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CHURCH
INSTITUTE

THE KNIT

before Christmas

Summer 2024

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THE KNIT *before Christmas*

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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



By the time you receive this summer issue of *The Knit Before Christmas*, SCI-Port Newark has already hosted the first of our 2024 port packing events as part of *Christmas in July*. On a more personal note, I have even purchased a few gifts for Christmas for fear that they may sell out come December. All this to say that, even in the sweltering heat of summer, Christmas is on the not-too-distant horizon. Producing 30,000 knitted and crocheted items and ditty bags, along with packing and distributing these same items, is a year-round effort. And we could not accomplish this massive project without your support. Thank you!

In May, the Seamen's Church Institute initiated an external survey and many of you, a tremendous number of our *Christmas at Sea* and *Christmas at Sea on the River* volunteers, completed this survey. The purpose was to assist us in identifying our core values in order to better define our mission. Once again, thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. What caught my attention was how many of you responded that you wanted to learn more about SCI and our mission beyond the *Christmas at Sea* program.

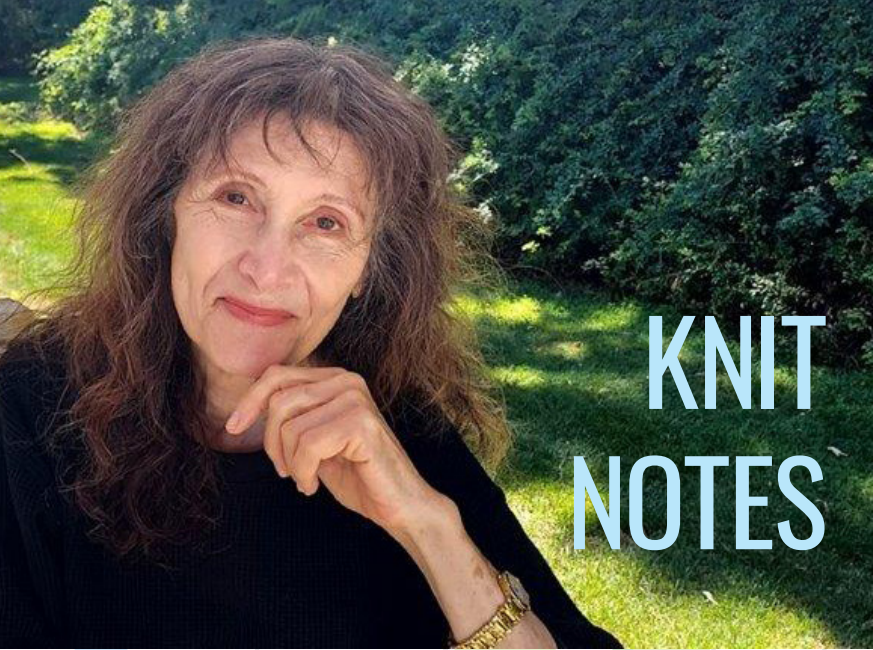
SCI's work addresses the whole mariner to improve their personal, material, physical, and spiritual well-being. We do this through seafarer and mariner services such as vessel visiting, transportation, and hospitality; mariner education and training; and advocacy and pro bono legal efforts. But one of the most impactful areas of our mission is the crisis

response work that we do. Every year, our Chaplains on the rivers and in ports respond to multiple incidents of fatalities aboard vessels. Of course, some responses get more attention than others. In March of this year, the container ship *Dali* allided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore Harbor, causing the collapse of the bridge and resulting in the death of six construction workers. At the invitation of the shipowner and investigators, SCI's Chaplains were invited aboard to meet with the crew to provide support. You can learn more about this work and our visits to the *Dali* in a special article in this issue of *The Knit Before Christmas*. Going forward, we will include a broader mission-focused story to accompany the articles specific to the *Christmas at Sea* program. I hope that you enjoy learning more about SCI and our mission.

Again, thank you for the time that you devote to SCI's *Christmas at Sea* ministry and for all that you do to support SCI's mission to seafarers and mariners both far and near!

