers International House.

**Ted Ingram**, a seaman who prior to his retirement was a long-term resident and desk clerk at SIH, died in February 1984 at Sailors' Snug Harbor, North Carolina, after a long illness.

In October 1983, Pastor Fensterer transported Ted with his belongings to the Snug Harbor retirement home for American merchant seafarers. On Ash Wednesday 1984 a memorial service was held for Ted Ingram in the Nordgren Chapel at Seafarers International House.

From SIH News Summer 1984



One of many memorial services over the years for a seafarer with no immediate kin. Rev. Brooke L. Swertfager (right) presiding in the Chapel. In attendance were fellow mariners and SIH staff members who knew the deceased. April 2018. SIH Archives.

# GEOGRAPHIC EXPANSION

From 1994 to 2005, Rev. Dr. Serge Castigliano took the helm and expanded SIH's reach through the establishment of the Maritime Ministry of Southern New England (MMSNE) which served seafarers and commercial fishers in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

In 1995, Rev. Andrew "Andy" E. V. Krey became Chaplain/Missioner for Maritime Ministry of Southern New England (MMSNE). In the early 1970s, as a student Andy had the opportunity to work a few months at Seamen's House in Boston and subsequently signed up to work on a tanker for at least a month. Later, Andy became executive director of Maritime Bethel at Savannah until his retirement in 2021.



Two seafarers are calling home before cell phones existed in the early 1990s.  
Photo by Andy Krey.



Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) class of summer 2001.

During these years, Andy recalls that every sermon or speaking engagement was ended with: *When you hear of severe weather coming your way, don't pray that the storm goes out to sea! Pray that it just fizzles out.*

Presenting to a Church in New Haven around 1996, Andy met church member and event helper **Ruth Setaro**. On the spot he offered her the keys to the van and asked if she would want to take care of some seafarers. Ruth accepted and has been SIH Port Chaplain in New Haven ever since. Never having left the U.S., Ruth sees the world through the eyes of the mariners she helps day and night. Her dedication to seafarers was recognized with a NAMMA lifetime distinguished service award in 2021.

With Pastor Castigliano on the ship's wheel, the **Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)** program was launched in 1998. This was the first CPE program in the world with maritime chaplaincy as the context for ministry and continues to be a summer internship choice for seminary students. In 2003, Chaplain **Rev. Walter Wiklund** was hired through 2007.

Castigliano established a fundraising and marketing office and launched a capital campaign to upgrade the facilities in the late 1990s. By 2001, over \$800,000 had been raised in part by the Adopt-a-Room program. Major funding from **ITF Seafarers' Trust**, which still supports SIH with vehicle replacement, building improvements and during the 2020 pandemic accommodations for seafarers, was also vital.

# SETTING THE COURSE

In 2000, Pastor Castigliano initiated the annual *Setting the Course* fundraising event that recognizes shipping industry and union leaders who promote and improve seafarers' welfare.

## *Outstanding Friend of Seafarers (2000 - 2023)*

Rev. Timo Lappalainen, Gerhard Kurz and Richard M. Larrabee (2001)  
Dale C. Christensen, Jr., Esq., Rev. Canon Peter Larom and Jan Eyvin Wang (2002)  
David W. Heindel and Clay Maitland (2003)  
Captain Timothy A. Brown, Rev. Serge A. Castigliano and Paul Sa (2004)  
Ron Davis and Per Heidenreich (2005)  
Robert E. Gleason and Captain Robert Johnson (2006)  
Stephen Cotton and Timothy J. Casey (2007)  
Thomas J. Bethel and Peter Shaerf (2008)  
George A. Quick and John F. Reinhart (2009)  
Don Keefe, Philip J. Shapiro and Joseph C. Sweeney (2010)  
Joseph J. Cox and Mayte Medina (2011)  
Thomas E. Murphy and Augie Tellez (2012)  
Robert Bugbee and Michael Jewell (2013)  
Donald J. Marcus, Edward R. Morgan, and Richard P. Phillips (2014)  
Anthony Chiarello and Stephen K. Knott (2015)  
H. Marshall Ainley, Ian T. Blackley and Raymond J. Burke, Jr. (2016)  
Jack Buono, Paul Doell and Lawrence Rutkowski (2017)  
Philip W.J. Fisher, Bill Van Loo and Christopher V. Roehrer (2018)  
Kathleen "Kate" Hunt, Lois K. Zabrocky, Enrico "Ricky" Esopa, and Bill Woodhour (2019)  
James E. Caponiti, Eric P. Ebeling, Timothy J. Ferrie, and Steven E. Werse (2020)  
Jacqueline Smith (2021)  
Anthony Naccarato, C. James Patti, Bethann Rooney, and Jacqueline Smith (2022)  
John Atkins, Mark W. Barker, and Adam Vokac (2023)



2022 Outstanding Friends of Seafarers, from left to right: Anthony Naccarato, Bethann Rooney, C. James Patti, Jacqueline Smith. Photo by Henryk Behnke

At his retirement in 2005, Castigliano was very pleased to be recognized himself as an **Outstanding Friend of Seafarers**. The event has since been SIH's major fundraiser.

**R**ev. Gary A. Grindeland combined the Director of Chaplaincy with the Executive Director & Pastor position during his tenure from **2005** to **2007**. He was enthusiastic about the Port Mission and visited with crews at least weekly. Since his family lived in Wisconsin, he had to commute and eventually rejoined his family there.

When **Pastor Brooke L. Swertfager** approached Pastor Gary about using the J. Vincent Nordgren Chapel for **Christ Lutheran Church**, he welcomed that new ministry relationship. This arrangement proved to be beneficial to house guests and congregation alike. It lasted until the pandemic of 2020.

SIH was served faithfully by interim directors **Rev. Tom Mugavero** in 2005 and **Rev. James Sudbrock** in 2007.

## September 11

In the aftermath of **9/11** in 2001, SIH offered hospitality and human services to displaced victims and rescuers in addition to over 100 room nights. The chapel was filled with guests and strangers comforting each other.

At that time no one understood the consequences for seafarers as post-9/11 port security made it impossible for volunteers to visit ships without proper credentials, and far fewer non-American mariners were given entry visas for shore leave.

# FURTHER EXPANSION

**O**n March 9, 2008, Rev. Marsh Luther Drege, was installed as Executive Director & Pastor, fittingly in a service at Gustavus Adolphus Church.

With Pastor Marsh at the helm, ship visits and transport of seafarers further increased. He hired **Pastors Joshua Rinas** (from 2008 till 2011) and **Christine Bridge** (from 2011 till 2014) and increased hours for Chaplain **Sigrid Erickson** (from 2006 till 2019) for the Port of New York & New Jersey. **Pastor William Rex** was hired to begin a deployed mission in Philadelphia in **2009** until his retirement in 2022.

Service in the Port of Baltimore was established in **2011** in collaboration with the Delaware-Maryland Synod and the Baltimore International Seafarer Center with **Pastor Gerry Rickel** initiating that partnership and serving for 6 years. Since **2016**, **Rev. Dr. K. Robert "Bob" Schmitt** has served in Baltimore. He was joined in early **2022** by Ukrainian native **Rev. Vitalii Guz**, who has become crucial in aiding Ukrainian as well as Russian mariners trying to reach family back home after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In winter **2023**, **Revs. David Lowell Chilton and Kathryn Drefke** were recruited for the Port of Albany. Now, SIH serves mariners on "brown" river waters as well as on "blue" ocean waters.



*Top left: Rev. Luisito Destreza delivers a Christmas-at-Sea satchel to a seafarer, who immediately tried on the hand-made scarf and hat in Dec. 2019.*

*Top right: Rev. Vitalii Guz cheers up a Ukrainian mariner in summer 2022.*

*Middle: Rev. Bill Rex presents Christmas-at-Sea satchels from God's Love in Philadelphia in 2021.*

*Right: Rev. Dr. K. Robert "Bob" Schmitt picks up Christmas-at-Sea satchels from Gloria Dei Arnold, MD, in November 2022.*

*Left: Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night ... prevented Port Chaplain Sigrid Jaeger Erickson and her dog Leif from transporting seafarers desperate to spend a few hours ashore (2019).*



# CHRISTMAS-AT-SEA

Since 1898 (during the Spanish American War), volunteer knitters and crocheters have created handmade hats and scarves, packed and distributed gifts to mariners. It is unclear when this tradition started at Seafarers International House. We know that since 1914 Pastor Helander's compassion for sailors and for all who had to celebrate Christmas away from homes and families caused him to reach out. He appealed to others to provide Christmas gifts for those who were alone on the holiday and was happy when he knew that no one was without a present.

In 1961, 600 Christmas packages were delivered to mariners. By 1997, more than 1,000 seafarers received Christmas-at-Sea gifts like warm clothing and/or home-made cookies from individuals and congregations. In 2022, a record 2,935 Christmas-at-Sea satchels each filled with a handmade hat and scarf, 3 pairs of socks, a T-shirt and a pullover, nuts or chocolate and a personal Holiday greeting were delivered to seafarers who were confined to vessels because of travel restrictions during the pandemic. Individuals, unions, shipping companies, and congregations nation-wide along with a few international donors make Christmas day joyful for seafarers!



