

PORTCALL

Seafarers International House

MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: *Unprecedented*

Spring! Full of hope and right-ly so. *Seafarers International House (SIH)* has emerged from an unprecedented winter of significant drops in temperature and momentous accumulations of snow resulting in cancellations and postponements of seafarer's arrivals and asylum seekers caught amidst winter storms trying to make their way to our warm rooms.

After years of searching, on Epiphany Day, we closed on what will become our **new mission home**. We are falling in love with the space and finalizing the plans needed for renovations. It is nice to know others are falling in love with this facility, too. In a recent Feasibility Study conducted by our consultants, over 94% of the 50 interviewees affirmed that the acquisition and renovation of the new home is necessary for the long-term health and sustainability of SIH. Indeed, our respondents stressed the importance of a permanent, right-sized home aligned with current mission realities and the operational advantages of owning rather than leasing space. According to our consultants: *"Interviewees widely viewed the project not as a real estate transaction, but as a mission-driven homecoming that strengthens SIH's capacity to serve with dignity and flexibility."* The interviewees expressed full trust in our leadership and overwhelmingly agreed that this project would be feasible. They expressed their willingness to support the effort, and their

hope that others would join them.

As former SIH board member Jake Shisha put it: *"This is truly a trifecta!"*

- 1. We have a new home to increase and improve our services.*
- 2. We have secured some of the purchase price through the lease of our original guesthouse over the past years.*
- 3. Through the recently renewed lease agreement, our guesthouse continues to serve an under-served community in need of housing, while providing income. And we are doing it all in Manhattan."*

It's an important and in many ways unprecedented moment in the history of Seafarers International House and plans are underway for **a Homecoming campaign** to be launched soon. We will share more in the months ahead.

These are also unprecedented times for the people we serve. Volatility in world trade has had an impact on seafarers; the conflict in the Middle East is inflaming that and puts mariners in grave danger especially trying to get through the Strait of Hormuz. In the US, our port chaplains are finding that fewer seafarers are allowed shore leave, so that their on-board visits of empathy and practical resources are more crucial than ever. (More on the subject on page 5).

Chaos in our Department of Homeland Security has brought great fear to legal

asylum seekers. We continue to house those who are willing to come out of the shadows to reside with us as you may read on page 4 in "Welcoming the Islanders, who are no longer strangers."

We now marvel that we are attending to seafarers in **6 ports** (Albany, Baltimore, Duluth, Houston, New Haven, and New York/New Jersey) and asylum seekers from around the world.

We remain hopeful in these unprecedented times and will celebrate the achievements of three shipping industry leaders, who are making a difference in seafarers' welfare in the US and around the world. (See pages 2 – 3 to get to know the **2026 awardees at the April 23 Setting the Course Reception**).

All of it combines to be a rich and robust experience in unprecedented **mission driven homecomings** and we are grateful.

Blessedly, the love of God for all humanity is unprecedented as well:

The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter; God utters God's voice; the earth melts; The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Psalm 46:6-7

Peace, 

Marsh Luther Dreyer

2026 SETTING THE COURSE RECEPTION AWARDEES

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 5:00 - 8:00 PM

Since 2001, the Setting the Course event has been a major fundraiser and supports the Port Mission that serves about 15,000 seafarers in the ports of Albany, Baltimore, Duluth, Houston, New Haven, and NJ & NY and lodging for seafarers in Manhattan. Each year we honor shipping industry representatives who have significantly improved the welfare of seafarers.

Outstanding Friends of Seafarers:



Frederick W. Finger, Jr. is the Senior Vice President for Fleet Strategy & Special Projects at American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group, Inc. He leads long-term fleet acquisition and replacement planning and evaluates emerging technologies to support ARC's strategic objectives. He also oversees shipboard labor relations and plays a key role in the company's cadet recruitment and outreach initiatives.

Mr. Finger began his career after graduating from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in 1978 and has spent his entire professional life in the U.S.-flag shipping industry. Before joining ARC in 2009, he held operational and commercial leadership roles over 25 years at Maersk Line, Limited, including Director of Commercial Operations and Senior Director of Specialized Vessel Management.

He serves on the Board and Executive Committee of the United Seamen's Service and is active in several maritime organizations, including Lloyd's Register North America's Advisory Committee, the American Bureau of Shipping, NDTA, the Navy League, USA Maritime, the National Cargo Bureau, and the NDTA U.S. Registry Working Group. He is also a past Chairman of the OSAC Maritime Security Working Group.

