



SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Winter 2010

HOMELAND SECURITY – AT CROSS PURPOSES

*U.S. Government
undermines its own
security program*



On the Camden waterfront, the Rev. James D. Von Dreele boards the tanker MV TOS Integrity to pay a hospitality call on its crew. Heightened post-9/11 maritime security means that seamen rarely are allowed ashore.

Executive Director's Report: In our zeal to protect our country, sometimes policies and procedures get in the way and actually undermine what we are trying to do. We have asked seafarers to be our allies in the fight against terrorism, yet we as a country often treat them as potential security threats.

A case in point: the *MV TOS Integrity* was an American flagged ship serving the Delaware River for several decades as a lightering ship. The new owner from Singapore has reflagged the ship this summer and laid it up for repairs.

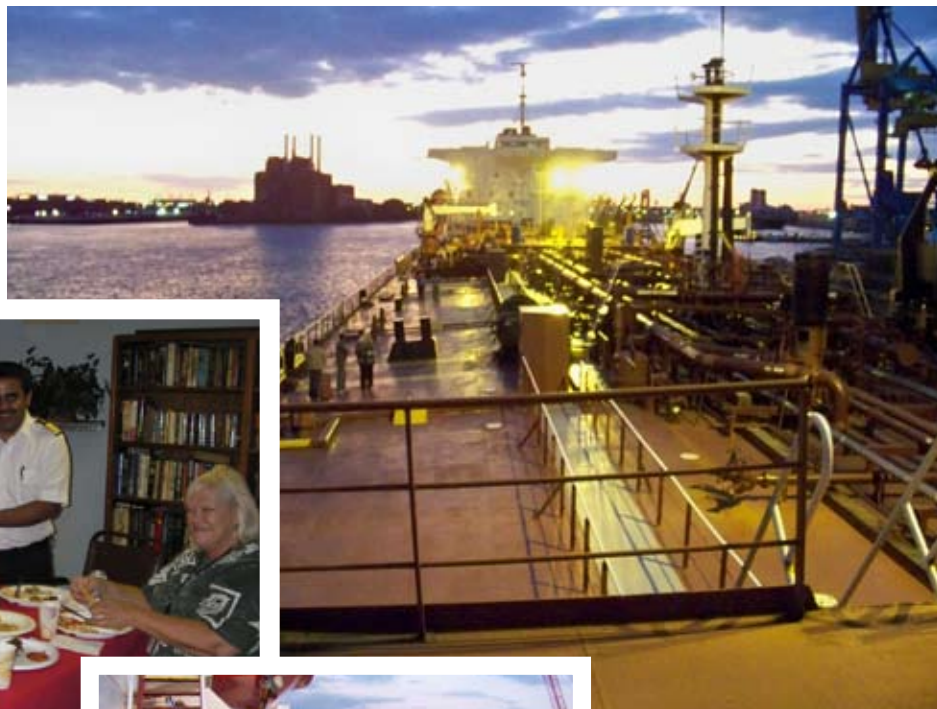
Now it has a foreign crew that comes under Custom Border Protection's (CBP) rules – one of which is that foreign crewmen can only stay 29 days in the United States without having to go to a foreign port. If they exceed the 29 day rule, CPB detains the seafarers aboard ship with no possibility for shore leave. As recounted in this newsletter, this 29 day rule has effectively imprisoned this crew for a number of months. The net result is a very angry crew who cannot understand this policy. Will they continue to be our allies?

The Seamen's Church Institute strives to show the better, caring side of America. This crew has seen this better side and greatly appreciates what we have been able to do with them during their detention. Your support enables SCI to do this important work. Read on with Pastor Bill Rex's story of caring for the crew of the *MV TOS Integrity*.

THE REV. JAMES D. VON DREELE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHO IS GOING ASHORE? NOT THE CREW OF THE *MV TOS INTEGRITY*

By Pastor William Rex
SCI Chaplain



Top: Sharing jokes over dinner with crew members

Right: St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Ferndale, PA aboard the MV TOS Integrity



A view from the bridge of the MV TOS Integrity docked at Broadway Terminal in Camden, NJ looking across the Delaware River at Philadelphia

I've been asked to describe what's going on aboard the *MV TOS Integrity*, a well-worn tanker ship that has been docked since July in Camden, NJ. While the 35-year-old vessel's new owners raise money to move it to Singapore, the crew is being confined to the ship like prisoners.

It is best to start at the beginning of a story, I know. But my experience does not include the ship's sale and what caused the harsh unintended consequences of U.S. Homeland Security rules. When I became involved, as a part-time chaplain with the Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey, my colleague Mesfin Ghebrevoldi, SCI's senior ship visitor, a veteran of 30 years with the seafarer ministry, was already assisting this crew.

