

PORTCALL

Seafarers International House

MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: *Legacy Gifts & Holy Closures are Living Streams*

"Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by the water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when the heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought, it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit."

Jeremiah, 17: 7-8

2023 was the year that Seafarers International House (SIH) celebrated 150 years of uninterrupted service to well over two million people. 2024 is starting out robust and faithful to this uninterrupted Calling of being the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants, or more succinctly, of welcoming in the stranger.

Part of our success in welcoming more strangers is increased financial support from our donors. Especially impactful last year were the legacy gifts of two dear friends, Eva C. Swanson, and Melva Pauline Hoffelt Roland, as well as three Holy Closures - closures of Lutheran churches who have completed their brick-and-mortar presence but continue to serve others through their missional giving: Zion Lutheran Church, Ridgefield NJ; Trinity Lutheran Church, Shelton, CT; and Faith Lutheran Church, East Hartford, CT.

It is hard to see friends pass and churches close. But some, like Jeremiah's tree beside the water, do not

cease bearing fruit. As part of our endowment or reserve fund, these gifts create enduring legacies beyond a lifetime or the timespan of a single congregation.

Clearly our roots of 150 years are many, varied, and planted by the water of living streams. Our 2023 service numbers illustrate this point. In part because of legacy gifts, we welcomed 49 asylum seekers from twenty-four different countries and provided them with free lodging for 735 nights. This included a family of four from Ghana. (See article on page 5).

These unexpected income streams enabled us to hire our new Social Worker, Michael Bradford, to assist me in caring for immigrants and seafarers. We also visited about 13,000 seafarers in four different ports, offering affordable accommodations of 2,297 lodging nights in our guest rooms at the Markle Residence to old and new seafarers, and distributed 3,216 Christmas at Sea satchels - a record!


With your support and legacy gifts, we strengthened our partnership with the Albany Maritime Ministry (AMM) and Pastors Kate Drefke and Lowell Chilton, who we introduce on page 2. Since February 2024, we have a new half-time port chaplain in Baltimore, Ukrainian born Rev. Vitalii Guz (standing left to me in the photo). A new ship visitor, Tim Marzik, started in March in New Haven as our faithful Ruth Setaro

retired after over 27 years of tireless service. (See article on pages 6 - 7). In April 2024, we expand westward as we establish our first Great Lake partnership with the Twin Port Seafarers Mission in Duluth.

In the long run, legacy gifts help to grow our endowment and reserve funds. That produces future income streams to help us add staff or expand into different ports. And, if the opportunity arises, these gifts may allow us to purchase a new mission-based home with about 16 guest rooms by 2026.

As you read the following pages, you will see how donations and particularly legacy gifts do not cease to bear fruit. For that we are most grateful.

Please do consider listing SIH as a beneficiary on a life insurance policy or an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or in your will.

Legacy gifts live on as we welcome the next generation of strangers on the way. Peace, 

Marsh Luther Drefke



NEW SIH PARTNERSHIP IN THE PORT OF ALBANY

By Seafarers International House and Albany Maritime Ministry Port Chaplains Rev. Kate Drefke and Rev. Lowell Chilton

In December, Chaplains Lowell Chilton and Kate Drefke visited the crew of the bulk carrier Bright Falcon at the Port of Coeymans, about 10 miles south of Albany, NY. The crew, twenty Filipino seafarers who were all denied entry and thus had no shore leave, were very happy to welcome Kate and Lowell aboard.

As the crew gathered in the mess hall [a dining area on a ship], the captain invited them to speak about the meaning of Christmas and asked them to pray for the crew. After the visit in the mess, several crew members were elated to come down to the van and carry Christmas-at-Sea gifts aboard. The Albany Maritime Ministry has a long tradition of gathering gift wrapped shoe boxes with small items enjoyed by the seafarers. Thanks to the new partnership between the Albany Maritime Ministry and Seafarers International House, Chaplains Kate and Lowell were also able to gift the crew SIH Christmas-at-Sea satchels this year, resulting in SIH's delivery of a record 3,216 satchels in all ports this past holiday season.

The seafarers that Kate and Lowell visit are mostly international seafarers. While many river mariners (tug operators mostly) work along the Hudson River, the Albany Maritime Ministry focuses on the ocean going cargo ships and bulk carriers similar to our reach in the other ports in Baltimore, New York & New Jersey, and New Haven.