Volunteers of Upper Susquehanna Synod including Bishop Craig Miller helped SIH staff Pastor Marsh and Lucas fill two vans with Christmas-at-Sea satchels, bringing the total number of satchels donated by this synod alone to 7,000 in the past 9 years! November 2022.

*"Do you remember me, Mother Ruth? You gave me this sweatshirt last year. It's my favorite one."*

The M/V NORD TRUST had docked in New Haven a year ago, December 2010, and our Port Chaplain Ruth Setaro had delivered 27 Christmas-at-Sea satchels for the officers and crew. For one of the newer crew members, the Christmas satchels were a complete and delightful surprise.

So, when the NORD TRUST was returning to New Haven this last December, this same seafarer told all his fellow crew members that they would be warmly greeted and helped. As soon as the ship docked and was cleared by port security, Chaplain Setaro climbed the gangway. She was met at the top by this seafarer who was overjoyed to see her again. Most of the seafarers on the NORD TRUST took turns going on shopping trips with the port chaplain. Seven crew members didn't have visas and couldn't disembark the ship, so they spent their time speaking to family and friends with the cellphones, phonecards and Wi-Fi that the Port Chaplain supplied.

All the NORD TRUST seafarers received their Christmas-at-Sea satchels, carefully stowed away until Christmas morning on the Atlantic Ocean.

Winter 2012 Port Call newsletter.



Joyful seafarers on the Antwerpen Express show off their Christmas-at-Sea satchels. Photo by Arnd Braun-Storck December 2019.

# ASYLUM SEEKERS

Early in Pastor Marsh's tenure, SIH rekindled its service to immigrants. The Assistance to Asylum Seekers program includes detention center visits and free accommodations, food and transportation, and social work assistance. Asylees often become contributing members of society within 3 months or less. This effort was spearheaded by then SIH Director of Development & Communications **Christopher V. Roehrer, Esq.**

Since **2011**, a social work intern has helped Pastor Marsh to organize pre-pandemic visits to the Elizabeth, NJ, Detention Center and to assist asylees with work permits, health insurance, driver's licenses, and preparation for job interviews. The intern also assists seafarers.

In addition to practical assistance to asylum seekers, SIH engages in advocacy for immigrants through SIH's Port Call Newsletter, its web site, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn) and with the advocacy event, the annual Right of Asylum Reception since **2013**.

In **2017**, the board courageously voted for SIH to become a sanctuary organization, preceding ELCA's sanctuary declaration by two years.

From 2009 - 2014 all public spaces at the guesthouse were completely remodeled and in 2016 - **2019** all guestrooms were refreshed.



*It became a tradition, the Monday dinner with current guests and mentors who returned and the social work intern. Photo by Marsh Drege in July 2019.*

## HARRY'S STORY

*The asylum seeker's journey is fraught with danger, fear, uncertainty and hope.*  
Adopted from a narrative recounted by Chris Roehrer in a pamphlet ca. 2018

(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. 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 with a local tourist bus operator, - all within only 63 days at SIH.

Harry frequently returned to SIH to say hi to staff and to counsel new arrivals. Joining SIH's Volunteer Detention Center Visitor program, he brought hope to other detained immigrants.

Note: Few asylees are willing or mentally ready to share their sometimes traumatic experiences publicly. To ensure Harry's privacy, his name and any dates were changed.



Volunteer Detention Center Visitors including former SIH President Margay Jo Whitlock (4th from right) and current board member Leslie Neve bringing hope to detainees at Elizabeth Detention Center in 2021.



Youth Group from Sunne Lutheran Church in Wilton, ND, sorts knitted scarves and hats from Pastor Marsh's hometown Minot, ND, for Christmas-At-Sea. Photo by Marsh Luther Drege, June 2019.

## CITY SERVICE PROGRAM

Over the years, the guesthouse operation had become the economic engine of SIH. Guest fees provided 75% of income to support the Immigrant and Port Missions.

A great way to connect the guesthouse operation to service was the **City Service program**. Each summer, since **2009**, Pastor Marsh welcomed 4-6 church groups per summer as they stayed in the guesthouse and were matched up to serve in soup kitchens or food pantries in need of volunteers. Once their social services ministries were done, the young people had plenty of time to explore NYC. For many the whole experience was eye-opening and horizon-broadening.