For more than four decades, Mr. Finger has devoted his career to strengthening the U.S.-flag shipping industry by focusing on the seafarers that serve it and the nation.



In 2024, Fred Finger's article Leveraging Human Factors for Safer Maritime Vessel Ops was published in MarineLink. The photo shows him presenting on Human Factors and introducing the keynote speaker at the spring 2025 ARC Key Officer Conference. Photo courtesy of ARC.



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

A native of Camden, NJ, Mr. Orzechowski graduated in 1991 from the trainee program at the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education in Piney Point, MD. He sailed in the deck department, both in the deep sea and inland divisions.

Mr. Orzechowski came ashore in 1994, when he was elected Port Agent at the SIU hall in St. Louis. Two years later, he was elected Vice President of the SIUNA-affiliated Seafarers Entertainment and Allied Trades Union (SEATU), and in 2000, he was elected to the SIU Executive Board as Vice President of the union's Lakes and Inland Waters District. He was re-elected in 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020.

In October 2015, Mr. Orzechowski was appointed to the role of Vice President of the Seafarers Harry Lundeberg School of Seamanship at the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Education in Piney Point, MD and remained in that role until 2023





SIU Secretary-Treasurer Tom Orzechowski is constantly advocating for seafarers as pictured here in Washington D.C. with Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey when he promoted career opportunities in the maritime industry for Massachusetts residents. Photo courtesy of SIU March 2024.

when he was promoted to Secretary-Treasurer by a unanimous vote by the Executive Board of SIU.

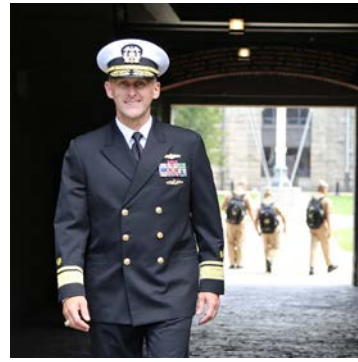
Mr. Orzechowski has extensive experience as an organizer and contract negotiation. He has attended and completed the International Foundation Employee Benefit Plans programs in addition to completing Portfolio Concepts and Management Program at the Wharton Aresty Institute of Executive Education at the University of Pennsylvania. He serves as Co-Chair to the union's SIU Health and Benefit and Pension Plans as well as the Rivers Pension Trust.

Within the shipping industry, he is respected as a trusted advocate for seafarers and their rights.



Having graduated from SUNY Maritime College in 1991, RADM John Okon understands the needs of cadets and how to prepare them for a career in the maritime industry. Photo courtesy Alumni Spotlight SUNY Maritime College.

Special Recognition for Service to Seafarers



Rear Admiral John A. Okon '91, USN (ret), was born in Syracuse, New York, and graduated from New York Maritime College in 1991. Over a distinguished 33-year career in the U.S. Navy, and now as President of his alma mater, he has exemplified servant leadership grounded in a deep commitment to seafarers, sailors, and the civilian maritime workforce.

Guided by the belief that leadership is about serving others and positively influencing those around him, he has consistently placed the well-being, development, and success of his people at the center of every mission.

Rear Admiral Okon is widely respected for his personal care and attention to those he leads. Whether supporting sailors at sea, mentoring future maritime leaders, or advocating for civilian professionals ashore, he leads with empathy, humility, and integrity.

He understands that operational excellence is inseparable from human connection and has fostered cultures throughout his career founded on trust, accountability, dignity, and respect for all.

His service to the maritime community extends beyond operational leadership. A strong advocate for education, training, character development, and mental health, he recognizes that the strength of the U.S. maritime enterprise depends on fully preparing the next generation of mariners, personally and professionally. As President of Maritime College, he continues this legacy by ensuring students are technically proficient and grounded in character, resilience, and iron-clad integrity.

Rear Admiral Okon's leadership is defined by a lifelong dedication to people, service, and the maritime profession.



WELCOMING THE ISLANDERS, WHO ARE NO LONGER STRANGERS

By Henryk Behnke, Seafarers International House



Because of privacy concerns, we cannot share an image of the Islanders, but a photo of a street scene somewhere in the Caribbean. Photo courtesy of Juan Carlos Carlocchia from Pixabay.

