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*Media information*  
**The Seamen's Church Institute**  
**of Philadelphia & South Jersey**  
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The Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey is a non-profit, ecumenical service agency called by faith to provide for the human needs of seafarers and the well being of the Delaware River ports, always without prejudice and in the spirit of God's grace. We recognize the invaluable service members of the maritime community provide for us and our region's economy, and we are proud to befriend and defend them in times of need or hardship.

Seamen's Church is part of a global network of 150 port ministries in North America, and 750 throughout the world. We are not only chaplains, ship visitors, counselors, mediators, and advocates, but also ambassadors of goodwill for the Philadelphia region.

We are affiliated with the Episcopal Church but governed by an independent board of directors representing many faith traditions and comprised of church, civic, government, education, business and maritime industry leaders. Our staff and volunteers include clergy and lay workers from many faiths.

Our financial support comes from three major fundraisers each year -- the Spirit of the Port Award Luncheon, the S.H.I.P. Invitational Golf Tournament, and the Fall Gala -- as well as contributions from churches, maritime organizations, seafarers, seafarer rights organizations, and government grants that support the role we play in making homeland security regulations more effective.

Most ships we visit have crews comprised of as many as a half dozen nationalities. Few ships have a crew all from a single country. We are often called upon by the U.S. Coast Guard and others to skillfully resolve disputes among crew members. At times we intercede when corrupt ship owners withhold pay and adequate food from seafarers.

Seamen's Church was founded in 1843. By 1848 it had built a 600-seat floating chapel on a barge at Dock Street & Spruce, in the Society Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia, which served merchant seafarers for 10 years. Over the years, always to meet the needs of seafarers at the time, Seamen's Church has operated hotels, a restaurant, a home for aged and disabled seafarers, an auditorium and a social center.

Today we have a chapel and seamen's center where mariners can pray, worship and relax. With automated ships in port for briefer periods than before, much of our work is done aboard ships and with a fleet of vans that provides transportation to help seafarers shop, visit historic sites and enjoy their time in our port.

In short, we work to create world peace one seafarer at a time.

# The important port we serve



**Seamen's Church** ship visitors and chaplains go aboard virtually every ship that docks -- 1,500-plus each year -- at more than 30 terminals on both sides of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We go as far south as the refinery in Marcus Hook, near the Delaware state line, and north to the Kinder-Morgan docks at the old U.S. Steel Fairless Works in Bucks County.

## *The seafarers we serve*

A seafarer, sometimes called a merchant mariner, is a crew member on a civilian cargo and passenger ship. They also work on government-owned Military Sealift Command cargo ships and the Navy's two hospital ships.

About 40 percent of the seafarers we serve come from the Philippines. There are also significant numbers of crew members from India, Russia, Greece, Ukraine, the United States, China, Latvia, Poland and Croatia. A small number come from about 75 countries.

They work on ships flying under the flags of many countries, usually not the country where they live. Vessels are often owned by one company, and operated under a charter agreement by another. Crew often are employed by ship staffing companies which have contracts with ship owners or charter operators. When between contracts, seafarers (including those from the United States) often have to spend weeks at a hiring hall to get their next job -- they can't sign up via telephone or the internet).

Most ships have at least three nationalities on their crew -- and many have as many as six or seven. This adds to the loneliness of life at sea by reducing the chance of being off duty at the same time as someone who can converse in a language you understand. This was driven home to one of our ship visitors not long ago when he visited a large tanker. He met with the ship's chief officer (the second in command) and went through the list of services we offer. For a variety of reasons, none of those could be accepted that day. "Is there anything," the ship visitor asked, "that I can do for you?" The chief officer smiled and said, "Yes! You can sit down and have a cup of coffee with me. I haven't had a good conversation in months." They had a good conversation, about all the things people talk about -- family, work, life back home, life on the ship. . .

*Here are some of the categories of ships whose seafarers we serve:*

**Tanker ships** that go back and forth between refineries here and distant sources of crude oil, where they take on cargo at off-shore platforms or in countries where it is too dangerous to go ashore. They spend months at a time out of cell phone range from land. While here they spend part of their time anchored in the bay, transferring a large part of their cargo to a smaller tanker or barge so they won't hit bottom coming up river. When they finally reach the refinery dock, there is much work to do related to maintenance, taking on fuel and supplies and inspections. When we finally get to take them ashore, it is usually for a short time.