In 2018, Seafarers International House addressed a problem rarely considered when thinking about seafarers' welfare, - Me Too, at sea. While the percentage of female crew members remains very low at under 2%, fear of harassment or assault undoubtedly prevents more women from joining the ranks of seafarers. Post-pandemic, our port chaplains meet more and more females among the crews. The vulnerable at sea also include members of the LGBTQIA+ community.



A female Engine Cadet on the Torm Malaysia with Port Chaplain Ruth Setaro in May 2022. Increasingly more women are choosing the profession and become seafarers.

# SUPERSTORM SANDY OCTOBER 2012

## An Account by Pastor Marsh Luther Drege

As New York City was preparing to celebrate Halloween in 2012, Superstorm Sandy came up the eastern seaboard and ultimately caused flooding to 17% of the city's total landmass and resulting in 43 deaths.

While the storm didn't flood the guesthouse, it caused significant impact. On the weekend prior to the storm, there were lines around the block to get into a grocery store. Everyone was scrambling to buy water and flashlights. By Tuesday, the city felt like a ghost town as everyone braced for the storm. Some guests vacated the guesthouse to return home, while other guests came to escape the potential flooding in their NYC low-lying homes. The guesthouse was 75% filled when the power went off, the elevators stopped working, the water stopped flowing. The stairwells and hallways were plunged into complete darkness and, of course, there was no heat. For five days the guesthouse had no electricity, so water had to be carried in pails up 11 stories to flush toilets. Handicapped guests had to have food brought up to them or be carried down the darkened stairwells so that they could sleep at night in the mezzanine and lobby. There they would be closer to EMT's if needed. It was a "Tale of Two Cities" where everything below 34th Street seemed like it was a darkened war zone and everything above 34th Street seemed to be running normally.

After a few days of blackout, guests started to wonder about showers. So, I drove (the subway wasn't working), 30 guests back and forth in my car in shifts to and from Saint Peter's Lutheran Church on 54th Street where they had showers. I remember a young asylee couple came into the guesthouse a few days before the hurricane as the woman was 9 months pregnant and needed to be close to Mt. Sinai hospital. Indeed, she delivered during the height of the storm at Mt. Sinai (thank God for generators) and returned to a crippled guesthouse where they were grateful to be "home"- even if that home was compromised. We wondered if they would name their baby "Sandy" but they, understandably, decided otherwise.

I recall my overwhelming concern about guests' safety and well-being for five days straight, worrying how long the blackout would last. But I also remember the gestures of mercy that brought great relief: Con Edison, across the street from SIH, eventually put out 100-foot power chords so that neighborhood folks could take turns recharging their cellphones. Board member Jake Shisha drove in from New Jersey and delivered a truck load of bottled water and flashlights. Pastor Chris Mietlowski and his wife, Linda, collected every candle they could find from Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church and delivered them to SIH with prayers, providing crucial candlelight in the midst of so much darkness.

As The Gospel of John says: *"In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."* (John 1: 4-5)



Port Chaplain Rev. Arnd Braun-Storck brings a box of Chocolate Easter Bunnies - and with it hope - to Captain Florian Boettger for the crew of the Dublin Express in April 2020. Most of the ship visits, however, were conducted on the gangway - at a safe distance as the world wondered how the COVID 19 virus spreads.

# PANDEMIC OF 2020

In mid-March 2020, NYC went into lock-down and SIH had to let go its entire guesthouse related staff, 23 people. These employees had become family to each other and to our guests. There were just no more travelers to keep them employed.

Seafarers were confined to vessels, not allowed any shore leave. Our Port Chaplains started to shop for crews and conduct "gangway ministry."

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. There was also concern that seafarer fatigue and mental health issues might lead to serious maritime accidents. To assist distressed seafarers, SIH promoted the International Christian Maritime Association's free service "Chat with a Chaplain".

One of our seafarer guests was stuck on board the Maersk Sentosa and reached out to Pastor Marsh, who collaborated with the ***Seafarers International Union (SIU)*** and ***Maersk Line, Limited*** to facilitate crew changes.

In the meantime, SIH shared public alerts about the growing crew change crisis and started to champion seafarers as "*invisible essential workers*." Throughout the pandemic our Port Chaplains provided a vital link for seafarers to the outside world expanding the reality of personal shopping for seafarers who couldn't get off the ship due to Covid lockdowns. SIH did not miss one day of visiting ships during the pandemic even though the entire world was shut down.

