Why Knitting for Mariners Matters

Some people have asked, “Why doesn’t SCI just buy hats and scarves for mariners. Wouldn’t that be easier?”

In terms of sheer practicality, an outsider may consider running a knitting program for mariners in this day and age a misuse of time and resources. When it comes to economies of scale and time, he or she might point out the “waste” involved in producing handmade knitted goods, collecting them from all over the United States and distributing them through a network of volunteers. After all, the mariners served by the Seamen’s Church Institute (SCI) can easily purchase well-made garments at affordable prices in stores here in America, in other countries or on the Internet. Store-bought goods serve the same purpose, take a whole lot less time to make and—in terms of production—cost only a few cents.

Does that close the book on Christmas at Sea—the last in a quaint but antiquated chapter of seafaring life? We don’t think so. The handmade garments mariners receive each year crafted by volunteers around the country represent something more than just cozy apparel for a watery workplace.

While the eagle eye of a financial planner may identify a more cost-effective way to help mariners stay warm in the winter, one who looks at the faces behind the numbers will see things differently. SCI’s “bottom line” involves serving human beings, putting all our resources into services for the maritime workforce. No one who sees the assets of thousands of knitting and crocheting volunteers could ever think it a misappropriation of talent and time to bring comfort and care to mariners around the world.

SCI’s volunteer knitting program creates a marvelous link between people on land and the men and women working on the water. Handmade items symbolize valuable time—time marked stitch by stitch from someone else’s busy life. They represent the special care taken by a knitter to craft a garment designed for life on the water. And knitters and crocheters mark their items with humanity—the individuality of someone’s hand creating a one-of-a-kind gift. All of this signals appreciation for mariners’ work. What price can you put on that?

Mariners value very highly the handmade garments (along with the notes and cards) they receive at Christmastime. (Just read some of the thank you notes in this newsletter to see for yourself.) Our knitters and crocheters give something extraordinary—something mariners want and deserve. No machine-made item could communicate our gratitude and their importance in the same way. Knitting for mariners matters.

What others may see as frivolity, you and I know as something special and important. Send a message that handmade garments and SCI’s volunteer knitting program really matter—to you and to mariners. Make a financial contribution today.

—Paige

Founded in 1834, SCI is a voluntary, ecumenical agency affiliated with the Episcopal Church that provides pastoral care, maritime education, and legal advocacy services for mariners.
Dear Friends,

As I sit in my office looking out at the snowy port, I count myself lucky to have a job that keeps me inside … because it’s wicked cold out there. It seems this time around, Mother Nature has suddenly remembered (after two very mild years) that winter means cold, ice, snow and sleet.

As seafarers come through our Center here in Port Newark, I always smile when I see them wearing the handknit caps and scarves they’ve received from us. You can see from our thank you letters how much mariners love them. But this year, I want these mariners to have another name to which they can add thanks. The new Christmas at Sea tags in this newsletter connect the giver (you, the knitter or crocheter) and the recipient mariner. Although it’s always been obvious that volunteer knitters make the hats and scarves, until now we haven’t made it explicitly clear which one.

The “who” behind the knitted gifts makes Christmas at Sea work. You—your time and attention—ensure that the mariners we see in ports and along the inland river system receive a handcrafted gift. Christmas at Sea needs more people like you! With more mariners to serve, we need to grow our numbers to ensure each mariner we see receives a gift.

Can you join me this year in a concerted effort to spread the word about Christmas at Sea? Check with your friends, colleagues, relatives and members of your churches—I bet you know another stitcher out there who can lend a hand. Send me (via mail, email or phone) some names and I will personally reach out to get them involved.

As we’ve seen this winter, single snowflakes, one right after the other, can create blizzards. Likewise, single hats and scarves are soon enough to outfit yet another cargo vessel and eventually an entire fleet. Let’s put our collective talents to work as we strive into our 116th year.

Optimistically yours,

Paige
Christmas at Sea marked a banner year in 2013. We turned 115 years old (though we don’t look a day over 100), celebrated our anniversary by introducing a new hat pattern (the 1898 Hat) and launched a novel annual awareness campaign called #WATCHthisCAP. Where could we go from there? Turns out: only up.

In 2013, we collected 20,649 knits, making three consecutive years that Christmas at Sea has topped the 20k mark. Kudos to all our stitchers!

