

# PORTCALL

## Seafarers International House

### MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: *Just what Lutherans do!*

*"Let mutual love continue, and do not forget to offer hospitality to strangers, for by doing this some have entertained angels without knowing it."*  
Hebrews 13:1-2

It is mid February as I write this, and one in 50 Americans is served by over 300 Lutheran social ministry organizations like *Seafarers International House* (SIH). That's one in 50 Americans, not one in 50 Lutherans. That is quite impressive considering that we aren't a huge denomination. And here at SIH, we expand that net by serving thousands of people each year who aren't Americans (international seafarers and asylum seekers).

I'll never forget the time that an asylum seeker came to stay with us at our guesthouse and the first thing he wanted to do was call his mother back in Nigeria. I could hear him say to her, in a combination of English and Igbo, "I don't know why, ma, but this seafarers place also helps asylum seekers. I don't know why, ma, but this place is run by the Lutheran Church. I don't know why, ma, but I guess that's *just what Lutherans do*".

It is no secret that many of the Lutheran social ministry organizations are now threatened with de-funding their important work by the current administration. Although SIH does not

receive any federal funding from the government, many of our partner ministries do and we feel this de-funding is very short sighted. Frankly, Lutheran social ministries do a lot of work with the poor, the hungry, the refugee, the elderly, children, and others who would be without help otherwise. So, we stand resolutely with our Lutheran partners and denounce any comments by current administration officials that Lutheran social organizations are "money laundering" and "snake oil organizations". I guess the silver lining in all of this is that now the nation knows just how much Lutherans contribute to the needs of others?

Many Lutheran ministries have a high percentage of donations going to programs, not administration. That means a significant portion of your donations are directly used to deliver services, rather than being spent on administrative costs like management or fundraising. A charity is considered efficient when 65-75% of their funds go to programs. For SIH, that is 77%, or 77 cents of each dollar you donate.

All of these Lutheran social ministry organizations, as nonprofits, are required to be audited and meet the highest of criteria for transparency. Many of them have their financial reports readily available, either on their own web sites, GuideStar, or you can request them. SIH, for example, has earned the Platinum Seal of Transparency on GuideStar for the past years.

In her response to the false accusations leveled against our sibling Lutheran organizations, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA, stated:

*"Our call to love our neighbors as ourselves remains steadfast. Seek the truth and share the good news of Jesus Christ as we continue to follow his teachings."*

I guess that's *just what Lutherans do*.

Peace,



*Marsh Luther Drege*

*Pastor Marsh sitting next to Timothy Paul Schmalz' "Be Welcoming" sculpture, which was inspired by Hebrews 13:2. The statue was displayed at Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Quebec City, Canada during the summer of 2024.*



# 2024 SET A RECORD FOR SEAFARER ABANDONMENT

An edited version of a report by International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), the leading transport authority, connecting trade unions from 150 countries, and representing 16.5 million people in the transport industry world-wide.

A new ITF report reveals abandonment of seafarers by ship-owners increased by 87% in 2024 from 2023. A total 312 vessels, with 3,133 seafarers, were abandoned compared to 132 vessels in 2023. The report highlights the vulnerability of the 'Flags of Convenience' system that is central to ongoing impunity for abuses of seafarers' rights.

Abandoned seafarers can experience months of unpaid wages, extremely poor on-board conditions, inadequate food and clean drinking water, and long periods of work without proper rest. In some cases, they are left completely stranded for months – even years – on end.

The lack of enforcement and responsiveness from flag and port states, the lack of insurance for vessels, and ship-owners refusing to accept that they are mistreating their crew are common factors that contribute to abandonment and complicate the resolution of cases.

In an interview with *gCaptain*, **David Heindel**, President of the Seafarers' International Union of North America (SIU), Chair of the ITF Seafarers' Section, and **SIH's 2003 Outstanding Friend of Seafarers awardee**, explained: *"The persistent existence and easy accessibility of flags of convenience not only undermine seafarers' fundamental human and labor rights but also pose a significant threat to global security and supply chain resiliency."*

Heindel further said that eighty-one percent (253) of abandoned vessels in 2024 sailed under a flag of convenience. Twenty cases were reported with vessels with no flag. The Panama flag remains the flag with the most abandon-

ments (43). Other flag states included Palau (37), Tanzania (30), Comoros (29), Cameroon (20), and Bahrain (16).