Faithfully—

The Rev. Mark S. Nestlehutt
President & Executive Director



KNIT NOTES



In June, SCI welcomed Matthew Morse as the new Director of our International Seafarers' Center in Port Newark, NJ. As I was introduced to Matt, one of the very first questions he asked was, "What is your favorite part of your job?" Without skipping a beat, I replied, "the volunteers I get to work with."

There are many wonderful aspects to being the manager of *Christmas at Sea*, but nothing comes close to the privilege of getting to know the individuals and groups who are responsible for the success and longevity of the program.

My background is in leisure services and resources administration, having worked for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation for many years. My father, who couldn't believe there was a college degree in recreation, used to tell everyone he knew I was in the playground business. The wonderful thing about being in the

playground business is the blurred lines between work and leisure. Volunteers choose to do something because it's fun and fulfilling, and that intersection between work and leisure is a gift of a place to be. I am delighted that I still get to share the volunteer experience while at work.



Matthew Morse, who became Director of SCI's International Seafarers' Center in June 2024. Scarf made by Francine D., Pennsylvania.

Whether it's through handwritten correspondence, emails, telephone calls, or in-person visits, I thoroughly enjoy and am deeply touched by *Christmas at Sea* volunteers' openness and willingness to share life experiences. I am entrusted with your personal stories. I revel in learning about how you first became involved with the program and your connections to the maritime industry. I feel like a member of the family when reading about graduations, births, and weddings. I love knowing you mastered a new pattern or discovered a great sale on yarn at a local shop. This is what it feels like to be part of a community.

As we approach Christmas—and it will be here before we know it—I am reminded why I do this and how fortunate I am to be able to do this together with people from all over the country and beyond who I admire and who inspire me. It was many issues of *The Knit Before Christmas* ago that I first compared managing *Christmas at Sea* to being an orchestra conductor. That image still holds true. I may be holding the baton, but you, our friends and supporters, are the ones making the music and striking all the right notes. Thank you for all you do.

With gratitude,
Joanne Bartosik

Senior Manager of Development & *Christmas at Sea*

We've Got Angels!

Christmas at Sea has a team of experienced volunteers, known as the CAS Angels, eager to help other CAS knitters and crocheters with questions about our specially-designed patterns. You can find these



Angels on our social media platforms, **Untangled**, our members-only Facebook group

(facebook.com/groups/untangled.sci), and on **Ravelry** (ravelry.com/).



There is no need to struggle—reach out! Post your questions and be assured

you will gain insight, tips, and guidance about our patterns.

Realizing not everyone is on social media, we offer the option of emailing CAS@seamenschurch.org with your questions, specifying the pattern you are using, and providing contact information. You will then be introduced by email to a CAS Angel who'll be your personal coach and mentor.

It is our pleasure to introduce you to our dedicated group of CAS Angels:

Alice.....Maine
Beth.....Indiana
Debs.....United Kingdom
Janet.....Wisconsin

Jeanette.....New York
Kate.....Arkansas
Kathie.....Pennsylvania
Kerrie.....North Carolina

MelissaNew Jersey
NancyNew York
NicoletteKansas
Robin.....Nebraska

CAS volunteers are a valued community connected by a love of knitting and crocheting and united in support of SCI's mission. Many of our volunteers are seasoned knitters and crocheters who are experienced with our unique patterns. CAS's mentoring model allows you to share your expertise and skill with fellow volunteers who have questions about our patterns.

If this sounds right up your alley, and you are comfortable on social media platforms, please email CAS@seamenschurch.org with your contact information and indicate which pattern(s) you feel comfortable coaching.



Give Back Box: An Alternative to Mailing Donations

Give Back Box (GBB)[®] is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. GBB makes donating items to charities such as SCI convenient and hassle-free, by providing shipping labels at significantly reduced prices.