### What We Collected in 2013

- 7,176 Seafarer Scarves
- 8,263 Seafarer Hats
- 2,647 Mariner Scarves
- 1,396 Mariner Hats
- 154 Pairs of Socks
- 490 Helmets
- 56 Pairs of Slippers
- 467 Vests
- 1,203 Ditty Bags

### How We Distributed Your Gifts

- **Bay Area Ports** = 2,309
- **Ports of NY & NJ** = 4,567
- **Inland Waterways** = 6,877
How We Packed Those Gifts (Hint: With Your Help)

- St. Michael’s Episcopal Church, New York, NY
- Trinity Reformed Church, North Plainfield, NJ
- Pompton Valley Presbyterian Church, Pompton Valley, NJ
- St. John’s Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ
- Calvary Episcopal Church Youth Group, Flemington, NJ
- Grace Lutheran Church, Somers’ Point, NJ
- St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, New Providence, NJ
- WISTA (Women’s International Shipping & Trade Assoc), CT Branch
- Girl Scout Troops 22252 & 24089, Tabernacle, NJ
- Journal of Commerce Employees, Newark, NJ
- Christ Church Cathedral, Cincinnati, OH
- Grace Episcopal Church, Rice Lake, WI
- Grace Episcopal Church, Pomeroy, OH
- Peace Memorial Church, Rockport, IL
- St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Carmel, IN
- St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Henderson, KY
- St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Mt. Lebanon, PA
- St. Peter’s Episcopal Church of the Lakes, Gilbertville, KY
- St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Ladue, MO
- Trinity Episcopal Church, Lawrenceville, IN
- Grace Memorial Church, Baton Rouge, LA
- Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Vicksburg, MS
- St. Gregory’s Catholic Church, Mobile, AL
- Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church, Mandeville, LA
- Apostles of the Seas (Catholic Daughters), Oakland, CA
- Seafarer’s Ministry of the Golden Gate (sponsored by the American Baptist Churches), Oakland, CA
- Christ Episcopal Church, Alameda, CA
- Episcopal Lutheran Campus Ministry at Stanford, Stanford, CA

Do you think that we can top this year’s record?

Even with so many hats and scarves and vests and socks collected, we can always use more. As the economy improves, the number of vessels at sea and on the rivers increases. Believe it or not, we actually ran out of gifts this year. Although we saw more mariners, we had no more hats and scarves to give.

Let’s take this as a challenge to recruit more stitchers to the fold. If each of our 4,000+ knitters can bring one friend to the table, imagine the volume of handknit goods Christmas at Sea can generate.

Some ideas on how you can get others knitting for Christmas At Sea

1. Post a “help wanted” sign at your community center, library, coffee shop or church bulletin board. (Try the one in this newsletter, or get creative and make one yourself.)

2. If you knit with a group, get everyone to pledge at least one project to Christmas at Sea. If your group knits exclusively for Christmas at Sea, then strive for one more item from each person this year. If you have a local yarn store in your area, talk to the shop owner. She or he may have a charity knitting night and could include Christmas at Sea in the recipients of the group’s goodwill.

3. If you live in an assisted living facility or retirement community, start a group. (Don’t worry about numbers; two people can form a group.) We can provide patterns and more information about SCI and Christmas at Sea. If where you live is close to one of our centers (in Port Newark, NJ; Oakland, CA; Houston, TX; or Paducah, KY), let us know. Someone from SCI will come visit to talk about our work and how you can help.
**New Gift Tags**

For years (over 115, in fact), SCI has delivered gifts to mariners without revealing who created the handknit items. We told mariners that volunteers knit, collected and distributed the packages they received, but unless a knitter attached a note to his or her gift, mariners never knew just who had spent all of that time to make their Christmas warmer.

Over the past few years, we have encouraged our stitchers to label gifts, and a few do, adding a short note, the name of their church, or a photo. It makes the gift more personal, and mariners appreciate knowing where their knits come from. (Many of the thank you notes we receive specifically mention the stitchers’ names.)

Enclosed with this newsletter, you will find a new gift tag produced by SCI as a way to help mariners meet the knitters and crocheters of Christmas at Sea. On it, you can provide as much or as little information as you like—including your name, hometown, or even email address. It’s up to you.

We have included four of our new Christmas at Sea gift tags, but this does not mean you have to knit four projects (or that you can only knit four). If you run out, please email us at cas@seamenschurch.org (include your mailing address) or call +1 973-589-5828 to receive more. (If you knit as part of a group, you will probably need more. Send us a note and let us know approximately how many you anticipate needing.)

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**#WATCHthisCAP**

Did you see some? Did you place some? Read what happened with SCI’s miniature knitting project around the United States.

Our world and our lifestyles depend on maritime commerce, but really, how many people actually recognize that? With this question weighing on our brains, we at SCI decided it was time for some community awareness. Between Thanksgiving and the New Year, we asked knitters to help increase awareness of mariners’ contributions by making—and hiding in plain sight—mini mariners’ watchcaps to draw attention to the fact that mariners, whose work is often hidden in plain sight, deliver more than 90% of all imported goods.

