

# PORTCALL

## Seafarers International House

### MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RENEWAL IN THE BROKEN

**A**s a Lutheran pastor, I see Jesus in broken things. I suppose it's because of "The theology of the Cross" whereby we see Jesus' power and presence even in the most vulnerable of places - the brokenness of the cross. When Jesus was suffering on our behalf, his brokenness paradoxically became a true strength.

By some interpretations we could say that our world, our country, and indeed even our mission, Seafarers International House, has been broken these past 2 ½ years. We had so many transitions:

- March 2020 - shut down of the guesthouse and rental of hotel rooms for seafarers and immigrants
- April - July 2020 - lease of the guesthouse for COVID recoverees
- August 1, 2020, through February 28, 2021- vacant
- From March 15, 2021, to now - lease of the guesthouse to a not-for-profit partner
- From September 15, 2021, to now - rent of guestrooms and offices at a partner organization

Like our seafarers and asylum seekers, we as an organization, have struggled, faced uncertainty, and been broken. However, oftentimes we see the new life and strength in the broken places:

**We have not lost one day of service in the past 2 ½ years for the sake of**

- a) seafarers: housing them, visiting them aboard ships, seeing that they got immunizations, and
- b) asylum seekers: sheltering them, supporting them, making sure that they are not homeless

*"As (the disciples) came near the village to which they were going, Jesus walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and the day is now nearly over.' So, he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed ...'" (Luke 24)*

We have had "resurrection moments" during the past 2 ½ years as:

- Our Facilities Work Group secured NY Attorney General approval for a **4 ½ year lease with our not-for-profit partner (with an option to extend), crucial for our financial sustainability that depends on that income in addition to your contributions**
- We have a viable arrangement with a partner while looking for our next "home", a lengthy process involving financing, zoning, and other considerations **to "right size" our operations especially since the number**



**of asylees coming to New York has increased and the job, visa, and health requirements of mariners have become more complicated**

In Luke 24, the disciples are disheartened because Jesus has died, and their eyes are prevented from seeing Jesus who actually is walking alongside with them. Only when Jesus took the bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them - only then were their eyes opened, and they recognized him. They saw the resurrected promise in him. **Indeed, it was in the very act of breaking bread where the disciples saw the brokenness and resilience of resurrected Christ in their midst.** So also here at *Seafarers International House* we have seen Jesus and experienced God's presence anew. **Soli Deo Gloria** (Glory to God alone), who also works through you, our generous Christian, and non-Christian supporters.



*Marsh Luther Drage*

*Photo: In March, our Ukrainian Port Chaplain-in-Training, Rev. Vitalii Guz, visited this Ukrainian seafarer who was in rehab after a medical incident. The mariner's home was destroyed by Russian bombs. Shortly after this photo he left to be reunited with his wife in Poland. Now he is recovering back in Ukraine.*

# THIS SUMMER: SURPRISE!, CHAIRS, WAR

By Seafarers International House Port Chaplain Ruth Setaro, Port of New Haven, CT

As I look back, Summer 2022 went by in a flash. The port in New Haven was bustling with ships, mostly bulk carriers, bringing us loads of lumber, steel products, salt, gasoline, cement, and liquid asphalt. Ships leave loaded with tons of scrap metal or grain.

I have met seafarers from many countries, some from Ukraine. They have told me about trying to move their family members out of the country and others who continue to have folks in harm's way. One captain told me about his family in Odessa, who spent their nights in a basement bunker as bombs went off. Drones exploded over people's heads when they were outside.

As I have often said: When you have seen one ship, you have seen just one ship. Some are big, some are small, some are old and some are new, some are clean and some stained. The crews hail from all over the world. Some speak English and some don't. Some have visas and others don't. You get the idea. As varied as the ships, so are the crews and their needs as the following three anecdotes from this summer illustrate:

## **Surprise!**

I was very surprised when I had a call from port security that crew members were waiting at the gate of the port area to go shopping. I was surprised because the ship had docked earlier that morning and most seafarers, having been up all night as the ship came through Long Island Sound, would be tired and waiting for Customs and Border Protection and Coast Guard to come on board. Shopping usually happens a little later. But not having been able to have shore leave for many months the crew planned to take full advantage of a chance to get off the ship. However, that

is not what surprised me the most. I was surprised to find a female cadet in the mix.

Then the next ship, surprise, surprise, had two female cadets. All three young women were from the Philippines, and I learned that many Filipino women are beginning to attend the maritime schools to become seafarers.

On the following bulk carrier, I met three women seafarers from Poland. Wow! One, a 3rd officer told me that she was engaged to the 2nd officer. They had met 7 years ago at the maritime college. When they returned home they were to be married and she and her husband would be able to sail on the same ships.