**Product tanker ships** transport finished petroleum products such as diesel fuel and gasoline, often from here to other countries.

**Parcel tanker ships** have more than two dozen tanks, sometimes many more, each controlled to a precise temperature required by the chemical they transport. These ships require highly skilled and alert seafarers. The vessels often stop at several terminals on the river to load and discharge cargo, usually for brief periods of time, making shore leave rushed.

**Fruit ships** carrying bananas, melons and pineapples that make regular runs between our port and both Central and South America. Some load cargo while at anchor from barges that bring the cargo down rivers. So the crew often cannot go ashore except when here. Because we get to see the crews every other week, we often get to know them and talk about what they want to do on the next visit.

**Winter fruit ships** make regular runs between here and Chile, beginning around Thanksgiving and ending in early spring, and we see their crews every month.

**Container ships** whose cargo is transported in truck size containers which can be loaded and unloaded quickly, making shore leave quite rushed. One of these ships each week is on a regular run between here and Puerto Rico and is staffed by U.S. citizens. Others are on regular runs between here and distant points such as Australia and New Zealand.

**Forest products ships** bring paper and wood, mostly from Scandinavian countries of northern Europe.

**Steel carrying ships** deliver steel rods, plate and specialty steel coils which require special handling, arriving here after a month or more at sea.

**Cocoa bean ships** that feed the region's chocolate candy factories from distant ports.

**Project cargo** ships picking up and delivering railroad locomotives and cars, large a equipment or components of refineries and other complex production systems that are too big to travel overland. Project cargo also includes herds of livestock, usually being exported. These ships have no fixed route. When a crew signs up for a tour of duty they have no idea what countries they will visit. (We provide warm clothes when seafarers from tropical countries find themselves here in winter).

**Bulk cargo ships** transporting coal, salt, ore, scrap and garbage. Like on project cargo ships, these crews have no idea where they will go when their tour of duty begins, and they often spend long periods at anchorage waiting for their next load.

**Car ships** are giant floating parking garages, carrying from 5,000 vehicles -- some many more. Their decks can be adjusted in height to accommodate big trucks and road equipment. Such vessels are here at least once a week, usually unloading cars made in Korea. They stop at many ports in the United States, both discharging cars and picking up cars, trucks and road equipment bound for other countries. We often see several thousand Mercedes Benz and BMW cars picked up in a Southern U.S. port for delivery to China. They spend long periods near land so their crews keep in closer touch with home via cell phone than many.

**Military Sealift Command** cargo ships, owned by the U.S. Government and operated by civilian merchant mariners, that transport supplies and equipment to and from military operations. Two such ships are based here.

*Globally, 90% of everything moves by ship*

*The Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River and Bay estimates that the port and related enterprises generate 134,945 jobs, paying \$7.8 billion in wages and salaries annually.*

The Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey plays an important role in the operations and security of the port and practicing citizen diplomacy, working for world peace one seafarer at a time.