SIH's partner, Albany Maritime Ministry, is an ecumenical association that ministers to the spiritual, family and practical needs of seafarers in the Albany Capital District. With Kate and Lowell, sponsored by Seafarers International House, and committed volunteers, the partnership currently serves about 3,000



seafarers on 100 vessels every year. These numbers are expected to grow as aggressive economic efforts seek to expand volume in the Port of Albany, Port of Coeymans, and private terminals along the river. Since the founding of Albany in 1624 as a trading post, shipping has been important to its growth and prosperity. Located 124 nautical miles north of New York Harbor, today the Port of Albany is the largest inland Port in the Northeast United States. ⚓

The crew of the Bright Falcon pictured here with Chaplain Lowell were excited to receive Christmas-at-Sea gifts packed by many supporters of the Albany Maritime Ministry and Seafarers International House. December 2023. Photo by Rev. Kate Drefke.



Chaplains Kate Drefke and Lowell Chilton with Pastor Marsh Drege in the middle promoted port ministry at the Upstate NY Synod Assembly in Syracuse in June 2023.

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 5:00 - 8:00 PM

2024 SETTING THE COURSE RECEPTION

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, 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:



Katie Higginbottom was appointed Head of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) Seafarers' Trust in July 2018. Since then, she has actively expanded the Trust's reach through her relationships with maritime unions around the world and sought to increase the impact of the Trust's work through close cooperation with the many international organisations addressing the welfare and well-being of seafarers. At the outbreak of Covid in early 2020, the Trust distributed GBP 1 million (USD 1.3 million) in emergency grants to front-line seafarer services within 6 weeks.

Katie joined the ITF Seafarers' Section in 2005 where she played an active role in the ITF delegation to the ILO for negotiations and adoption of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC). She was responsible for training the ITF inspectorate on the MLC and for monitoring its practical application, most notably on the issue of abandonment. She has worked extensively with

maritime unions in the Black Sea region, East and West Africa and Myanmar.



Tim Nolan, President & CEO of TOTE Group. A senior executive with 30 years of maritime experience, Nolan joined TOTE Maritime Puerto Rico in 2013 becoming President & CEO of TOTE Group in 2018. Prior to this, Nolan served as senior VP of the international division for Yusen Logistics Americas (formerly NYK Logistics) and began his career with A.P. Moller-Maersk in 1994 where he held executive positions in the shipping and logistics divisions with postings in Chile and Denmark.

Under Nolan's leadership, TOTE has become one of the most efficient carriers and the first maritime company in the world to convert its fleet of vessels to liquified natural gas (LNG), the cleanest maritime fuel available. In addition, Nolan has reaffirmed TOTE's commitment to becoming the employer of choice for US mariners, developing new tools and systems to support their time at sea and ashore. Nolan serves in leadership roles for various maritime-related business and shares his talent with non-profit organizations including Jacksonville-based Dreams Come True.

The event is held at the New York Athletic Club.
For donations in honor of the awardees, tickets (\$500 pp) or further information please email henryk@sihnyc.org or visit www.sihnyc.org/upcoming-events

Special Recognition for Service to Seafarers



Randi Ciszewski is the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P) Government Fleet Representative. She has advocated for the rights of civil service mariners (CIVMARS) over the last 40 years – 22 years as Military Sealift Command Labor Relations Director, and 22 years as an MM&P Official. Randi administers collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) relying on her experience in employment law, conflict resolution, and collective bargaining, to include a CBA with CNO. (MM&P is the only Union with a CBA at this highest federal echelon governing working conditions of Navy Harbor Pilots). She has studied at Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations and is a graduate of the Department of Defense Women's Executive Leadership Program and the recipient of the Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Award. She is a founding member of the MM&P Women's Caucus and has broad experience in dealing with illegal discrimination. An advisor to President Obama and VP Biden's Department of Labor Federal Advisory Committee of Occupational, Safety & Health, Randi is a strong and fearless voice on federal maritime issues, dedicated to protecting MM&P CIVMARS' inherent rights. ⚓

WE'LL TAKE A PIECE OF EACH OTHER WITH US

By Pastor Zachary Dean of Calvary Lutheran Church, Hauppauge, NY

In a recent sermon for Lent, Pastor Zachary Dean recalled his days as SIH Summer Intern in 2018:

My last day of Clinical Pastoral Education—CPE for short— was where God showed up most clearly.

I was serving as a chaplain for people on cargo ships, for people who describe their jobs as being on a floating prison. They are away from their families for months on end, they miss their children's milestones and parents' deaths; their marriages often fail because of these long stretches; they are paid meager wages because it is an international job and hardly any regulation; the food they eat is gross—and there's not a lot of it; and yet we rely on these hidden people with 90% of what we have traveling on a cargo ship.