The ITF report includes the **story of one of these seafarers, Sanjay** (his name is changed for fear of reprisals from employers). Stranded onboard a tug without pay for 15 of the 29 months he's been onboard, he's seen three different crews come and go – each crew has left the vessel unpaid.

*"All I've had are false promises that I will be paid and allowed to leave,"* he said. *"I keep working despite everything because I don't want the crew to suffer, and I am the only engineer onboard. But I'm losing hope as each day passes."*

Sanjay is owed around \$40,000 – money which is vital for his family as the only earning member. He has been forced to sell his family heirlooms to make ends meet back home. *"I haven't told my family about what's happened to me, I don't want them to worry,"* he explained.

Sanjay is one of the 899 Indian seafarers abandoned by ship-owners last year. They remain the largest cohort of those stranded at sea, followed by 410 Syrians, 288 Ukrainians, 273 Filipinos and 192 Indonesians. A total \$20.1 million is owed to seafarers in unpaid wages, of which

ITF has recovered \$10.4 million so far.

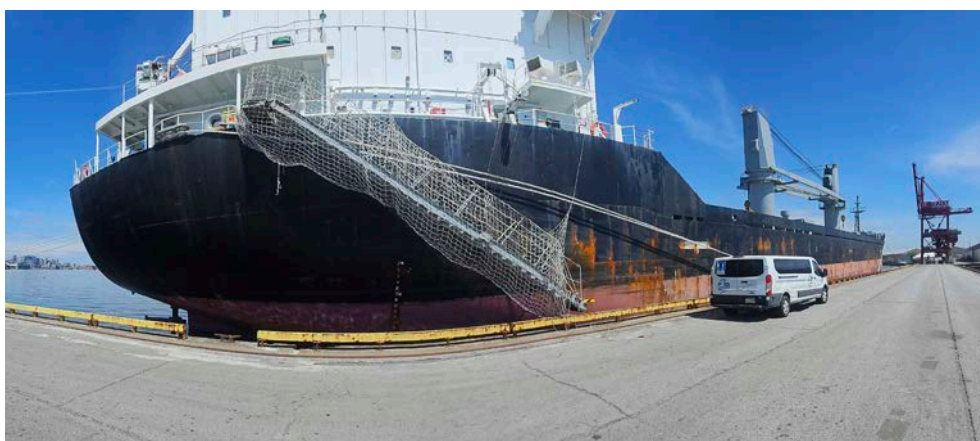
The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the Port State of choice for vessel abandonments, accounting for 42 in 2024 (the second-highest port state for abandonment was Turkey with 25 vessels). Dubai has become one of the fastest growing hubs for the maritime industry over the last five years. Lower taxes, cost of living and housing are proving attractive to ship owners, brokers and managers, shipping banks, shipping lawyers, and freight traders alike.

Free Trade Zones across the UAE (of which there are 46) are also helping to attract companies with incentives like tax exemptions and streamlined customs procedures. But the lack of regulation is leaving many seafarers stranded, with vessels owned or managed by UAE companies also responsible for the largest proportion of all abandonments.

We are thankful for our partners at ITF and especially their ITF coordinators who oversee and respond to these situations day in and day out.



Disclosure: Seafarers International House receives support from the ITF Seafarers' Trust for its vehicles to transport seafarers.



Port Chaplain Vitalii Guz took this wide-angle photo of a not abandoned vessel with SIH's ITF Seafarers' Trust van ready to pick up seafarers longing to stretch their legs on a trip to the mall in Baltimore in April 2024.

# THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 5:00 - 8:00 PM

## 2025 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, Duluth, 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:



**Captain Willie Barrere** is National President of American Maritime Officers, the largest union of US Coast Guard licensed Merchant Marine officers, representing 3,300 mariners. Previously, Willie served as National Executive VP leading contract negotiation and management of the collective bargaining agreements. He started shoreside as AMO's West Coast Representative after 32 years at sea in 2016.

A graduate with unlimited Third Mate license from USMMA, Willie became the USMMA's first Superintendent's Liaison before joining the Military Sealift Command. He was one of the initial officers hired by Maersk Line, Ltd. at the inception of their U.S.-flag operation in 1984. As captain, he sailed for Maersk and Crowley for 27 years.

His missions included delivery of military cargo for conflicts in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and performing a nighttime tactical withdrawal of the US Army assets out of Mogadishu.



**Robert F. Sappio** is CEO of SeaCube Container Leasing Limited. He proudly hails from a maritime family. Throughout his 42 years of service to the shipping industry, 30 of those years with American President Lines (APL) Ltd., he has been an ardent supporter of our nation's sea services and seafarers.

Robert joined SeaCube as COO and was promoted to his current role in 2017. Under his leadership, SeaCube has become a leading global lessor of intermodal equipment with a focus on the advancement of refrigerated equipment solutions.

Robert was with APL while it was developing its modern containership fleet. His positions included VP of China and SVP overseeing APL's activities in the Trans-Pacific, Trans-Atlantic, and Latin America regions. After APL, he headed North America for Rickmers-Linie and was with Alvarez & Marsal.

In 2023, Robert received the Connie Award by the Containerization and Intermodal Institute (CII), considered one of the highest honors within the global trade and transportation industry.

Robert is affiliated with and generously supports the U.S. Naval Institute, the U.S. Naval War College, the National Defense Transportation Association, Business Executives for National Security, the National Maritime Historical Society, and San Francisco Maritime Museum & National Park, which all benefit our sea services and seafarers.

### Special Recognition for Service to Seafarers



**Susan Winfree** is Executive VP and COO for the Shipping Association of NY and NJ (SANYNJ) and has 30 years of experience in the maritime industry. She held positions with Trans Freight Lines, Sea-Land Services, and as a consultant. At SANYNJ, Susan has driven efforts to hire and train over 2,200 longshore workers including over 700 US veterans, served as a Labor Adjustor to resolve labor disputes on behalf of SANYNJ member companies, and is developing procedures for Collective Bargaining Agreement implementation.

Susan is on the board of the National Maritime Safety Association and the Central NJ Alumni Chapter for the USMMA AAF. She is a member of Women in Shipping & Trade Association (WISTA), and an inaugural member of First10Forward, whose mission is to advance the professional goals of women pursuing non-traditional careers. She is a supporter of Sea Sisters, Inc. and volunteers to speak in schools, sharing information about careers in the maritime industry.

She earned a BS in Nautical Science & Marine Transportation as well as a Third Mate's unlimited license at USMMA, and a MA in Teaching from Monmouth University. ⚓

# ONE ISOLATED COMMUNITY SHARES THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS WITH ANOTHER

By the Rev. Susan Beck, Pastor, The Community of St. Dismas, with an introduction from Henryk Behnke

**D**uring the past holiday season, our partners at the Baltimore International Seafarers Center (BISC) collaborated with Pastor Susan Beck of the Community of St. Dismas. St. Dismas is a community of Lutheran congregations formed in facilities of the State Dept. of Corrections including Central Maryland Correctional Facility.

BISC helped bring their hand-crafted Christmas cards to the 11 remaining crew members of the Dali, the containership involved in the terrible accident that led to the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 26, 2024.

Hailing from India and Sri Lanka, ten seafarers from the Dali were released in late June 2024. The ship's eleven officers including the captain must stay in Baltimore to help with the FBI investigation as well as the more than 40 separate claims that were filed in federal court against the ship owners. A judge has set a deadline for their depositions for July 16, 2025. Hopefully, the 11 officers will be able to return home after those hearings. What was supposed to be a 27-day voyage to Sri Lanka has kept the mariners in the US for a year now.