I took the captain and two of the women on a shopping trip. The girls wanted to go to Walmart and the captain to Dick's to buy golf clubs. I asked him how he enjoyed the female crew. Laughing, he told me that the concerned chief officer had asked him if he noticed that the ship was using more fresh water than usual. The captain said yes, he did. He explained that it was not because the girls used more water taking showers, but that the men were cleaning up more, not only taking more showers, but also washing their clothes more often. Indeed, I did notice that even their coveralls were really clean.

## **Chairs**

This will be remembered as the "saga of the chairs". The crew wanted to replace pedestal chairs on the bridge, the one the pilot sits in, and the other for the officer on duty, as well as desk chairs. At first, I was told one chair would be replaced by an automobile seat. Really? So, I began looking for junk yards.

When I met the chief officer on the first



trip off the ship, he told me that they wanted to replace the pedestal chairs on the bridge. I dropped the crew at the mall, and was asked to stop at Jordan's and IKEA on my way back. I found a pedestal chair at Jordan's for \$549. At IKEA, pedestal chairs were only \$135. Coming back to the mall, the chief officer asked if we could stop at IKEA and look at the chairs. "Perfect" he said – but, of course, the chairs were sold out for months.

The next day I received a message from the captain that he would like to "check out Staples for these damn chairs". Staples in Hamden had lots of chairs. He selected two, which would be modified and loaded them boxed in my van. Later in the day, he texted that one of the chairs in the boxes was not the right one. The next morning we went back to Staples and got the chair that was supposed to be in the box.

The next night, I picked up the chief officer from TJ Max, where he got two desk chairs.

Another day I was called, and the chief officer returned the two desk chairs to TJ Max and bought a pedestal chair.

*Top photo: Ruth with a female engine cadet on the vessel Torm Malaysia, May 2022. ITF Seafarers' Trust and Woman's Seaman's Friend Society of Connecticut support the vans that are so important for our work. Thank you to them and to all donors who contribute to the Port Mission.*





Meanwhile, the crew was having a wonderful time with shore leave, as many of them had not had shore leave in 6 months. Time in the van is important as seafarers share what is on their minds. One officer told me that he had not been off the ship in one year; he was excited to return home to India soon. We talked about his family and his faith. He was not a Christian and did not believe in an afterlife. He believed that the good he did now would transfer to a good life for his family. When he died that was the end. He listened quietly as I told him a little about the joy of Easter and my belief in the afterlife.

I took other crew members to the train station. They had a blast visiting NYC.

Over the ten days the ship was here unloading steel billets, the crew and I became a bit like family to each other.

In the end, five chairs were kept. The photos below show the automobile seat that started it all and the two new pedestal chairs for the bridge. A big improvement for sure! We are still laughing about the "saga of the chairs".



## SAVE THE DATE

### 2023 SETTING THE COURSE RECEPTION

THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2023, 5:00 - 7:30 PM  
NEW YORK ATHLETIC CLUB

For more information email: [henryk@sihnyc.org](mailto:henryk@sihnyc.org) or visit [www.sihnyc.org/upcoming-events](http://www.sihnyc.org/upcoming-events)



At the April 27, 2022, Setting the Course Reception, left to right: Awardees Anthony Naccarato, Bethann Rooney, C. James Patti, and Jacqueline Smith. Photo by Hannah Mrakovčić.

#### War

I have never had a problem writing my anecdotes about my work with seafarers. I have never had to write about war. This spring was very different.


For days, I had been trying to figure out what I wanted to say. I watched the news and I cried. I visited ships with seafarers from Ukraine, Poland, Romania and other Eastern European countries - and I cried, and I prayed.

Ukrainian seafarers are desperate to get information about their families, not knowing if they are dead or alive or if they have escaped to another country. Some have feelings of guilt that they are not home fighting.

I met a Polish captain. We had a long talk. We talked about how during the Cold War as youngsters we were taught and practiced in school for a nuclear bomb attack and where to find a bomb

shelter. He never thought that his children would be learning to do this. His wife has taken in a Ukrainian woman and two young children. He worried that Russia will retaliate on Poland for giving so much aid to the people who have fled Ukraine. I was able to take him to a Polish Mass at St. Stanislaus Church which gave him some comfort and then escorted the Priest to do a mass on the ship.

Six months later the war continues. For now we watch and wait, cry and pray. *God be with the people of Ukraine and God help us all.*

The past summer showed again that every crew is different. Spending time with them is always an adventure. It is an honor to serve these seafarers, who sacrifice so much to bring us the things we need. 

# KINDNESS REWIRES

By Pastor Marsh Luther Drege

I received this note the other day from two asylees who came to stay with us as a referral from Catholic Charities: "Pastor Marsh, these words are to thank you for your kind help. God bless you".