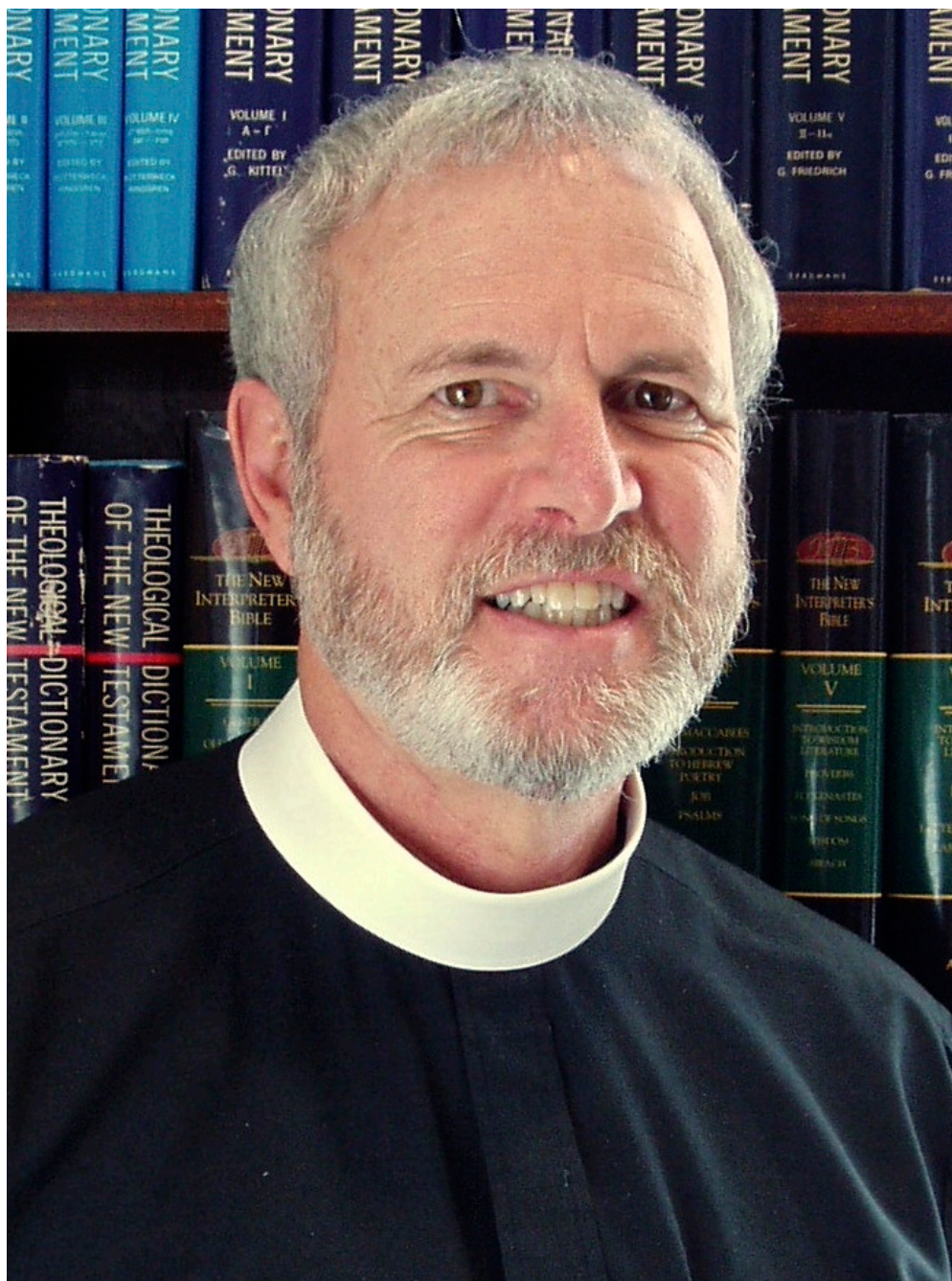
### **The Region's Maritime Industry Includes:**

- Deep sea marine terminals load and unload 100 million tons of cargo each year -- imports and exports of cars, trucks, fruit, steel, wood, paper, scrap, crude oil, refined petroleum products, chemicals, cocoa beans and military cargo.
- Refineries that supply three-fourths of the energy the Northeast United States requires.
- Aker Philadelphia Shipyard, a busy commercial shipyard building container ships and tankers on the site of the former Philadelphia Naval Shipyard (the Navy's first shipyard).
- Rhoads Inc., a ship repair yard at the former naval shipyard.
- Law enforcement and safety -- U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Delaware River Port Authority police, the FBI and others.
- Lightering operations -- the biggest oil tankers transfer part of the cargo to another tanker or barge so they won't hit the bottom coming up the river.
- Navigation and docking assistance provided the Pilots' Association for the Bay and River Delaware and tugboat operations.
- Ship supply. Many of the ships we visit make regular round trips from here to Central America and Africa where it is impractical to buy fuel, lubricants and food so they do most of their buying here. When a big cargo ship refuels, it's a big purchase.