Pastor Susan shares the following story with us – from one isolated community to another:

**W**hile our incarcerated Community of St. Dismas congregations don't have direct contact with the outside world, they do hear the news.


Last March, they were profoundly affected by the news of the Dali's accident that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge. Many grew up seeing that bridge from their neighborhoods, so its collapse was very distressing – a part of their landscape was gone.

But more impactful to them was the loss of life and the effect on the seafarers whose work takes them away from home for extended periods of time. The plight of the crew of the Dali hit them – much as they are locked up, so are those men confined on the ship. While the circumstances are very different, the result is the same – separation from all they know and love for a period of time that could stretch on beyond what they expected. So as any good Lutheran congregation would do, they

decided to do something to help. They cannot, of course, go beyond the confines of the steel doors, iron bars and razor wire fences inside which they live, but they wanted to find a way to send encouragement and cheer to others experiencing the hardship of confinement. Our congregation at Central Maryland Correctional Facility in Sykesville decided they wanted to make Christmas cards for the seafarers.

We sought approval to bring in art supplies, and eventually were approved to bring in paper, markers, colored pencils, and watercolor paints. We devoted two of our Bible study sessions to making cards and talking about how there are many ways that people are "locked up." Prison is one way, but people are also "locked up" by disease, disability, loneliness – and by circumstances like those experienced by seafarers in general and the crew of the Dali in particular.

The men took this service project to heart, putting thought, soul, and effort into the cards. One said, "I enjoy being artistic for others," and another, "it encourages me to encourage others." The talent that exists behind bars to create works of art never ceases to amaze; the heart to reach beyond those bars to help others does as well.

In the spirit of Christmas, the Community of St. Dismas brothers at CMCF have reached out to a very different group of brothers, the seafarers. What could be more Christ-like, than to reach beyond barriers of steel walls, iron bars, and razor wire all the way to the expanse of the seas? 



At the Baltimore International Seafarers Center (BISC) in early December 2024, Pastor Susan Beck (second from right) brings hand-crafted Christmas cards for the Dali crew to our partners (from left to right) Pastor Joshua Messick, ship visitor Don Bryant, and Pastor K. Robert Schmitt, who then delivered them to the Dali crew stuck in the US. Photo taken by Joey Nelson.

# A HOME TO THEIR HOME

By Dr. Daniel J. Molloy

Dan is a member of SIH's Immigrant and Sojourner Mission Committee and was a SIH board member or advisory member. He was also the Director of Social Services of the National Maritime Union (before it merged with Seafarers International Union).

I thought often about Seafarers International House (SIH) while reading Patrick Joyce's *Going To My Father's House*, a reflection on the immigrant experience. \* It is a scholarly work in which two quotes stuck out in particular:

*"Being an immigrant is like being in an empty cathedral with clasped hands praying to belong."*

And

*"I can't read your soul, until I see your house."*

I can think of no ministry more relevant, necessary, and heartfelt, than giving those who need it a home on the way to their home. No human need may be stronger. So, I continue in my enthusiasm for all SIH does.

My own tenure on SIH's Board ended during the pandemic but I am glad to be able to take part in committee work. My more than 35 years on the SIH Board, stretching all the way back to Rev. J. Gordon Swanson [SIH Director from 1984 – 1993] and Rev. David Hurty [SIH Director of Operations from 1989 – 1996], were an important and happy part of my career.



Florence and Dan Molloy at the 2015 Setting the Course event. SIH Archives.

At one point I knew almost all the residents, many of whom I had referred myself through National Maritime Union Social Services. Through all those years I saw SIH as a grace filled place where the vulnerable were safe.

I am delighted that you have found ways to keep sailing.