Currently, for \$20 you can purchase a UPS label for a *Christmas at Sea* donation, which is good for packages that weigh up to 70 pounds, if the combined length and girth of the box (the length of its longest side plus the distance around its thickest part) does not exceed 108 inches.

After purchasing a label, you receive an email confirmation (check your spam folder), with the label to print from the convenience of your home. *Christmas at Sea* volunteers without access to a printer have reported that their local UPS store customer service representative can print the label by scanning the code from their cell phone.

Christmas at Sea is among dozens of charities participating with GBB. Make sure to purchase an SCI *Christmas at Sea* label with the 118 Export Street, Port Newark, NJ address. Please note: GBB supports several of their own charities—those labels are free, and the Kohl's department store dropoff locations do not apply to SCI.

Christmas at Sea has been a participating GBB charity for several years. We suggest GBB as a shipping alternative for your consideration; however, on the rare occasion that you may experience a glitch, please contact GBB directly by email at info@givebackbox.com or phone **310.954.2003**. In our experience, GBB has been responsive and helpful in troubleshooting any issues that may arise.



Untangled

MALs (Make-Alongs) on Untangled and Ravelry.

In addition to serving as coaches and mentors, CAS Angels meet several times a year over Zoom. These meetings yield thoughtful suggestions as to how to strengthen *Christmas at Sea* and foster discussions about ways to make being a CAS Angel a more meaningful volunteer experience.

One of the many wonderful ideas presented during our March 2024 meeting was to introduce a monthly make-along (MAL) project on **Ravelry** and **Untangled**. These robust challenges have become very popular. The April MAL challenged knitters to make Seafarer's Beanies, and crocheters to make Seafarer's Watch Caps. In May, we invited volunteers to craft scarves: the Seafarer's Scarf for knitters, and the Resilience

Scarf for crocheters. June's projects included the knit helmet, Nola Slippers, and the crochet cowl.

Ravelry and **Untangled** members post photographs of projects in progress as well as finished products. Knitting and crocheting tips are shared along with much encouragement and advice as knitters and crocheters try something new.

Enthusiasm for these challenges is unmistakable and growing. You never know what each month will bring, so be on the lookout for the monthly MAL projects and join the fun!



CAS FAQ:

Useful Guidelines for the 2024 Season

By the time *The Knit Before Christmas* reaches you, 2024's *Christmas at Sea* will be well underway. Over the summer, we welcomed the Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York chapters of the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), for a *Christmas in July* event, where they packed 3,290 knits and crochets for river mariners working on towboats in the Paducah, Kentucky area.

As we get ready for the fall influx of donations and begin to schedule packing groups, we thought it would be a good idea to offer some tips and gentle reminders, to assure smooth sailing and calm seas.

Pet Fur

We love pets. Many of us at SCI share our homes and hearts with canine and feline companions, but it is challenging when we open a package and find an abundance of fur. Although we try to remove as much of it as we can, there is a real concern about allergens. So, if you have a pet, please try to keep your creations as free of pet hair as possible.

Gift Tags

For your convenience, we've included a sheet of gift tags in this issue of *The Knit Before Christmas*. Gift tags are not required; we will affix a tag on your donation if it arrives without one, but it

is extremely helpful when donations arrive already tagged. It is a timesaving measure that allows our volunteers to be as efficient as possible during this busy season.

But you do not have to use our tags! Many CAS volunteers enjoy designing their own gift tags. Paula D. from Ohio takes photographs of local hot spots and travel destinations, and turns the images into gift tags. Artists like Naomi C. in Oregon and Jane B. in Maine prefer to sketch their own. We also appreciate children's art. Marilyn L. from Pennsylvania turns her son Daniel's artwork into cards.

You will find PDFs of contemporary and traditional gift tags available for download on our website (look under "Patterns and Publications"), or you are welcome to email CAS to request gift tags. (Let us know how many you would

like and where to mail the tags.) Our tags have punched-out holes so they can easily be attached threading a piece of yarn through the garment. Please do not use safety pins.

