



Christmas at Sea



THE  
SEAMEN'S  
CHURCH  
INSTITUTE

**THE KNIT**  
*before Christmas*

Winter 2024

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## THE KNIT

*before Christmas*

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## In this Issue

### 3 From the President's Desk

### 4 Knit Notes CAS By the Numbers

### 5 Volunteer Packing Groups A big thank you to all who lent a hand

### 6 Mariner Thank Yous

### 7 Take Your Place in History Legacy Gifts to SCI

### 7 Give Back Box

Affordable alternative when shipping your donations

### 8 Untangled

CAS members-only Facebook group

### 8 Challenge for 2024

## Editorial

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

**The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt**  
SCI, President & Executive Director



One of my daily prayers is from the Sarum Primer, a collection of prayers developed in Salisbury Cathedral during the 13<sup>th</sup> century:

“God be in my head, and in my understanding.

God be in my eyes, and in my looking.

God be in my mouth, and in my speaking.

God be in my heart, and in my thinking.

God be at my end, and at my departing.”

At its core, I believe this prayer speaks to how we perceive and connect with one another—how we comprehend, observe, communicate, and contemplate the strangers we encounter. The daily work of the Seamen's Church Institute aligns with this sentiment. In fact, Bishop Andrew Dietsche, XVI Bishop of New York and an ex-officio member of our Board, often characterizes SCI's work and mission as “ministry to the stranger.” How does SCI express love and care for the seafarers and mariners—strangers to us in a way—whom we

are called to serve? One way is through the generous donation of hand-knitted and crocheted hats, scarves, and other gifts offered to maritime workers who are far from home and crewing vessels during the holiday season.

We recently marked the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this remarkable *Christmas at Sea* program. Throughout many years, SCI's chaplains have distributed hundreds of thousands of these gifts: gifts that are hand-crafted by our remarkable volunteers, including you. I cannot express enough gratitude for your support of SCI's *Christmas at Sea* program and the numerous lives touched by your heartfelt contributions.

Faithfully—

The Rev. Mark S. Nestlehutt  
President & Executive Director

# KNIT NOTES

One of the most eagerly anticipated articles in the winter issue of The Knit Before Christmas is the annual ***Christmas at Sea: By the Numbers*** recap. The 2023 figures are impressive.

We packed a record number of ditty bags in Port Newark and shipped more knits and crochets to U.S. river mariners than ever before. We had an unprecedented number of volunteer groups express interest in packing. So much interest, in fact, that port packing extended into the third week in December. For the second year in a row, we had enough ditty bags (thank you, ditty bag makers!). After featuring ditty bags with cross stitch designs in 2022, the idea took off and we saw many more bags with nautical designs.

I had fun observing packing groups taking particular care in their selection of ditty bags, making sure the ditty bag matched the color of the hat, scarf, or cowl going inside. And, while thinking about color; I can't help but smile remembering U.S. Coast Guard members from Staten Island making Christmas cards from the construction paper and crayons I left out on our conference room table. It started a trend! The arts and crafts supplies became a permanent staple during the packing season and a new tradition has been born.

While numbers are important, they don't capture how beloved *Christmas at Sea* is. When the Santa Sacks appear, and the boxes are delivered during crew changes, the excitement is palpable. We continue