## CITIZENS AND NON-CITIZENS KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

**W**hile Seafarers International House supports legal enforcement of immigration rules, citizens and non-citizens should know their rights when encountering law enforcement officers. You have these constitutional rights:

- DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR if an immigration agent is knocking on the door unless they present a search warrant with your name on it that is signed by a federal judge
- DO NOT ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS from an immigration agent if they try to talk to you. You have the right to remain silent.
- DO NOT SIGN ANYTHING without first speaking to a lawyer. You have the right to speak with a lawyer.
- If you are outside of your home, ask the agent if you are free to leave and if they say yes, leave calmly.
- Be also aware a warrant to enter your home must be signed by a federal judge. "Administrative" warrants that look official are not valid.

• Cut out the text box below and GIVE THAT CARD TO THE AGENT. If you are inside of your home, show the card through the window or slide it under the door.



I do not wish to speak with you, answer your questions, or sign or hand you any documents based on my 5th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution.

I do not give you permission to enter my home based on my 4th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution unless you have a warrant to enter, signed by a judge or magistrate with my name on it that you slide under the door. I do not give you permission to search any of my belongings based on my 4th Amendment rights. I choose to exercise my constitutional rights.



The photo sent to us with their email thank you message from the crew of the containership Monte Verde on Christmas Day 2024.

## WITH GRATITUDE FROM SEAFARERS

Christmas-at-Sea 2024 exceeded our wildest dreams. You and hundreds of other supporters and volunteers helped us fill and deliver **3,507 satchels (!)** with warm clothing and holiday cheer!

We have heard from many seafarers, who expressed their gratitude to all our supporters. To the right is an example of an email that our Port Chaplain Rev. Arnd Braun-Storck in the Port of New York & New Jersey received on your behalf from the crew of the containership Monte Verde who were out on the high seas on Christmas Day.

**Acknowledgments:** Pastor Arnd's position is funded in part by the German Society of the City of New York. Since they merged with SIH in 2012, he continues our German language ministry as part of the Deutsche Seemannsmission e. V. (German Seaman's Mission) world-wide network.

The Port Mission in New York & New Jersey further receives generous funding from the New York Community Trust and the TK Foundation. The ITF Seafarers' Trust provides funding for our vans.

Christmas-at-Sea is also supported by *American Maritime Officers*, *Officers Union of International Seamen*, *Matson Navigation Company*, and *Seafarers International Union*.

Dear Pastor Braun-Storck,

First of all, I like to wish you and all members of the German Seamen's Mission a Merry Christmas! It is really great, that people like you support us in Newark and many other ports in the world.

Furthermore, I would like to say thank you for your nice Christmas gifts! The pullovers and hats we will need next time we are calling Newark in January. It will be cold.

Even with port calls and long navigation, we managed to have a nice BBQ and some funny games here on board this Christmas. You will find a group picture of our crew attached. [See above.]

On behalf of the complete crew of M/V "Monte Verde", Merry Christmas and a happy New Year 2025!

Joerg Kretschmer

Chief Engineer




# CONSIDER PLANNING YOUR LEGACY

Legacy planning gives you the opportunity to infuse your estate plan with personal purpose and values. Your legacy gift could ensure that the next generation of seafarers and immigrants can count on SIH's support.

Please consider adding SIH to your will. Alternatively, you might set up charitable gift annuity, 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 may also think about joining our Lighthouse Keepers monthly giving program to help those in need. Just click the "donate" button on our website ([www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org)) and choose your amount and frequency.

If you have remembered SIH, please let us know so that we may acknowledge you accordingly and add you to 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](mailto: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 - Superior, New Haven, New York & New Jersey, and in NYC.*

**In 2024, SIH served 19,066 people. This includes boarding 1,232 vessels, visiting 13,556 seafarers and delivering 3,507 Christmas-at-Sea satchels assembled by volunteers. SIH also provided 3,733 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.**

*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](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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Seafarers International House

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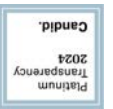
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Appearing to be charting the course through these fast-paced times are SIH President Rev. Susan Tjornehoj and SIH Executive Director Rev. Marsh Drege with the captain (left) of the vehicle carrier Amethyst Ace in Baltimore in December 2024. Photo by SIH Port Chaplain Rev. Vitalii Guz.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 

An Affiliate of the

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