Christmas Cards

We include more than 5,000 Christmas cards annually in the ditty bags that are distributed from Port Newark. We always need cards, and as long as they don't feature the calendar year they have no shelf life, enabling us to use them the following year. We are grateful to all our volunteers who recycle their cards with us by sending us the front cover of cards they've received personally.

You have an opportunity to make your cards extra special by including a personal note. Something as simple as "Merry Christmas from a friend in [the name of your state]," or "Best wishes for a happy holiday season," will go a long way in personalizing your donation.





Amazon Wish List

We created our *Christmas at Sea Amazon Wish List* (bit.ly/ChristmasAtSeaWishList) to give friends and supporters an idea of the variety of items we include in ditty bags, along with the knits/crochets and Christmas cards. It includes all of the mariner favorites. You will notice there is nothing with sharp edges on the list. No sewing kits, manicure sets, or disposable razors. Purposefully, we want to protect volunteer packers from cuts, nicks, and scratches. You may also notice there are no date books, pens and pencils, or calendars. The need for these items has diminished thanks to smart phones.

Everything on our wish list is travel and/or sample size. You are not obligated to purchase items from Amazon, especially if you see something offered at a lower price from a different vendor.

Plastic Bags

We request that you refrain from packing individual knits/crochets in plastic bags or kitchen storage bags. If you are concerned about protecting your donation from moisture and other damage while shipping, you can always pack the contents in one large garbage bag, which we will recycle in Port Newark.

Gratitude

SCI is grateful to you, our *Christmas at Sea* community, for your continued support. We never forget that it is your love of knitting, crocheting, and sewing, and your affinity for our mission that keeps *Christmas at Sea* vibrant. Your generosity and thoughtfulness leave a forever impression on the international seafarers and U.S. river mariners who receive your gifts.



In Memoriam

Eugenia “Vicki” Sedgwick

It is with sadness that we say goodbye and pay tribute to our oldest and possibly longest participating *Christmas at Sea* volunteer, Eugenia “Vicki” Sedgwick, from Fresno, California, who passed away in June 2024. Miss Vicki’s dear friend, Ginny, wrote that at age 103 she was a legend within their church and her knitting community. “She will be greatly missed, but what a legacy of a life well lived.”

FIRST RESPONDERS TO THE *DALI*

When news of the tragic allision in Baltimore involving the containership *Dali* broke on the morning of Tuesday, March 26, the magnitude of the disaster and its implications for the maritime community, the Port of Baltimore, and the seafarers aboard the vessel quickly became apparent.

As details emerged, it remained unclear what role the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) might play in responding to this catastrophe, which occurred just two hundred miles south of its Manhattan headquarters. Fortunately, within 48 hours of the incident, SCI received a call from contacts at Britannia P&I Club asking if SCI could support the seafarers aboard the *Dali*, who were stuck indefinitely on board a ship that was pinned beneath the mangled metal framework of the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

SCI has a long history of crisis response, providing support in incidents ranging from pirate attacks off the Somali coast to ship sinkings in the Atlantic. In this incident, as access was restricted to all but emergency personnel, SCI employed the expertise of its chaplaincy in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), a crisis response tool used by the U.S. Navy and first response organizations. As such, on April 1, SCI became the first seafarer welfare organization permitted to board the *Dali*. That day, one week after the incident, SCI's President and Executive Director the Rev. Mark S. Nestlehutt climbed the pilot ladder and met with the crew, offering support through individual and small group meetings with the Indian and Sri Lankan seafarers. After a full day aboard, the Rev. Nestlehutt felt reassured that the seafarers were well cared for by the ship's operator, Synergy Marine, but an additional pastoral care visit was warranted. Afterward, the Rev. Nestlehutt briefed local Baltimore-based seafarer welfare organizations on the state of the crew and began planning for a more extensive visit in the near future, which would include SCI's Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil-speaking Chaplain Associates—the goal being to provide comfort and counsel to the seafarers in their native languages.