- Ship maintenance -- a ship is like a small floating city. It has just about everything a city does and all of it needs to be maintained and repaired. Many of the ships carry cargo that requires precise temperature controls, for example, so refrigeration companies receive a lot of business from the port.
- Fumigation services -- wood, fruit and other cargo must be made insect-free before it leaves the port.
- Marketing services -- fresh fruit imports keeps large marketing operations busy.
- Legal and accounting services -- international trade creates a lot of work.
- Customs brokerage and freight-forwarding -- these large companies manage complex shipments involving land, air and water transportation, and handle the paperwork required by governments in countries the shipments pass through.
- Terminal management of complex facilities with many types of workers to hire, train and manage, an array of state and federal laws for which compliance procedures require vigilance, fierce competition for business, weather problems that require management skill, technology that requires wise and cost-effective updating and a wide variety of cultures and business practices that must be understood and handled with great skill.
- Dockworkers handle a wide variety of tasks related to loading and unloading ships and transferring cargo between ships and trucks or railcars. Many types of cargo and cargo-handling equipment (cranes, top-loaders, etc.) require a high level of skill and specialized knowledge.
- Warehouse workers have special skills -- cargoes like fruit, paper and specialty steel require a high degree of skill and knowledge.
- Commercial divers provide specialized knowledge and skill to inspect hulls of ships, piers, docks, bridge supports and other structures for damage after accidents and in routine inspections to check for ordinary deterioration. They also have to be qualified as expert witnesses to testify in court to what they see under water.  
Environmental cleanup equipment must be kept ready to contain and cleanup oil spills without delay. Pipeline companies. These include Sunoco Logistics Partners L.P. which has a busy tanker terminal adjacent to the Philadelphia International Airport that feeds its growing pipeline network extending to the Midwest and Texas.
- Railroad workers at three major railroads and several short-line rail companies earn good wages handling cargo moving to and from the port. This includes train crews, dispatchers, inspectors, yard maintenance, business development and customer service personnel and management.
- Truck drivers transport cargo to and from terminals and reposition cargo within terminals.
- Military -- members of the armed services and civilian employees who maintain four Military Sealift Command ships based in Philadelphia in a state of perpetual readiness. In addition there are personnel here on temporary duty when military cargo is arriving or departing. Philadelphia is one of the nation's Strategic Military Seaports.
- Dredge operators remove shoals that develop as hazards to navigation and silting that blocks docks, dry-docks at the shipyard and keep municipal water inlets.

- Container and chassis inspectors check for defects and wear that would damage cargo and compromise safety while the containers are being handled on the docks and transported over highways.
- Employment lawyers play a variety of roles -- there are union contracts to be negotiated and enforced, injury claims and other employment disputes to be resolved.
- Union contract administration requires skilled personnel on both sides to deal with complex issues under collective bargaining agreements related to the complex work at the port.
- Insurance brokers, inspectors and surveyors help keep commerce flowing.
- Banking -- the maritime industry requires a wide variety of banking services and finances.
- Private security personnel patrol terminals, assure that everyone who enters or leaves has the proper credentials and they enforce safety regulations.
- Retail sales. The Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey transports crews daily to stores and restaurants throughout the region. Based on a survey we took recently we believe that seafarers spend over \$1 million a year at Best Buy stores, for example.
- Engineering. New docks and improvements to terminal facilities must be designed, and the integrity of existing structures must be evaluated.
- Architects. The port is constantly being expanded and improved.
- Construction -- the port is in a constant state of expansion and renewal, generating many construction jobs.
- Consultants provide a wide range of expertise -- from security and technology to long-range market analysis and logistics innovation.
- Information technology firms and personnel provide sophisticated systems to support businesses, governmental operations in the maritime industry rely on sophisticated and secure information technology systems. This requires skilled software and hardware technicians, and major equipment purchases.





Our executive director and port chaplain

**The Rev. Canon Dr. Peter B. Stube**



**Father Stube**, a veteran Episcopal priest whose parents, grandparents and brothers were missionaries overseas, was named executive director and port chaplain of the Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey, effective in February 2013.

For the decade before assuming his duties he was rector of the Christ Church of New Bern, which has an annual budget of \$1 million and is the second largest parish in the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina. North Carolina Gov. Bev Perdue is an active member.

In Philadelphia he will lead an organization supported by many faith traditions that visits each cargo ship that docks at the more than 30 marine terminals it serves. It provides a variety of spiritual and social services -- working for world peace one seafarer at a time.