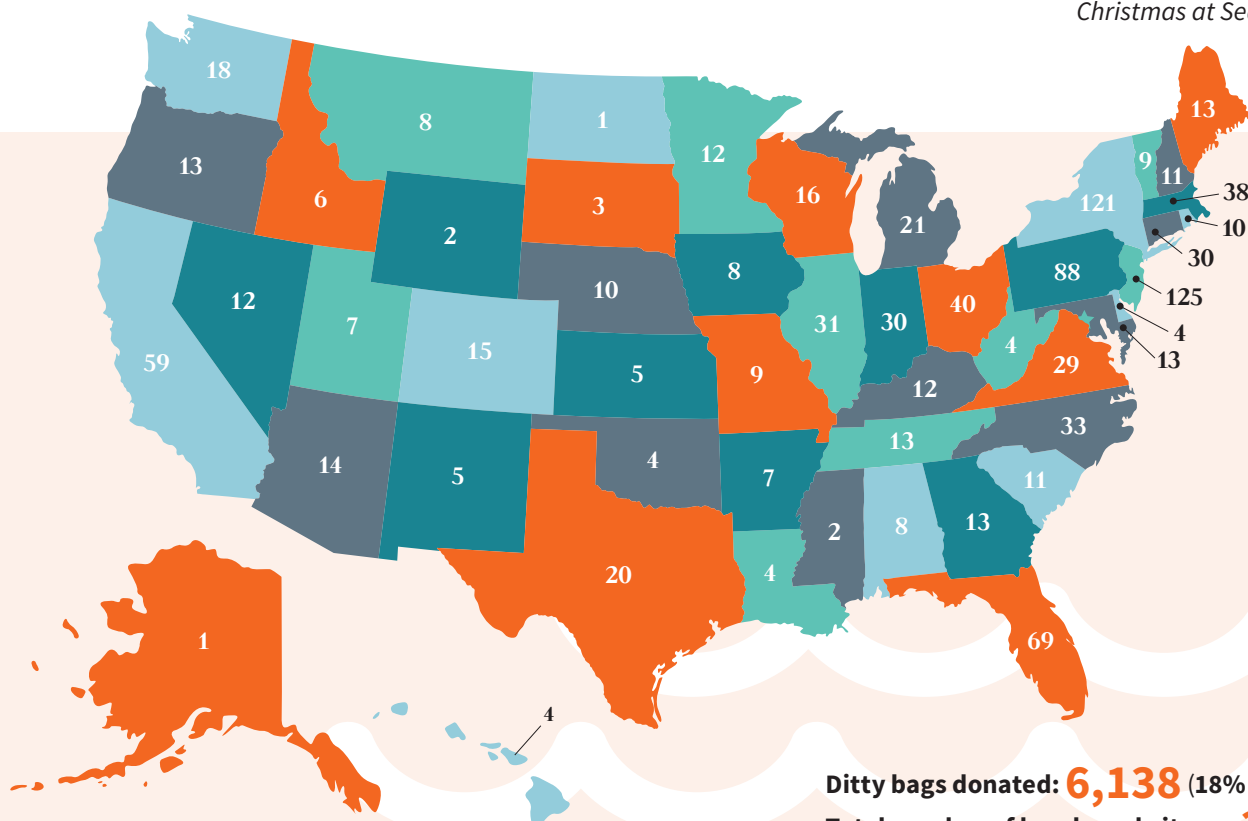
to hear echoes of stories reflecting how meaningful these gifts are to mariners far from home during the darkest, coldest, and loneliest month of the year. Not only do *Christmas at Sea* hand-knits and crochets warm heads and necks, but they also warm hearts.

On behalf of mariners everywhere, thank you for your support of *Christmas at Sea*. Your thoughtfulness and generosity show just how much you care about our mission and the work we do.

With gratitude,

**Joanne Bartosik**

Senior Manager of Development & *Christmas at Sea*



#### Rest of world:

Belgium  
Canada  
Japan  
United Kingdom

Knits/crochets donated: **24,046** (4% increase)

Ditty bags donated: **6,138** (18% increase)

Total number of hand-made items: **30,184** (7% increase)

Number of vessels that received Santa Sacks in Port Newark, NJ: **180**

Items sent to inland mariners via CAS On The River: **11,853**



# A big thank you to all the volunteer packing groups who helped make Christmas at Sea possible this year, both at SCL's International Seafarers' Center in Port Newark, NJ and along US inland waterways!