Many stitchers participated, using up their leftovers to create miniature watchcaps to tag and distribute in their communities. Bit by bit the tiny caps started appearing all over the country, sparking interest and surprise. Knitters shared their caps on the Christmas at Sea Facebook page, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram.

Did the campaign work? Read what one new knitter wrote to us about the project:

I would like to knit some caps. I live in the mountains of NC and don’t know any mariners. When I saw this pattern on Ravelry it made me realize how we take for granted the hard work of these men and women who bring us all sorts of necessary and interesting things from the rest of the world. Please send some tags so that I might spread the word inland. I said a prayer for the mariners this morning.

Thank you,
Karowin, NC

Check out our Pinterest map ([http://smschur.ch/wtmmap13](http://smschur.ch/wtmmap13)) showing several miniature caps throughout the country—from coast to coast and North to South. If you didn’t get a chance to participate this year, don’t worry. We plan on making #WATCHthisCAP an annual event, so start saving your scraps now.

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**Dear SCI,**

Thank you for the giving spirit of SCI and all of its ministry volunteers this Christmas season. Before our vessel departed the US East Coast in November, we were graciously presented with Christmas presents from SCI. These presents helped lift the spirits of the crew while we celebrated Christmas in the Gulf of Aden this season. The heartfelt words reminded us of all the blessings He has given us in our lives. The knitted caps are sure to keep us warm as we spend the next week crossing the North Atlantic. Thank you for reminding us that no matter where we are in the world, He is always with us.

Regards,
Max Paulus
Second Mate, Maersk Chicago

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**Chaplain Baldridge,**

The crew and myself would to thank everyone for the box of Christmas goodies and most needed handmade scarves that all the deck crew has used during the cold spell.

It’s a great feeling to get gifts during that time of the year we are away from home.

God bless,
Captain Jeff Stoneking and the crew of M/V Philip M Pfeffer
Dear SCI,

On behalf of my crew and also from myself I would like to thank you and all of your supporters and friends of the seamen for the Christmas presents donated to us in Oakland. Even much more important than the presents itself we consider the gesture connected to it. It’s one of the most difficult things for us to think about and feel with people we don’t know and don’t see. Therefore we really appreciated that so many fine people even far from the coasts thought about us and we included all of you in our prayer on Christmas Eve.

We spent our Christmas days on anchor-age near Shanghai and will be back to Oakland Jan 26 on our way to Europe.

We wish you a peaceful remaining Christmas time as well as luck, health and happiness for the New Year.

Best regards,
Crew & Captain of LONDON EXPRESS
Markus Droste, Master

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Dear Reverend Rider,

I, Detlef ALJETS, master of the motor vessel APL INDONESIA and the whole crew hereby like to thank you, your team and all the volunteers working with you to arrange this nice x-mas gifts for us sailors. I understand the huge amount of time spent to get this all done and I know its mostly free time from your team and the volunteers especially during the pre x-mas time, where everybody is very much stressed with preparations.

For us, we have to do our routine job/ops and cannot really enjoy the x-mas time far away from the family and friends and loved ones. Receiving a gift and open the present reminded me of my youth time and made me very, very happy in the hectic time of shipping.

Again thanks to everybody.
God bless you.

Best regards,
Detlef Aljets, Captain

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Dear friend,

I am onboard the Maersk Denver, Christmas Eve. We will spend the Christmas Day in Mumbai onloading and offloading cargo, then off to the next port. My job is to provide armed security against piracy to ensure safe passage for the ship and crew; I work as an independent contractor for Trident Maritime Security, a Virginia based company which hires former Navy Seals such as myself to provide services for Maersk and other shipping lines.

This evening I received a bag from Captain Frank Warnekros, sent by your very nice people, with several nice items in it, one of which is a beautiful blue hand knitted cap. I will find this cap useful as we transit west, back through the Suez Canal, where it has been very cold in the evenings lately, as I have to stand watch in the middle of the night. I send to you my sincerest thanks for thinking of us and for providing us with some comforts of home. You have my best wishes to you and your families as well, through this holiday season, and beyond.

With gratitude,
Dean Reilly

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Good Day and a Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year!

To all of you and family from all of us.

I would like to send a special thanks to BETTY JANE, PAT, MIEP, BARBARA, JOANNE & GINGER of seaman center/seaman church of New York, and say thank you very much for the gifts that we received! It was very much appreciated, and a very nice thing for us onboard the ship to receive, now that we are celebrating Christmas away from our loved ones.

Once again, I wish you and your family a VERY GOOD AND HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

ALL THE BEST,
RENCO
Renco Bosman, Chief Engineer,
Stolt Focus

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The crew of Canal Barge Co’s M/V Lainey Jones dressed in their 2013 Christmas scarves in Cairo, IL