In our fall 2024 Port Call newsletter, we shared the story of a family of four fleeing persecution in Ghana. Through our partner organization, we were able to sponsor them for over a year. The parents and small children traveled through the perilous Darién Gap in Columbia and almost lost their lives crossing a river in Arizona, where they applied for asylum. As we have reported, they have since successfully established themselves and are contributing to society, being employed and paying taxes. The mother in the family is now a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

When their room became available, we were able to sponsor another family, this time from the Caribbean Islands.

When father Joe left the Island, his girls, Martha and Rebecca, were 12 and 20 years old. The siblings now 18 and 26 and got separated last year. Rebecca and her partner Alex arrived in the US and were soon joined by Joe.

Mother Mary and younger daughter Martha had to travel extensively through South American including Honduras and ended up petitioning at the US Consulate in Mexico. Our partner organization's leader visited them there to bring hope and help.

In the meantime, Rebecca found work as a nanny, while

Alex found employment at a mall. Somehow, they even managed to have the family dog sent up from the Island, a first happy reunion.

Recently, US Citizenship and Immigration Services approved the family's reunification which is now being processed with Mary and Martha still in Mexico. There Martha has been learning English with the staff of the partner organization. These days she is making some money teaching Spanish remotely and is working part-time in a gym. She has passed the high school equivalency exam and is now exploring ways to begin online studies with a university.

State-side, around Christmas, Joe, Rebecca, and Alex found a home of their own. They are waiting and are praying that the family reunion will happen soon.

Now, there is again "room in the inn" for another family in need. From where will they be coming? Stay tuned.

On behalf of "our" Islanders, thank you to all donors, congregations, and ELCA's AMMPARO program for supporting SIH and partners in welcoming the stranger in need.



SHORE LEAVE, OFTEN NOT AN OPTION

By Henryk Behnke, Seafarers International House

After a long voyage, seafarers finally arrive at one of our US ports and are greeted by an SIH port chaplain, who comes on board to bring essentials, to check on working conditions, and to lend an ear. Then she offers the crew a ride to the mall, typically a welcome break from the routine and an opportunity to see a different town or to purchase souvenirs for loved ones. Isn't that one of the perceived perks of being a seafarer?

Yet, in recent years, fewer seafarers can leave the ship to go on shore. Seafarers International House transportation numbers document a dramatic decline. While in 2019 10,114 seafarers took a ride to the mall, by 2025 this number has dropped to just 1,878 mariners. This makes our ship visits even more important than ever.

A joint report by the ITF Seafarers' Trust and World Maritime University from last spring reveals that more than a quarter of seafarers receive no shore leave during contracts averaging 6.6 months, while a third go ashore only once or twice. Even when granted, 93.5% of shore leave periods last under 6 hours, with nearly half under 3.

Officers, offshore vessel crews, and tanker crews are the least likely to get ashore, with barriers including minimal crewing, heavy workloads, port security, inspections, and limited time in port. The report warns that shore leave is becoming an unattainable concept, calling for urgent action from all maritime stakeholders to prioritize crew well-being, vessel safety, and retention amid looming labor shortages.

US entry is even more difficult for international seafarers. Shore leave must be approved by the vessel's Master and granted by Customs and Border Protection (CBP).



Only one seafarer of crew of 20 had a Visa and was able to catch a ride to the mall with SIH ship visitor Tim Marzik (left) in New Haven last spring.

Obtaining a Visa is not easy since seafarers must apply in person at the US embassy in their homeland, where month-long backlogs are common. Exacerbating the situation is that CBP is at times, without warning, revoking visas and deporting seafarers. Deported crew members face 10-year bans from re-entering the US and permanent blacklisting by some employers.

Recommendations for seafarers are to ensure that all crew members have valid visas to avoid automatic denial by CBP. Then, they need to coordinate with port agents and seafarers' welfare organizations, like Seafarers International House, which can help facilitate transportation.

What about American seafarers? Over 50% of them plan to leave their jobs in the next five years, according to a 2026 study conducted by World Maritime University with support from the Officers' Union of International Seamen (OUIS), of which MM&P and MEBA are members. US seafarers reported long work-weeks (79 hours). In addition, 94.8 percent of American seafarers reported not having a weekly day off, and 87.6% of them stated that they had not had a full day off during their entire contract period.

"While US seafarers benefit from shorter contracts, this advantage is hampered by excessive workloads, demanding administrative burdens, extended work hours, high work stress, and severely limited shore leave," the researchers wrote.