He and others from SCI were going on board frequently and helping the crew cope with being confined to a ship that had been stripped of crew amenities by the previous owner.

The Rev. James D. Von Dreele, Executive Director of SCI and Chaplain to the Port, was working hard to get the crew's visas renewed.

The crew cannot come ashore because their 29-day visas have expired and the government has been unable to recognize their special circumstance and grant extensions. The stay-aboard rule is strictly enforced—the crew can't even play Cricket on the dock next to the ship, even though it is inside a fenced and guarded area.

In the days before 9/11, local congregations frequently visited ships to show kindness to lonely seafarers. Some even adopted ships that visit the port on a regular schedule. But under new security rules it is virtually impossible to get a church group aboard a ship while cargo is being loaded or unloaded. SCI's ship visitors have been required to obtain a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC), which requires a hefty fee and a criminal and terrorism background check.

As we pondered ways to help the *TOS Integrity* crew, ship visits by local church members came up in a conversation at SCI. Perhaps a laid-up ship with no cargo could be treated differently. We decided to try.

I mentioned the possibility to members of St. Luke's Lutheran in Ferndale, where I am the part-time pastor. They were enthusiastic! To make a long story short, the captain of the ship invited us to come aboard. Joseph A. Balzano, CEO of the South Jersey Port Corp., where the ship is docked, and others pitched in to make the visit possible.

When we arrived all the necessary help was there to haul what we brought up the gangway onto the deck. We brought food, games to play and things to read. We also brought warm clothing—when the crew arrived in July it had no idea it would still be here come winter! Smiles and handshakes and greeted us. As the visit stretched into the night, Indian and American food mixed. Everyone was laughing and learning about cultures and situations, and enjoying tours of the old ship.

Our departure brought pleas for return visits.

As this is written, the story of the *MV TOS Integrity* continues. Our work also goes on. Father Von Dreele and others persist in work to get new visas for the crew, joined by Lutheran Seafarers International House in New York, which pays my part-time salary at SCI and provides a mini-van for my ship visits.

SCI staff continues frequent visits to the ship. We've helped them get access to the Internet and stay in phone contact with loved ones back home in India. When a representative of the ship's owner came aboard and took over the internet access we had set up for the crew, SCI's Mr. Ghebrewoldi, who speaks seven languages, interceded successfully and graciously on behalf of the crew. They're back online.

We've been warned that there will be more ships like the *TOS Integrity* laid up in our port, more crews incarcerated for months at a time. So there may be more opportunities for congregations to experience the blessing that the members of St. Luke have received. If you're interested, call SCI's volunteer coordinator John Szelagowski.

Meanwhile, pray for the crew of *MV TOS Integrity*, for all who are working on their behalf.

DITTY BAG PACKING DAY

This year SCI was once again blessed with an energetic group of volunteers who came to the Center to help with our Annual "Ditty Bag" Packing. We were so happy to see so many of our dear friends, and so many new faces ready to prepare Christmas gifts for our visiting seafarers, and enjoy a lively day together.

It was a whirlwind of activity and high spirits. Father Jim welcomed and thanked everyone for their dedication and concern for the seafarers. The counters were hard pressed to keep up with the packers. We called a lunch break which began with a prayer service lead by the Rev. George Ratz, and the Rev. Byeong Eun Lee. We all enjoyed our brown bag lunches and were treated to Volunteer Coordinator, John

Szelagowski's homemade chicken soup and clam chowder. We were finished in record time. The packing day ended around 1:30 and our final count was almost 700 bags. We have another 300 partially packed bags as supplies ran short.

Our Ditty Bags bring real joy to these brave men who spend 9 to 10 months at sea bringing us the things we need for our everyday lives. For some, this is the only Christmas gift they will receive. Imagine your Christmas morning...far away from your family, friends and familiar surroundings. Now, imagine how happy it would make you feel to find a bag of necessities, packed by people sharing in God's love, outside your door on Christmas morning.



Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey would like to thank the many supporters who make this special program a reality. We would like to express our great appreciation for the generosity of the many congregations who provided the gift items and the bags to pack them in. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge our dedicated volunteers who packed up the Ditty Bags: Dottie Schneeweis, Norm Seidemann, Ellen Blek, Tim

Andrel, Fannie Wilson, Jean Breton, Vermell Hale, Nina Knox, Donald, Jim and Sam Smith, Laverne White, Muriel Rains, the gentlemen of the House of Adonai, John and Arlene Tieman, Harry and Ramona McFarland, Joni Andrel, Steve Loveless, Sam James, Cora Williams, Geraldine Smith, Lorraine Transue, Bette Potts, Sue Super, Virginia Phillips, Marion Paynter, and Marlon Abia.

