



Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey

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Who Are We?

The Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia & South Jersey is a non-profit, ecumenical service agency whose mission is to care for the human and spiritual needs of seafarers and the well-being of the Delaware River ports. 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 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 that represents many religious traditions and includes church, civic, government, education, business and maritime industry leaders. Our staff and volunteers are clergy and lay workers of many faiths.

Seamen's Church in Philadelphia was founded in 1843. By 1848 it had built a 600-seat floating chapel on a barge at the foot of Dock and Spruce Streets, which served merchant seafarers for a decade. 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 with automated ships in port for briefer periods than before, and with US homeland security rules that prevent many seamen from going ashore, much of our work is done aboard ships. We offer hospitality, counseling, a sympathetic listener, and a friendly face. We provide wifi hot spots and SIM cards to help seafarers stay in touch with loved ones, and where possible our fleet of vans provides transport to help them shop, visit historic sites, and enjoy their time in our port.

Seafarers are at sea for 9 to 12 months at a time, often completely out of touch with home, and theirs is a lonely and dangerous existence. Most ships we visit have crews of as many as a half dozen nationalities, and often there is no common language.

We are sometimes called upon by the U.S. Coast Guard and others to skillfully resolve

disputes among crew members, or to intercede when corrupt ship owners withhold pay and adequate food, or when seamen need medical assistance or help with US bureaucracy.

Our trained and security-cleared ship visitors also help port terminal operators by efficiently providing transport and other services to their crew members. We are able to collect seafarers directly from their vessels, help them find what they need in our port, and assure a safe and timely return to their ships.

Our financial support comes from fundraisers such as our Spirit of the Port Award Luncheon and Invitational Golf Tournament, 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.

Although we are a small organization that relies on charitable contributions, our reach is both wide and deep. SCI is the only group dedicated to providing services at no charge to seafarers in the Ports of Philadelphia and South Jersey. Be it a phone card or just a smiling face, we are always there to help.