And on my last day, after months of hearing stories and tending to needy situations, frankly, I couldn't wait to be done dealing with the heartbreak!

I had the responsibility of bringing a few Philippine sailors out to lunch, and afterwards they asked if they could hang out at a local park until it was time to go back to the ship. So I drove them over to Liberty State Park (Newark, New Jersey is where all the ships come in), and I told them I'd be waiting in the van. (You could tell this was my last day because I should have gone with them.)

And a little while later, when I went to go get them, they were gone. I was in a panic. Cue the frantic searching

and calling out for them—no answer. I ended up looking out over this vast field that stretched towards New York Harbor, and there they were: asleep, lying in the field.

I went and got them, and they started telling me how that sleep was the best sleep they had gotten for months; that it had been forever since they last felt grass and warm sunlight.

As we drove back to the ship, conversation continued, and they asked me why I did what I did: Why do you wear that collar? Why do you care about us? Why are you spending your day like this?

And I told them something about how I believe that Jesus wants everyone to share their time with other people; to care for them even if we don't know who they are; and that *maybe we'll take a piece of each other with us wherever we go so that we grow closer to the rest of humanity.*

The rest of the ride was a bit silent. They got out of the van. I could taste the end of this program. And they all came over to the driver's side window. They each laid a hand on my arm. And one of them said: *You take a piece of us with you, too.*

Here was I: the one supposed to be offering care, the last day when I could have done a better job, and these people—these beautiful people— were the ones who ended up caring for me.

Heartbreaking. Yet beautiful. ⚓



RESCUED BY A TREE BRANCH

By Pastor Marsh Luther Drege



Left: This is Jonathan holding one of our repurposed Christmas at Sea satchels. Pastor Marsh gave this satchel filled with toiletries to him and his Ghanaian family as we welcomed them to stay with our immigration partner, The Lighthouse for Asylees.
Right: A Ghanaian boy (for privacy we do not publish a photo of Jonathan's sons). Stock image by 12019 from Pixabay.

Jonathan (name is changed for privacy) told me the harrowing story of their journey from Ghana, by way of the infamous Darien Gap, crossing a river into Arizona to claim asylum in the U.S. and surviving by virtue of a single tree branch in that river.

Jonathan carried his 6-year-old son on his back as his wife carried their 4-year-old son on hers and avoided certain drowning by clinging to the tree branch with all of their might. Jonathan called it a miracle and simply says that “God provides in ways that we can’t even imagine - even through a tree branch”.

And then he went on to tell me the story about how when they first arrived at the US they spent 4 days in detention in Arizona and then a Ghanaian benefactor flew them to Atlanta where they stayed for some time until they relocated to central Jersey.

There Jonathan was walking down a street one day when a complete stranger stopped his car and asked Jonathan if he was Ghanaian because of his distinctive build and head shape. This stranger then assured Jonathan that he and his family would be aided by other Ghanaian friends of the driver and they were - eventually being referred to Seafarers International House and The Lighthouse for Asylees.

Because SIH's guest rooms currently can't accommodate whole families, we have sponsored Jonathan's family for the past 4 months as they thrive and adjust to life as new

arrivals.

SIH is grateful to partner with The Lighthouse to house asylum seeking families – expanding our services beyond single asylees. The Lighthouse is a place that not only extends our care to the immigrant but also mirrors our very own logo of a beaming lighthouse reminding us that the mercy of God shines through us to those who are yearning to breathe free. 🚢

WHY DID THEY LEAVE GHANA?

Like asylum seekers from other countries, Ghanaians flee their homeland because of

- **Political persecution because of their affiliations, beliefs, or activism. Opposition figures, journalists, and human rights advocates frequently find themselves at odds with government authorities.**
- **Discrimination and violence towards Ghana's LGBTQ+ population, who experience persecution, harassment, and physical attacks.**
- **Religious persecution: despite Ghana's vast religious diversity, minority religious groups experience discrimination or violence.**

BON VOYAGE TO ONE WHO WELCOMES STRANGERS

A similar article from Ruth Setaro was published in the January 2024 Newsletter of Trinity Lutheran Church, New Haven, CT



Always welcoming the stranger. Here Ruth was photographed for an article in the New Haven Register in 2015.