IT'S BETTER TO BE ON THE HELPING END SAYS MESFIN GHEBREWOLDI, SCI'S SENIOR SHIP VISITOR

By Henry J. Holcomb
SCI Volunteer Ship Visitor

Top: Mesfin Ghebrewoldi boards the MV TOS Integrity
Bottom: Mr. Ghebrewoldi with the Operations Manager of the MV TOS Integrity



Mesfin Ghebrewoldi, our senior ship visitor, can tell jokes and empathize in seven languages. He can find solutions to whatever problems a foreign seafarer presents, whether it is finding a Bible in a little-known language or helping resolve a thorny contract issue. He can keep track—in his head while visiting ships—of where his colleagues are and get them to ships at 31 terminals on both sides of the river, when they are needed.

But what truly amazes people who work with him day in and day out is the longevity of his passion for helping seafarers.

One of his veteran colleagues, Anthony Coppola, said he has held jobs where he kept his passion strong for ten years before it faded, “but Mesfin is as passionate about helping seafarers today as he was the day I met him.”

Others who have known Mr. Ghebrewoldi even longer say the same thing. He has been on the job daily at Seamen’s Church Institute for 30 years.

How does he do it? He keeps looking forward, he says. “When we solve a problem it is deleted from my mind.” Each situation presents new challenges” he says, and that keeps him fresh. He is also driven by what he learned as a seafarer 40 years ago.

Mr. Ghebrewoldi grew up in Eritrea, a northeast African nation once colonized by Italy. After World War II the British took over and merged it with Ethiopia, setting the stage for a brutal 30-year civil war.

As a young man Mr. Ghebrewoldi read *Robinson Crusoe*, the 18th Century Daniel Defoe novel about the adventures of a young Englishman who went to sea and ultimately became shipwrecked.

“I fell in love with that story,” Mr. Ghebrewoldi said. It drew him to the sea, where he worked on cargo ships for 11 years. In 1974 he was stranded in Philadelphia, and separated from his wife and children, by civil war. Going home would have meant certain death under the military regime that had taken over his country. He has since remarried and is the father of four children.

Looking for work in 1979, he got a job at the Seamen’s Church Institute and he has been on the job ever since.

The seafaring life has changed since those days. A sense of adventure once drew men like Mr. Ghebrewoldi to the sea. Before containers and modern cargo-handling equipment, a seafarer could count on spending a week or two in one foreign seaport after another. Seafaring was a chance to see and learn about the world.

Now they are drawn by a chance to make more money than they could if they stayed at home, in order to lift their families out of often hard-scrabble situations. Ships are now automated so the crews are smaller. The times in port are shorter. The loneliness is more pronounced.

A U.S. citizen since 1995, Mr. Ghebrewoldi says “this is a beautiful country...most of its people would never intentionally harm someone.”

But, as he so skillfully explains to seafarers harmed by U.S. policies and bureaucracies, our system does have its flaws. When those defects hurt seafarers, Mesfin uses a blend of humor and compassion to calm the victims. “The American people have nothing against you. We just have a system that has cracks,” he told one seafarer who had been incorrectly jailed for a year, “and you fell into one of them.”

Sometimes he works with a harmed seafarer all day, even longer. When he’s done, the damage to the nation’s image usually has been repaired.

Since 9/11, U.S. policies have come down hard on seafarers. They cannot come ashore without an escort who has submitted to a government criminal and terrorism background investigation –an escort like Mr. Ghebrewoldi and others at SCI.

Mr. Ghebrewoldi does not see a need to tell seafarers about God. Most, he says, are closer to God than most people. “They face life and death situations. When was the last time you and I were in a situation like that?” he asks.

“So the job of seafarer ministries like SCI is not to talk about God, but to work to be assured that seafarers are treated in ways that please God,” Mr. Ghebrewoldi said.

Thanks to the vigilance of seafarer ministries around the world, the life of seafarers is improving on some ships. On others the owners still do as they wish.

Usually Mr. Ghebrewoldi is able to forget problems he helps solve. But one sticks in his mind. A captain withheld the crew’s pay for six months, causing severe hardships for the crew’s families back home in the Philippines.

One seafarer told how his wife had sold everything they owned to buy food. She finally had been forced to sell their son’s bicycle. “That shook me up. I didn’t sleep that night,” Mr. Ghebrewoldi said. “It broke his son’s heart. That bike was his pride.”

Thanks to the work of Mr. Ghebrewoldi and others at SCI, backed by the river pilots and others in the port community, that crew was paid without further delay.

That’s what keeps Mr. Ghebrewoldi going, day after day, up and down steep ship gangways when it is blistering hot and bone-chilling cold. “It’s helping the seamen, it’s helping the seamen. Period,” he added. “I don’t want foreign seamen to go through these difficulties.”