For 13 years (1990-2003) Father Stube was rector of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer of Springfield, Delaware County, in suburban Philadelphia. During that time Father Stube, a trained baritone, performed with Choral Arts Philadelphia, which sang with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He has been a soloist with other choral ensembles.

He succeeded the Rev. Canon James D. Von Dreele, who retired in November 2012. Father Stube, 61, was selected after an extensive search by a board committee chaired by Henry J. Holcomb, retired longtime staff writer for the Philadelphia Inquirer. The committee included Captain Greg Adams, retired commander of the Philadelphia U.S. Coast Guard station, Roy E. Denmark Jr., Dr. Ray Heinzelmenn, Rick Sperry, Mary Ruth Talley and Johnston. The Search Committee, like the Seamen's Church ministry, was ecumenical. It included people of Episcopal, Mormon, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Jewish and American Baptist faith traditions.

His church in North Carolina has helped settle Karen refugees from Myanmar (formerly Burma) and he has long been comfortable working in cross-cultural situations and ministries, Holcomb said. In New Bern, he has been president of an organization that is attempting to create blended housing in a depressed area of town. For this work he received a citation of merit from the local chapter of the NAACP.

Three generations of the families of Father Stube and his wife, Rachael, have served in the mission fields of the Philippines, India and Indonesia. "We have always had a heart for these people," he told his parish in announcing his departure.

The Right Rev. Clifton Daniel III, bishop of the East Carolina Episcopal Diocese since 1997 (and currently interim bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania) said Father Stube does "superb pastoral work," and "he wears well . . . is very attentive and responsive" and has kept his leadership tools sharp by taking advantage of excellent continuing education opportunities. He leads a diverse congregation and works well with all cultures and faiths. He welcomes and effectively engages in conversations with a great variety of people, including people who disagree with him or the church, Bishop Daniel said.

Father Stube has been a priest since 1979 and holds a Masters of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Virginia Theological Seminary and a bachelor of science in Biblical Education, Scripture and Theology from Columbia International University. He also has 30 credit hours in pastoral counseling and theology at Eastern Nazarene College. He was ordained a priest in 1980 in Montana and has served parishes in Montana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. In his last diocese, he was Canon Theologian.



## *Our senior ship visitor*

### **Mesfin Ghebrevoldi**

**By Henry J. Holcomb**  
*Volunteer ship visitor*

Mesfin Ghebrevoldi, senior ship visitor at Seamen's Church Institute, 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 more than 30 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. Ghebrevoldi even longer say the same thing. He has been on the job daily at Seamen's Church Institute since early 1979. I've known him for roughly half that time. I spent a day with him 15 or so years ago while writing a story for The Philadelphia Inquirer about the venerable seafarer ministry, and have seen his dedication grow stronger over the 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. When I retired from the paper and decided to volunteer at the Seamen's Church, Mr. Ghebrevoldi became my mentor during my six-month apprenticeship. I visited ships with him and others and learned how to do the at times complex work.

Mr. Ghebrevoldi 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. Ghebrevoldi 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. Ghebrevoldi 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. Eventually his wife remarried and moved on. He eventually married and started a new family in Philadelphia, where he has become a pillar in the Eritrean immigrant community.

The seafaring life has changed since his years working on cargo ships. A sense of adventure once drew men like Mr. Ghebrevoldi 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 stays in port are brief. Seafarers are drawn by a chance to make more money than they could at home, to lift their families out of often hard-scrabble situations. Ships are now automated so the crews are smaller. The loneliness of life at sea is more pronounced.

A U.S. citizen since 1995, Mr. Ghebrevoldi 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 systems do have flaws. When those defects hurt seafarers, he 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." That seafarer was so angry. He had been mistakenly jailed for six months. Immediately after the mistake was acknowledged and he was released another federal agency arrested him for staying past expiration of his visa -- never mind that he had been incarcerated and could not leave.

Mr. Ghebrevoldi and others, including yours truly, worked with that seafarer for several days. We called his wife to explain to her what had happened and we made sure his credentials for future work had been repaired. As he left for his home on a Central Pacific island, he was laughing and complaining about the bad food in jail. I promised him a good meal the next time he was in our port.

By the time we finished, thanks to Mr. Ghebrevoldi's persistence and skill, as with countless other seafarers, the damage to our nation's image had 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. Ghebrevoldi and others at Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey.