- |   |  |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Lisa and<br>Felicity Affortunato<br>APM Terminals<br>Calvary Episcopal<br>Church,<br>Flemington, NJ<br>Christ Episcopal Church,<br>Glendale, OH<br>Council on Port<br>Performance,<br>Workforce<br>Development<br>Implementation Team<br>East Coast Warehouse | Edie Klink & Maggi Husar,<br>Seaside Park, NJ<br>Green Marine<br>Hapag-Lloyd<br>Ingleside United<br>Methodist Church,<br>Baton Rouge, LA<br>Maher Terminals<br>ONE, Ocean<br>Network Express<br>Port Authority of New<br>York & New Jersey | Port Newark Container<br>Terminal (PNCT) &<br>Ports America<br>Regina Refstie &<br>Turid Ostensen,<br>Staten Island, NY<br>San Jacinto College,<br>Maritime Campus<br>The Second Saturday<br>Service Knitting<br>Group, Trinity<br>Episcopal Church,<br>Swarthmore, PA | St. Andrew's<br>Episcopal Church,<br>New Providence, NJ<br>St. David's Episcopal<br>Church, Cranbury, NJ<br>St. John's Episcopal<br>Church,<br>Little Silver, NJ<br>SUNY (State University<br>of New York)<br>Maritime Cadets<br>TowWorks<br>Trinity Church<br>Wall Street | Trinity Episcopal Church,<br>Cranford, NJ<br>Trinity Episcopal Church,<br>Vicksburg, MS<br>United States Coast<br>Guard, SEC New York<br>USMX, The United States<br>Maritime Alliance Ltd.<br>The Woman's Club of<br>Morristown, NJ<br>Women's International<br>Shipping & Trading<br>Association<br>(WISTA NJ NY CT) |
|---|--|--|--|---|



## Individual CAS volunteers:

925

## Top 3 individual volunteers:

- Helga K., NC — 1,026
- Loretta Z., TX — 489
- Kathy S., CA — 457

## CAS volunteer groups:

131

## Top 3 volunteer groups:

- St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Old Lyme, CT — 558
- The Church of St. Mark and All Saints, Galloway, NJ — 386
- St. James Episcopal Church, St. James, NY — 364

## New volunteers:

214



# Mariner Thank Yous

Monday, December 25, 2023

Good day,

On behalf of my crew I want to thank your organization for delivering very much appreciated Christmas gifts for my crew during our port stay in Newark earlier this month.

Keep up the good work and God bless you all. Merry Christmas and a happy 2024,

Best regards,

Marco Rook, Master, *Clementine Maersk*



Tuesday, December 26, 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Good day,

We are glad to inform you that we received Christmas gifts from the Seamen's Church Institute at Port Newark, which were distributed among the all crew members onboard during the Celebration of Christmas on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2023, at sea.

We are sending pictures of us holding your gifts. Thank you to your organization and volunteers, as well as to Chaplain Michelle for the delivery onboard. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year, 2024.

Best regards,

Capt. Nanda Sudusinghe, Master

Mr. Pavlov Fedor, Chief Engineer, *M/V Tirua*

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Good day,

I wanted to write this email while the holidays are still in progress! Thank you, thank you, thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for your generous and thoughtful gift bags. My crew really appreciated them. Having them hanging on their doors when they walked out of their cabins on Christmas morning made them all smile! Keep



MV Chuck Zebula on December 25, 2023 on the Ohio River at mile 128. Terry the cook (L) and Joe the deckhand (R) say thank you for the gifts!



doing what you're doing—it is not said enough, but you are all very much appreciated! Thank you and Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and all the best!

Best regards,

Chris Kalinowski, Master, *Maersk Denver*

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Dear SCI,

Thank you for your wonderful presents—they are much appreciated.

I'm sending some pictures from our Christmas celebration, where you can see the present bags and us wearing the knitwear. Happy holidays.