He sees a lot that would prompt most to complain, but he doesn’t. “It’s better,” he said “to be on the helping end.”

WHY IS SCI'S WORK SO IMPORTANT?

Since 9/11, important new responsibilities have been imposed on the work of the Seamen's Church Institute. The new roles thrust upon us are vital to everyone in the Philadelphia region.

First, we're helping the businesses that keep our port a vital part of the region's economy step up to the post-9/11 challenges. We truly have become critical to homeland security and port safety.

Both logistics and law enforcement experts will tell you that the cooperation of seafarers—and everyone else who works in transportation and logistics, is essential to a safe and secure supply chain. If seafarers feel we respect them, they will work with our authorities. If we make the seafarers feel we are hostile to them, they could decide to cooperate with those who would cause us harm.

Seafarers trust us. They tell us when they see something that doesn't look right!

Federal regulations imposed since 9/11 seem extremely harsh and unfair to seafarers. Our ship visitors often hear angry comments like this: "America is getting more like Russia than Russia!" And, "I have done nothing to cause you to treat me like this!"

We do very good job of easing these tensions. By the time we finish working with angry seafarers they are usually smiling and feeling good about America.

WE NEED YOUR HELP IN THREE WAYS:

1. **Work with us to secure new ways to pay for the new work we are called to do.**
2. **Give generously to keep us going while we work on the longer-term issue of meeting higher post-9/11 costs.**
3. **Join us in promoting an awareness of the essential role the port plays in our region's economy. We cannot afford to waste it.**

Again, as we have done many times in our 166-year history, we've stepped up to help the region remain competitive while meeting fresh challenges. Since 9/11, our chaplains and ship visitors have submitted to criminal background investigations, and taken safety and drug tests to comply with the regulations and needs of each terminal. We're at the crossroads. Our work is more important than ever. But the economy is taking its toll on our resources. Many port businesses that support us are struggling. The income from our endowment, of course, has been diminished. And the cost of doing what we do has gone up.

PLEASE HELP US MEET THE NEW CHALLENGES. THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR KIND SUPPORT!

SCI PROFILED IN THE *PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER*

Inquirer staff writer, Linda Loyd, profiled SCI on the front page of the business section on October 19th in an article entitled "A helping hand along the docks - Phila. mission befriends foreign sailors."

You can read the full article on our website's home page, <http://sciphiladelphia.org/> in the "Latest Announcements" section, or on the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* website at: http://www.philly.com/philly/business/20091019_A_helping_hand_along_the_docks.html



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The Seamen's Church Institute welcomes the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) to the Port of Philadelphia with its new liner service coming to the Packer Avenue Terminal and wishes to thank MSC for its sponsorship of this edition of the SCI's Executive Director's Report.

Now that we have dedicated our beautiful new Chapel of the Redeemer, there is still an opportunity to permanently remember your loved ones by purchasing a chapel chair with a gift of \$500. We will recognize your gift with a plaque on the chair. Please include remembrance details with your gift.

Thank you.

WE WISH TO EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE TO: The Delaware River Port Authority, www.drpa.org, for their continued generous support of SCI including the printing of this publication and our fall gala program book. To **onethread**, www.onethread.com, for donating their graphic design services for this publication as well as providing for all of SCI's design needs. To the following companies who sponsored our most important fundraiser of the year, SCI's fall gala.



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The Rev. James D. Von Dreele (right) presents SCI's "Friend of the Port Award" to Jim Miller (center) accepting on behalf of Aker Philadelphia Shipyard, and Gary Gaydosh (left) accepting for the Philadelphia Metal Trades Council.

Aker Philadelphia Shipyard and its union workers in the Philadelphia Metal Trades Council were honored at the Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey's 19th Annual Fall Gala held November 13. "We salute their extraordinary contributions to the maritime industry and our regional economy," said the Rev. James D. Von Dreele, Executive Director of the 166-year-old seafarer ministry.

The commercial shipyard was built between 1998 and 2000 on a portion of the old Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, which closed in 1996. It has since built four container ships for the Matson Navigation Company of Oakland, California, and is now working on a series of 12 tanker ships for American Shipping Company.

The gala is a major fund-raiser for our ecumenical ministry that serves social and spiritual needs of 40,000 seafarers aboard the 1,700 ships that dock annually at 31 Delaware River seaport terminals in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. "This year's event is very important. We have stepped up to help the local maritime industry meet new homeland security regulations that require certified escorts for seafarers passing through marine terminals while continuing our traditional services," Father Von Dreele said. "This additional work, which helps keep our port competitive and homeland security regulations effective, has increased our costs," he added.