Mr. Ghebrevoldi does not see much need to tell seafarers about God. Seafarers, 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 is not to talk about God, but to work to be assure that seafarers are treated in ways that please God, Mr. Ghebrevoldi said.

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

Usually Mr. Ghebrevoldi is able to forget problems he helps solve and move on. 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 his colleagues, 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 stays clear of politics and passes up opportunities to complain. He stays focused on the seafarers. "It's better," he said, "to be on the helping end."

*A similar version of this article appeared in the Anchor, the newsletter of Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia and South Jersey, written by Henry J. Holcomb, volunteer ship visitor and board member.*

# Where We Worship:

## Supporting seafarers, spiritually and safely

04/27/2013 12:29 AM



BY LORENZO BIGGS  
Philadelphia Daily News

THE SEAMEN'S Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey is one of 250 "port ministries" in North America that help seafarers from across the globe feel at home when their ships are docked in a port city. It serves merchant seamen's everyday needs - with amenities like a rec. center, a TV lounge and a computerized communication center - along with their spiritual ones.

In February, the Rev. Canon Peter B. Stube, an Episcopal priest, became the SCI's latest executive director and port chaplain, joining a long line of SCI ministers.

**Where we worship:** SCI's headquarters at 475 N. 5th St. (formerly a furniture dealership) has a magnificent sanctuary designed by Richard Stokes, known for his work on several Stephen Starr restaurants. The ceiling is designed to look like the inverted hull of a ship. Beginning the first week of May, a noon prayer service will be held at SCI every weekday except Thursday for the port community and guests. On Thursdays, a noon Eucharist is celebrated.

**What we believe:** "We're the Good Samaritans of the sea," said Father Stube. "We are committed to showing hospitality to every seafarer that comes into the port of Philadelphia." Port calls can be brief, but if time allows, the institute arranges transportation for shore leave, takes visiting seafarers shopping and shuttles them to the institute's headquarters.

When the seafarers can't come to the SCI, the SCI comes to them. "We go to the ships to listen to them and respond to their needs." SCI staffers bring things such as phone cards and donated clothing and magazines. "Whether physical or financial, they are all connected to the soul," Father Stube said. "Our primary vision is to be a compassionate presence among the seafarers, not trying to proselytize, but attempting to be Christ to them."

**What we're known for:** Serving merchant seafarers since 1843.

The institute's first house of worship was a 75-foot-high, 600-seat church that floated on the Delaware River. The floating chapel was moored at Dock and Spruce streets from 1848 to 1858. Today, SCI has put Philadelphia on the map as one of the world's more welcoming places for mariners.

**Safe harbor:** Among working mariners, the SCI is known for "being a safe place," Father Stube said. Some dockside entrepreneurs offer transportation and other services similar to what the institute provides for free, "but they take colossal amounts of money from the seafarers, and it's not really ethical." The institute's personnel wear SCI's distinctive anchor logo when they visit ships docked along the Delaware River, and their courtesy vans display it as well. When seafarers see the anchor "they know they're safe. . . . They know it's safe to go on our vans to the various places they want to go, and it's safe to talk to us."

**Something that might surprise people:** Approximately 1,470 huge commercial ships came to port last year. "I've lived in Philadelphia for 13 years and had no idea the scope of the shipping industry here," Father Stube said. SCI visited 1,412 of last year's vessels. The rest were in and out of port too quickly.

**Big moral issue we're grappling with:** In the post-9/11 decade, one tough one has been negotiating foreign seafarers' rights to get off their ships, given border security concerns. Father Stube's predecessor, Father James D. Von Dreele, worked tirelessly with the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection to help make shore leave possible.

**God vs. cellphones:** While men and women of the cloth often see ringtones as interruptions to their work, Father Stube said telecom services are central to his staff's ministry. "The average seafarer is under 40, and most of them have grown up with all this technology. . . . The first place they want to go [while in port] is Best Buy."

Cellphones, Skype connections and long-distance calling cards are an especially vital part of the ministry. "Most of the time we're dealing with loneliness," said Father Stube. "We try to provide ways for them to be in contact with their families back home through Internet and telephone."