Best regards,

D/C Kean Stryhn, *Clifford Maersk*

Sunday, January 14, 2024

Dear Seamen's Church Institute,

On behalf of my crew and myself personally, I would like to thank you for your commitment towards us seafarers. Your representative visited us on 12 January and brought two full bags of gifts.

While having gifts is a heartwarming thing in itself, more important are your efforts to make this world a better place.

I truly think that social interactions like these make people smile and feel hopeful—they show the true spirit of Christianity from people with goodwill.

It is my pleasure to share a photo of my crew with you. Wishing all the best to you and your loved ones!

P.S. Your warm hand-crafted garments will be very useful when we come back to winter in Europe.

Best regards,

Andrey Mikhaylov, Captain, *M/V Asphalt Synergy*

Take Your Place in History:

# Legacy Gifts to SCI

Technological advancements may have transformed the maritime industry, but one constant remains—the challenging and perilous nature of working on the water. For more than 180 years, the Seamen’s Church Institute, recognized as North America’s most comprehensive maritime service organization, has built a lasting legacy of supporting mariners and seafarers.

Few individuals embody SCI’s mission as profoundly as Janet Lord Roper, a dedicated “house mother” at SCI’s New York Seaport building from 1915 to 1943. Mrs. Roper, a central figure in our history, comprehended the challenges faced by mariners, consistently providing care and compassion to those who visited our center.

In tribute to her, the **Janet Lord Roper Legacy Society** was established to honor those generous individuals who, over the years, have included a bequest to SCI in their wills or trusts to support our mission. If you are contemplating a legacy gift, we encourage you to stand in solidarity with seafarers, support SCI, and consider joining the Roper Legacy Society.

For those who have already incorporated SCI into their estate plans, we are deeply grateful. If you would like further information about the **Roper Legacy Society** and planned giving, please reach out to Amy Mugavero, Director of Advancement and Strategic Initiatives, at **212.349.9090** or via email at **amugavero@seamenschurch.org**.



Give Back Box (GBB) is a nonprofit organization that provides an affordable alternative when shipping your donations to *Christmas at Sea*.

For \$20 you can purchase a UPS shipping label. Simply go to **givebackbox.com** and click on the donate tab. Scroll down the page, click on “all charities,” and you will see the SCI logo on page 3. Add the label to a virtual shopping cart and check out and pay with any major credit card. Download and print the label from the convenience of your home.

The maximum weight of the package is 70 pounds. The combined length and girth of the box may not exceed 108 inches. You will need a separate label if you are sending more than one box. There is no need to send anything priority or express, as we accept donations year-round!

For additional information about GBB, please visit their website at **givebackbox.com** or email: **info@givebackbox.com**



*Janet Lord Roper*





118 Export Street,  
Port Newark, NJ 07114



## Challenge for 2024

How about making one of our patterns that you haven't tried before? There are plenty to choose from—just **visit our website** and navigate to *Christmas at Sea*—Patterns and Publications. There you'll find our handbook to download, or individual patterns for each of our approved hats, scarves, socks, vests, and ditty bag. Happy crafting!

**seamenschurch.org**

Follow us  
online



## Untangled

Untangled is *Christmas at Sea's* (CAS) members-only Facebook group. It was created to give CAS volunteers and friends access to a safe space to share information, as well as being a quick, easy, and accessible way of asking questions and getting answers. We currently have just over 650 members, and we would LOVE to reach 1,000 members by the end of 2024. Please sign up and tell your friends!

It is easy to join. Go to [facebook.com/groups/untangled.sci](https://facebook.com/groups/untangled.sci), answer three short membership questions, and agree to the group rules. If you are new to CAS, please let us know how you found us, and if you belong to a knitting/crocheting/sewing group, please indicate which one.

By following us on Facebook, you are connecting to an online community of CAS followers, who through their skills, talent, and creativity, embrace SCI's tradition of expressing gratitude to mariners at Christmastime for all they do to make our modern way of life possible.