Their story is typical of what so many asylees are going through these days. They came from a country in South America that doesn't accept the fact that they are gay, so they traveled, often on foot, through Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, all the way through Mexico, and once they were able to claim asylum at the border of Mexico, they were bussed by the Governor of Texas to New York City to fend for themselves.

Catholic Charities, overwhelmed by the busloads of asylees coming into our city, contacted me in July and asked if we could house these two traumatized men. I said "Certainly", and the blessings began to flow. First of all, I've never met more hardworking, ambitious gentlemen. Secondly, I've seldom met asylees who know so little English. The only way that we could communicate was through Google Translate. But then, a miracle: Our housekeeper is from the same country as these men and not only was she able to translate for them, but she was able to explain how to use the metro cards we gave them, how to navigate the in-house laundry service, as well as to provide some "older sister" support and prayer along the way. Thanks to our supporters, we were able to assist them with free lodging, warm meals, and with our housekeeper, together we were able to make them feel welcome and cared for in their new homeland.

With our assistance- and that includes yours, the two were able to secure jobs, enroll in ESL classes, and save up for a down payment on an apartment which they moved into proudly just five weeks after they arrived.

I recently toured another asylee housing ministry in Chicago and something the religious brother operating the guesthouse told us stuck with me: **"Kindness rewires the brain"**. He went on to explain that most asylees are traumatized when they arrive in the U.S. -- often having narrowly escaped violence and experiencing brutal travel conditions, seeing death along their journey, and being treated inhumanely by authorities. Any kindness that can be extended to them will help re-wire their brains and begin a healing process.

At *Seafarers International House* we have been blessed to be able to extend kindness to seafarers and asylees for nearly 150 years. It all began with one pastor from Sweden in 1873, who cared for seafarers - and soon new arrivals. Just think of the lives that have been transformed, the faith of individuals that have been strengthened, the brains that have been rewired! **All because of kindness.** 🚢

## 150 Years of Uninterrupted Service - Call for Stories

In 2023, *Seafarers International House* will celebrate 150 years of meeting the needs of seafarers and of immigrants.

If you would like to share your anecdotes and your experience with those we serve, please email [henryk@sihynyc.org](mailto:henryk@sihynyc.org)

Photos will be appreciated. We may publish your story on Social Media, this newsletter or in an anniversary booklet.



Photo by Dimi Katsavaris on Unsplash



# THANK YOU NOTE

By Jane

Finally, we are receiving more asylees. In March, Jane, an asylee from Southeast Asia shared a thank you message with us upon moving out to a new, more permanent home, and a job with one of our charity allies. She stayed at our temporary home for 63 days during the cold winter months and writes the following in her newly learned English:

*Hello Pastor Marsh,*

*I have good news to share with you. I got a job and I will start working from 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*





*In late Spring the crew of SSI RELIANCE received their Christmas-at-Sea satchels early - or late, depending on your perspective. The joyful smiles of the seafarers show us Christmas-at-Sea is always in season. Photo by Ruth Setaro.*

## CHRISTMAS AT SEA - ALWAYS IN SEASON

**T**hank you to all 2021 contributors! With your help we delivered 2,162 Christmas-at-Sea satchels to seafarers during the Christmas Season of 2021. Now, will all of you help us break this record for 2022?

90% of global trade is transported on the high seas by crew members on container ships who remain invisible to most people, yet our supply chains depend on their services. Seafarers are the “unseen essential workers” and are overworked, frustrated and lonely. Therefore, we invite you, your business, school group or congregation to bring joy to seafarers who will not be home with their loved ones for Christmas. Our port chaplains safely deliver the satchels filled with gifts to the ships for the holiday. Every crew member on a ship regardless of their faith or nationality will open their satchels, each containing:

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

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

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

What might have been another lonely night at sea becomes a joyous occasion, because complete strangers generously shared the spirit of Christmas with seafarers!

If it is more convenient, **you may make a donation** and have us purchase the items for you. Typically, a completely filled satchel costs about \$35. You may also order items for seafarers **on Amazon. We have created a special Christmas-at-Sea Wish List**, which you can easily access at [www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea](http://www.sihnyc.org/christmas-at-sea)

To order empty satchels and to coordinate delivery or pick up, please contact:


For Baltimore area: Rev. K. Robert Schmitt, 410-746-0236, [k.robert.schmitt@comcast.net](mailto:k.robert.schmitt@comcast.net)

For New England: Ruth Setaro, 203-687-2177, [ruthsetaro@snet.net](mailto:ruthsetaro@snet.net)

All other regions: Jeni Janis, [jeni@sihnyc.org](mailto:jeni@sihnyc.org)

Filled satchels may be mailed by **December 2, 2022** to:

**Seafarers International House**  
120 W 14th St, New York, NY 10011

Christmas At Sea is supported by International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P), Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA), and Seafarers International Union (SIU) 