"From the numerous statements by working seafarers it becomes evident that a major change is required if the industry is to not only retain those experienced seafarers... but also to recruit the next generation," said OUIS Executive Director Nick Bramley.

"MM&P officers participated in this study to shine a light on the realities of modern shipboard life," said MM&P Atlantic Ports Vice President Tom Larkin, a board member of Seafarers International House. "These findings make it clear that fatigue, stress, and work-life imbalance are not just quality-of-life issues—they are safety issues. Addressing them is essential to protecting mariners, vessels, and the integrity of the US maritime industry."

Grateful disclosures: OUIS supports our Christmas-at-Sea program along with the American Maritime Officers, Seafarers International Union, and Matson. Our vans are sponsored by ITF Seafarers' Trust, except for the van in New Haven, which is funded by Woman's Seamen's Friend Society of CT. 



Pastor Jonathan Westerlund went sightseeing around New York Harbor with these seafarers in August 2022.

DISCIPLE-SHIP

By Rev. Jonathan Westerlund, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Life and Children, Family, Youth, and Young Adult Ministries, Metro NY Synod, and former SIH port chaplain

When thinking of discipleship, the first thing that came to my mind was a literal ship. So many stories in scripture include ships: Noah's ark, Jonah, Jesus walking on water, Jesus calming the seas, Jesus telling the disciples to cast their nets on the other side, Jesus calling the disciples to fish for people, and many more.

Maybe discipleship is a little bit like a ship, or the crew of a ship. No matter what size ship, you need a crew to make things work. On today's commercial vessels, you need an oiler and an electrician, a messman and a cook, and crew members with many other roles and responsibilities.

On a larger sailing vessel, you'd need someone to open and lift the sails, someone to maintain the rudder, a rower, a deck-swabber, and a pilot.

PLAN YOUR LEGACY

The majority of adult Americans have not created a will. Many forget that creating a will is not only a legal process, but more importantly a way to extend your love, care, and generosity to family and friends. You can decide who will represent you as executor, and you can designate who will get what, including gifts to your favorite charities. You don't have to leave a million dollars, either.

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

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

Discipleship is about following. For us, it's about following Christ. But discipleship is not about going alone, it's about following Christ together. We as the body of Christ are the crew of this disciple-ship. We need musicians and teachers, doctors, and farmers. We need all of us with our varied gifts, talents, and callings. Above all, we need the captain of that ship, Christ, guiding us through fair weather and stormy seas. In all things, we need God-given trust and faith so that we can say "Jesus, take the wheel" and rely on God and each other instead of only ourselves.

Throughout scripture, the word "you" would often be better translated as "you all" or "y'all." In our disciple-ship, it's all about community, it's all about working together doing God's work, it's all about following Christ while lifting each other up and grabbing an oar when our shipmate is tired.

May the wind of the spirit guide our sails, my (disciple)ship-mates.



Pastors Susan Tjornehoj and David Wangaard, pictured at their granddaughter's baptism September 2025, are members of the Homeport Society.

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



MISSION & PEOPLE SERVED

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

In 2025, SIH served 19,519 people. This includes boarding 1,347 vessels, visiting 14,078 seafarers and delivering 3,405 Christmas-at-Sea satchels assembled by volunteers. SIH also provided 3,679 lodging nights for seafarers and asylum seekers. SIH provides its services to all people regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, or family/parental status.

Program services accounted for ca. 75% of expenses with only 15% spent on management and 10% on fundraising and communications.

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THANK YOU FROM 3,405 SEAFARERS



Thank you to all 2025 contributors who helped us deliver 3,405 Christmas-at-Sea satchels spreading Holiday Cheer among seafarers this past Christmas! Representing participants and recipients are the Advent Sisters of Advent Lutheran Church, Mattituck, NY, (photo from Facebook May 2025) and crew member with their satchels in Baltimore (photo by port chaplain Rev. Vitalii Guz January 2026).

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

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

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THANK YOU FROM 3,405 SEAFARERS

Last spring in Baltimore, Port Chaplain Pastor Vitalii Guz was able to drive these three seafarers in the ITF Seafarers' Trust sponsored vehicle to a mall. These days, we see fewer mariners are allowed shore leave making our ship visits crucial. Read the article "Shore leave, often not an option" on page 5.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 

An Affiliate of the

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