Many seafarers were on extended contract during this crew change crisis with no way to return home. Others on land urgently needed an affordable place to stay to quarantine or to complete hiring regulations in a disrupted industry. Fortunately, for three months early in the pandemic, SIH rented the guesthouse to an organization taking care of community members recovering from COVID. With that income and increased donations from caring supporters, SIH was able to rent rooms for mariners at a mid-town hotel.



The Maersk Sentosa marooned in the Port of Salalah, Oman, with hardly any containers aboard as supply chains were disrupted by the pandemic and subsequent crew change crisis. Photo by frequent SIH guest and Sentosa crew member Michael Penkowitz. July 2020.



Ambulance bringing another COVID 19 patient to the guesthouse. Photo by Marsh Luther Drege, April 2020.

# INTO THE FUTURE ...

Seafarers International House secured funding from the **Mother Cabrini Health Foundation (MCHF)** for extra rooms for asylum seekers in the calendar year 2020. Those rooms were not needed as the immigration process came to a halt. Only the occasional immigrant needed a place to stay for a night or two to reunite with family or friends in the U.S. Hardly any asylum seekers were admitted at the border or released from detention during that time. The MCHF funds became vital after the pandemic when asylum seekers from other states were bused to New York City; - SIH accommodated some of them in 2022 and 2023.

Creating a financial plan for 2021 was a huge challenge for the Finance Committee including Executive Director Marsh and **Board President Captain Richard "Rick" Schoenlank**.

The SIH "economic engine" sat idle from August 2020 to February 2021, yet seafarers relied on SIH's services including delivery of essentials to crews, vaccination of mariners in the ports, as well as affordable accommodations in NYC. Navigating the way forward into a next chapter for SIH became the mission. The Executive Director, Board President, Executive Committee, and essential staff were tireless in their dedication to this task.

Since March 15, 2021, the guesthouse has been leased to Breaking Ground, a community partner assisting people with transitional housing needs. The short-term solution became more permanent when the NY Attorney General gave consent to extend the lease for 4 ½ years with the option of renewal.

With the cost of hotel rooms rising again, SIH partnered with another not-for-profit organization September 15, 2021, renting office space and guestrooms for sea-farers and for asylum seekers.

SIH finally emerged from the pandemic, thanks largely to the generosity of its supporters, unions, ship owners, affiliated synods and government funds and the grace of God.

With viable arrangements with both Breaking Ground and the other partner, SIH is now looking for a new permanent home.

That guided process involves financing, zoning, and other considerations to "right size" our operations since, as of fall 2022, the number of asylees coming to New York has increased and the job, visa, and health requirements of mariners have become more complicated.

*The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*  
Leviticus 19:34

As Pastor Marsh declared at the close of a 2019 video: *"We take that biblical calling very seriously and we're very grateful to be able to concretely welcome the stranger, welcome the sojourner, welcome those from far away, and welcome those who are on their way."* With God's help, SIH will continue to do just that, meeting the changing needs of all the people in its care. 



An asylee from Myanmar upon her arrival flanked by two friends of Catholic Charities and Marsh Drege.. January 2022.

Hello Pastor Marsh,

*I have good news to share with you. I got a job and I will start working from this coming Monday. By the way, I used the reading room upstairs for zoom meeting for the job interview. Maybe that's why it brought good luck for me.*

*And I'm going to move to a new accommodation today in order to live a certain amount of time there.*

*I would like to say thank you very much for providing me a very cozy and safe room which makes me feel like home. I can't even imagine how could I survive with such a rough weather without a warm place in a completely strange city for me.*

*Also, your initial urgent cash assistance for food makes me alive. The food from the dining room is delicious and I will surely miss that. Your presence and the metro tickets help me grow my knowledge about New York and ease my documentation processes because transportation is essential to get things done.*

*The most important thing I got from you is your prayer, kind consideration, and mental supporting; knowing there is someone around me as a relative gives me sense of being protected. I can't even fully describe with words how much I am grateful for everything you have done for me. I deeply appreciate that. And I wish you and everyone who supports me be peaceful and abundance. May almighty God Bless you.*

Regards, Jane

From an email sent in February 2022 (The syntax is representative of this asylee's emerging proficiency with English) to Pastor Marsh from the asylum seeker in the photo left. Her name has been changed.



*Top: A guest asylee, who fled from persecution in Nigeria (name and date omitted for privacy concerns). Bottom: Seafarers on the Ardennes in Baltimore show off their Christmas-at-Sea satchels. Photo by Port Chaplain Bob Schmitt, December 2021.*

# 150 YEARS

Seafarers International House

212-677-4800

[www.SIHNYC.org](http://www.SIHNYC.org)