## MISSION & PEOPLE SERVED

*Seafarers International House (SIH) is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants. SIH offers hospitality, social assistance, and advocacy to a multi-national and multi-faith community in maritime ports on the Eastern Seaboard and in New York City. During the second year of the pandemic, we served over 18,000 people including over 15,000 seafarers visited and over 1,300 lodging nights provided for seafarers and immigrants. SIH provides its services to all people regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, or family/parental status.*

**We are making the most of your contributions: 77% of our revenue is spent on programs, only 23% on administration and fundraising.**

## INCOME FOR LIFE: EVERYONE WINS!

**"Everyone wins!"** Says SIH supporter and Homeport Society member Ralph U. Price, describing the benefits of a charitable gift annuity. At his age, **he receives 9% income each year** of his life, thereafter the corpus goes to the mission of SIH to aid seafarers and immigrants.

A charitable gift annuity is a simple contract between you and the ELCA Foundation (or another foundation or trust). In exchange for making a gift to benefit *Seafarers International House*, you will receive regular (quarterly, semi-annual or annual) fixed payments for your lifetime and, if you desire, for the lifetime of your spouse or another person. SIH receives the remainder of your gift.

You receive a **tax deduction** at the time the charitable gift annuity is established. A portion of each payment is tax-free in most cases.

You can also join our Lighthouse Keepers monthly automated giving program to support our work with seafarers and immigrants by making a modest monthly donation that

adds up and helps those in need. Just click the "donate" button on our website ([www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org)) and choose your amount and frequency.

For assistance, please contact Henryk, Director of Development. You can reach him at (212) 677-4800 ext. 7203 or [henryk@sihnyc.org](mailto:henryk@sihnyc.org). If you have included us in your estate plans, please let us know. We'd love to welcome you into the Homeport Society or as a Lighthouse Keeper and will list you in the annual report. ⚓



Former SIH Board Member and proud Homeport Society Member Ralph U. Price.

As *Seafarers International House* emerges from the pandemic we move forward in our mission by leasing out our flagship building 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 general public for either rooms or meeting space. We still receive your mail.

If you are a seafarer with a valid MMC in need of accommodation in Manhattan or other assistance, please email [res@sihnyc.org](mailto: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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## IN THIS ISSUE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:  
RENEWAL IN THE BROKEN

THIS SUMMER: SURPRISE!, CHAIRS,  
WAR

SAVE THE DATE: APRIL 20, 2023  
SETTING THE COURSE RECEPTION

IMMIGRANT STORY: KINDNESS  
REWIRES

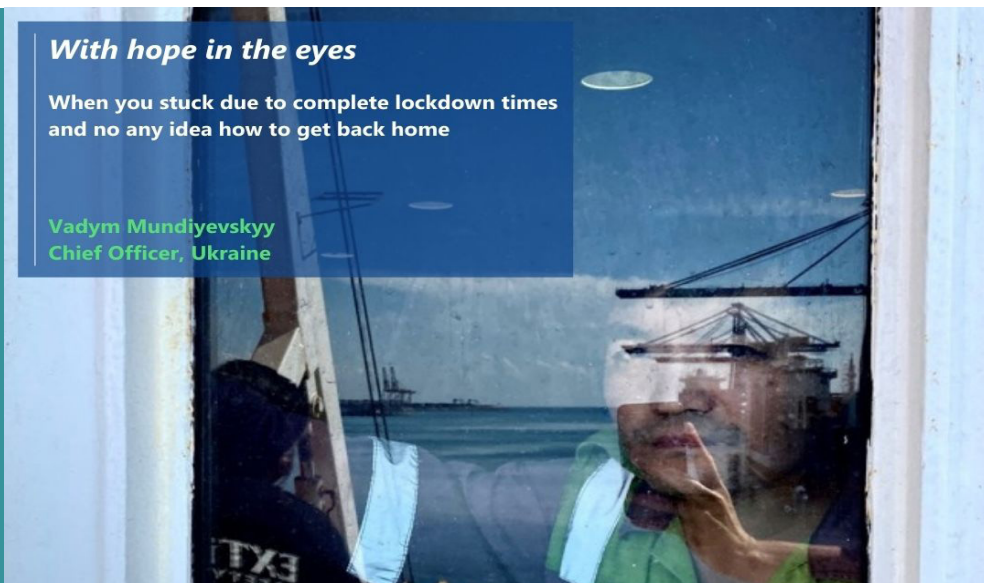
CHRISTMAS AT SEA

INCOME FOR LIFE: EVERYONE WINS

### *With hope in the eyes*

When you stuck due to complete lockdown times  
and no any idea how to get back home

Vadym Mundiyevesky  
Chief Officer, Ukraine



Ukrainian Chief Officer Vadym submitted this photo for the ITF Seafarers' Trust photo competition last year. The photo and the message of the title "With hope in the eyes" remain very timely.



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