BACKGROUND PHOTO: *The containership Dali and the wreckage of the Franklin Scott Key Bridge.*

LEFT: *The Rev. Mathew Thomas boarding the Dali via the pilot's ladder.*

OPPOSITE TOP: *SCI Chaplain the Rev. Dr. Bill Allport, and Chaplain Associates the Revs. Mathew Thomas and Mary Matthews aboard the Dali.*



Two weeks later, on April 17, after countless phone calls and emails to coordinate schedules, SCI's team traveled to Baltimore and took a 30-minute ride to the port side of the *Dali*, where they were warmly welcomed by those on board. The crew's faces lit up at the sight of the Revs. Mathew Thomas and Mary Matthews, two dedicated SCI Chaplain Associates based in Newark who could engage with them in familiar languages. The captain gathered the crew in the messroom, inviting them to speak with the team and, for the next four hours, the Revs. Thomas and Matthews mingled with crew members, providing much-needed spiritual and emotional comfort. An oiler remarked, "It was like having my auntie or uncle here. Thank you."

While the Revs. Matthews and Thomas met with crew members on the B Deck, SCI Chaplain the Rev. Dr. Bill Allport, moved around the ship and talked with crew members. Conversations revealed the emotional struggles of the crew, particularly after witnessing the tragedy of the bridge collapse. Isolated for more than three weeks at this point, a significant concern for the crew was the recent FBI seizure of personal electronic devices, which hindered their ability to contact families. One crew member was unable to reach his wife for their 25th wedding anniversary, so

Chaplain Allport lent his own phone to the seafarer, and to the man's immense joy, he was able to connect with his wife, share his love and reassure her of his safety.

When disasters like this bridge collapse occur with accompanying tragic loss of life, thorough investigations naturally follow. As a result, the *Dali*'s crew spent more than three months restricted to the ship. Thankfully, at this time, the ship has been pulled from the wreckage and docked, many of *Dali*'s crew have been able to leave the ship, and some have returned home, although some still remain onboard. It was SCI's initial visits that paved the way for sustained assistance from local maritime ministries and the Baltimore community. Our visit with the *Dali*'s seafarers exemplifies our mission in action: to aid mariners and seafarers wherever and whenever needed. That said, we strive to be even more impactful with our work.

As SCI embarked on the first year of its strategic plan for 2023–2028, one of the key initiatives was to implement a formalized program for more effectively deploying SCI Chaplains beyond their current geographic regions and to explore establishing an emergency fund for such deployments. This directive highlights SCI's commitment to crisis response, demonstrating its dependability and dedication in providing compassionate support for mariners and seafarers facing challenging circumstances worldwide. However, it must be acknowledged that this critical work is only possible through the support and generosity of sponsors and donors. Every dollar given and every knit or crocheted garment donated helps lift the spirits and dignity of the mariners and seafarers served by SCI.





118 Export Street
Port Newark, NJ 07114



August Is National Make-a-Will Month

Nearly two-thirds of American adults do not have a will; however, all adults should. **Everyone needs a plan.**

It is an opportunity to create a lasting impact on causes that are important to you. Without a will, you risk having personal questions settled by a court appointed third-party administrator.

Know the basics.

The following information will be helpful in beginning discussions with your advisor(s). The Seamen's Church Institute's Development department is pleased to work with you to ensure a gift meets your goals of supporting SCI in the most meaningful way possible.

If you would like to include SCI in your will, please use our full legal name, **The Seamen's Church Institute**. Our federal tax identification number is **13-5562356**.

Your attorney may find the following language helpful.

I hereby give, devise, and bequeath (a dollar amount, or all or a percentage of the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate) to The Seamen's Church Institute, 50 Broadway, 26th floor, New York, New York 10004, for its general purposes.

As you create or update your plan, consider extending your impact on SCI through a gift in your will or other estate plan. If we can be of assistance in any way, please get in touch with Amy Mugavero, Director, Advancement & Strategic Initiatives, by email to amugavero@seamenschurch.org or by phone at **212.349.9090**.

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