**God is . . .** concerned and compassionate toward those most in need, Father Stube said. Scripture guides the SCI "to pay attention to those who have deep needs, because it's our understanding that God is deeply concerned about need."

**God and the deep blue sea:** Most seafarers are people of faith, "because they are at the mercy of the Holy One there on the seas - particularly in Africa, where there is the danger of pirates," Father Stube said.

"When they talk about their prayer life and faith, I listen and encourage. . . . If we don't have a relationship with him, this endeavor of seafaring becomes an incredibly fearful place. And if we can lay hold of the Holy One, it makes life and seafaring doable."



# *Frequently Asked Questions about Seamen's Church*

*By Henry J. Holcomb, volunteer ship visitor*

## **I didn't know we had a port. How big is it?**

*Very big.* It generates thousands of jobs and pumps dollars into our region. We visit ships at more than 30 terminals on both sides of the Delaware River, from Marcus Hook near the Pennsylvania-Delaware state line to Fairless in Bucks County.

## **How has security impacted seafarer shore access?**

Only credentialed people are allowed inside terminals. Our ship visitors submitted to background checks and have obtained credentials from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. We also take drug tests and pass an examination on the safety rules. Many ships dock at refineries. Getting to them involves navigating a complex route through highly secure areas.

## **Where do seafarers want to go?**

Shopping, mostly. They can buy things like laptops and tablets here they can't get at home. Many ask to see local landmarks and historic sites.

## **Do you work with others?**

*Yes!* We have a strong working relationships with all the government and law enforcement agencies and businesses responsible for the security, service and hospitality related to ships in port.

## **What religion are you?**

We serve seafarers of all faiths -- and no faith tradition. Our staff and volunteers come from many traditions. We have an historic affiliation with the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania.

## **How do seafarers find you?**

We monitor Maritime Exchange reports on ships arriving and departing and visit ships. Also, we're known among the world's seafarers. So they often call us.

## **What makes a ship visitor?**

Senior ship visitor Mesfin Ghebrewoldi, a seafarer for a decade before he joined Seamen's Church 34 years ago, said the work requires a "good heart and being a good listener."

## **Do seafarers ask for prayer?**

*Yes!* Often about problems at home, some of which are in the headlines, others personal. If they are sailing into a pirate-infested area they ask us to follow them with prayers, and we do. We're also getting more requests for Bibles and study material -- a home-study movement in the Philippines is now taking place on ships.

## **Why do seafarers go to sea?**

Many talk of the lack of good jobs at home, and how they couldn't afford good shelter, electricity and school for their children if they didn't go to sea.

## **How many nationalities are on a ship's crew?**

Usually at least three, often five or six. Nearly half the seafarers we see are from the Philippines. The multiple cultures often bring conflicts which we often help resolve and keep commerce flowing

**Do women go to sea?**

Not often. But we're seeing more women than before, mostly from Greece and the Philippines. And we hear more are in their maritime academies.

**Do seafarers bring their families?**

From time to time we see spouses and children of ships officers, usually from India.

**Where does this ministry rank?**

Because our 30-plus terminals are spread over a very long stretch of river, we're among the largest. Seafarers tell us we're among the very best.

**Do you get to know seafarers?**

Yes. Many of the ships are on regular runs -- fruit ships between here and Central and South America, tankers between here and Africa, and container ships between here and Puerto Rico. So good conversation can develop and continue for months.

**What are the most memorable ship visiting experiences?**

Reuniting seafarers with relatives or friends they haven't seen in years ranks high. Also helping people like the innocent seafarer who was incorrectly incarcerated for a year due to bureaucratic blunders.

**How often do seafarers get ashore?**

Some tanker crews make round-trips to Africa, where they load at offshore platforms, without going ashore. The car-carrying ships come all the way from Korea, then stop briefly at U.S. ports with little time for shore leave.

**Is life getting better for seafarers?**

Yes. Largely because of the vigilance and persistent advocacy of organizations like Seamen's Church. If we went away, things would go back to the way they once were . . . with some captains denying health care and pocketing money that was intended for seafarer pay or food.

**Why is this work important?**

We help make homeland security rules work without abusing seafarers and creating allies for those who would harm our nation -- we're building world peace, one seafarer at a time.

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