Dear Friends of Seafarers –

Well, we made it through another Christmas season. It has been a remarkably busy several months as I have collected Christmas-at-Sea satchels from churches in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York, 393 in total plus many extras of hats, socks, T-shirts, candy, nuts and treats. Overall, Seafarers International House (SIH) gathered and delivered a record 3,216 satchels for crew members on bulk carriers and containerships. It is truly AMAZING, and I am so grateful for the tremendous support for this program.

I have spoken with seafarers far away from home this Christmas and talked to them about the loneliness they feel. One cook told me that he has been on the ship for an entire year because the company could not find anyone to replace him; his 3 children don't understand why he can't come home. He planned to prepare a special meal for the crew and that they would open their satchels while in the middle of the ocean heading to South Africa. They are lucky if they have a little time to celebrate because the work of the ship never stops.

And now, as the new year starts, I will officially be retiring on January 31. This has been a very difficult decision for me because ships and seafarers have been my life for the past 27 ½ years and I have loved every minute of it, but it is time to begin a new chapter of adventures.

I have met people from all over the world, some from

Ruth Setaro joined SIH when former Chaplain Rev. Andrew "Andy" E. V. Krey presented our port mission to members of Trinity Lutheran Church in New Haven in 1996. On the spot Ruth was offered the keys to the van. She enthusiastically agreed to transport some seafarers and has done so until now. Ruth's dedication to seafarers, who fondly call her 'mum', was recognized with a North American Maritime Ministry Association lifetime distinguished service award in 2021. Never having left the U.S., Ruth sees the world through the eyes of the mariners she helps day and night. On March 17, 2024, a celebration was held at Trinity Lutheran Church in New Haven to thank Ruth for her faithful service and to wish her *Bon Voyage* on her own journeys, stateside or finally abroad making use of all those invitations she received over the years.

countries I had never heard of. I began at a time when there was no security at the port – now there is extremely high security. I visited ships years ago that I would refer to as rust-buckets that were barely afloat to ships regularly inspected by the Coast Guard for safety.

I have lost friends when a ship sank in a storm and have assisted in funerals for seafarers who have died at sea. I have gone into emergency rooms with injured seafarers or burn units and cardiac units. I brought seafarers to pharmacies to get Covid vaccinations and have done much shopping and fulfilled Amazon orders for seafarers unable to get off their ship because they did not have a visa as US consulates abroad are backlogged.


At times, I was asked to bring burgers or pizzas to crews craving "American" food. Often, I had SIM cards with me and lately took "hot spots" with Wi-Fi on board so crews could contact loved ones at home.

And I drove hundreds, more likely, thousands of miles, taking seafarers in the SIH van to go shopping at Walmart or Best Buy. The last vehicle was a gift from the Woman's Seamen's Friend Society of Connecticut, who have partnered with SIH to support my work along with private donations given to SIH. For their loyal and generous support we are grateful.

I have been graciously welcomed and fed with ethnic food from around the world. I have been truly blessed and I thank God for each and every day he has given me. Thank you, Trinity Lutheran Church, my home congregation,

and to Seafarers International House, for all the support you have given me all these years. Many, many thanks,

Ruth Setaro, SIH Port Chaplain

PS: In February, it was my pleasure to show my successor, SIH Ship Visitor Tim Marzik, around the port and visit crews with him. A talented musician and songwriter, Tim has for years been an advocate for Seafarers International House at his concerts and is now ready to assist mariners. He starts in early March to make sure seafarers are taken care of in New Haven. Please support him as enthusiastically as you have sustained my work – the seafarers are counting on you. 



Connecticut native Tim Marzik, SIH's new ship visitor in New Haven, is personable, compassionate, and knows the area, - all ideal requirements to transport seafarers, deliver Christmas-at-Sea satchels and essentials and to offer prayers and counsel. Photo by Tim Marzik.

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 four ports currently (Albany, Baltimore, New Haven, New York & New Jersey), and in NYC. In 2023, SIH served 18,004 people. This includes boarding 1,094 vessels, visiting 12,522 seafarers and delivering 3,216 Christmas-at-Sea satchels assembled by volunteers. SIH also provided 3,032 lodging nights in Manhattan 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.

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@sihny.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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BON VOYAGE TO ONE WHO WELCOMES STRANGERS



On her last day of faithful service of over 27 years, SIH Port Chaplain Ruth Setaro said bon voyage to the crew of the Star Harrier. (One of them went shopping with her for a large karaoke machine. Seafarers don't fail to surprise!)
(See article BON VOYAGE TO ONE WHO WELCOMES STRANGERS on page 6).



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