

## ***Christmas-at-Sea***

*A Holiday Initiative of*



# **Seafarers International House**

### ***Why Christmas-at-Sea is mutually beneficial***

Dear friends in Christ,

When I met my friend Marsh Drege, we had an instant connection. He was from North Dakota; I was on my way to my first call at a church in North Dakota. We talked at length about the good people there, and the heartiness required to withstand a normal North Dakota winter.

When Chad and I learned that Marsh was going to be the Executive Director at the Seafarers International House (SIH) in New York City, we knew it was the perfect fit for him. SIH is a ministry that helps seafarers in countless ways. Men and women who work on ships are frequently away from home for weeks or months at a time. This ministry gives them a home base when they are away from their loved ones. Pastors offer counseling services and sacraments.

In 2020, Seafarers International House distributed more than 2,000 Christmas at Sea bags or “satchels” to seafarers away from home. They’re filled with little things that mean the world to a seafarer; a sweatshirt; a knitted cap; a chocolate bar; a hand-written card. These bags have made an enormous difference to people who are away from their loved ones, and the Upper Susquehanna Synod has been collecting them for years. The churches that have collected them have found a way of being the church that turns out to be mutually beneficial.

How could it possibly be mutually beneficial? Imagine this scenario: You’re out shopping. On your list, you have your own groceries, plus a few items for your Christmas at Sea Satchel. You head to Walmart or Target, wherever you can get it all done in one stop. You head over to the clothing department to find a sweatshirt. You find a plain sweatshirt in your favorite color and decide on that one. \$14.99 on sale, for a shopping win. You wonder if it’s the favorite color of the person who will open it on Christmas. You continue to find a neat-looking hat that has a thermal lining. Into the cart it goes. You imagine a person smiling as they put it on, knowing that it will keep them warm when their ship comes to a cold place. Now you’re in the candy section. You can smell the chocolate from the next aisle. You find your way to your favorite kind, because you want whoever gets their hands on this bag to know how amazing that kind of chocolate really is. Because it’s a treasure, you lay it gently on top of the other items.



After checking out, you head for home. You find some stationary that looks friendly. You start to write your note. "Dear Seafarer..." You pause. Now what? How do I tell this person that I feel sort of connected to them, just from buying a few things for them?

*"Merry Christmas!*

*I hope this Christmas season finds you well. I chose these items with you in mind, and as I folded them and put them in the bag, I prayed for you. I prayed that you might be kept warm and peaceful, just as the infant Jesus was kept warm and peaceful on the night that he was born. While you and I will likely never meet, I hope you know that we are connected as children of the most loving God. May you be blessed with peace in this season.*

*Peace in Christ,*

*<your name here>*

*P.S.: I hope you like the color of the sweatshirt. It's my favorite."*

Imagine how it would feel to seal that envelope and tuck it into a bag that you know will be received by someone who needs to read your words and feel the love of God. Imagine how it would feel to receive the satchel. Talk about a mutually beneficial ministry! I hope that you consider filling a Christmas at Sea Satchel this year. If you'd like to know how to get your hands on the bags, just email the folks at Seafarers International House ([info@sihnyc.org](mailto:info@sihnyc.org) or visit the web page shown below).

And I hope that no matter what, you remember God's love for you in the coming month. Because God's love is alive and on the move.

Peace,

*Pastor Sarah [Hershberger]*  
of the Upper Susquehanna Synod

To find out how to participate visit [www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea](http://www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea)