

THE  
SEAMEN'S  
CHURCH  
INSTITUTE



# THE LOOKOUT

Spring 2025 · Volume 117 · Number 1

[seamenschurch.org](http://seamenschurch.org)



## 6 | Crisis Ready

Supporting Mariners in the  
Wake of Tragedy

## 9 | Time for a Change?

The Case for Towboat  
Simulator Model  
Standards

## 12 | How CMA Helps:

Addressing the Key  
Challenges Facing  
Today's Seafarers

## 22 | At The Helm

Q&A with John Roberts  
of Ingram Marine Group

# 2025 SUSTAINING AND SUPPORTING SPONSORS

Investing in SCI's mission-driven work on behalf of mariners and seafarers

---

## SUSTAINING SPONSORS



American Commercial Barge Line



Ingram Marine Group



Trinity Church New York City

---

## SUPPORTING SPONSORS



American Bureau  
of Shipping



Kirby  
Corporation



Genco Shipping &  
Transportation



McAllister Towing



Mediterranean  
Shipping  
Company



Moran Towing  
Corporation



SeaCube  
Container Leasing



TOTE  
Maritime

---

## IN-KIND SPONSOR



Seward &  
Kissel, LLP

The Seamen's Church Institute thanks our sponsors for their generous support. Sustaining and Supporting Sponsors make the greatest impact on mariners' welfare. Learn more about sponsorship opportunities and benefits at [seamenschurch.org/sponsors](https://seamenschurch.org/sponsors).

[seamenschurch.org](https://seamenschurch.org)

*We extend our gratitude to the Rev. David Rider for providing many of the photographs featured in this publication. More of David's photos can be found here: [davidrider.photoshelter.com](https://davidrider.photoshelter.com)*



# THE LOOKOUT

*The Lookout* is a publication of  
the Seamen's Church Institute.

Spring 2025 • Vol 117 • No. 1

[seamenschurch.org](http://seamenschurch.org)

+1 212.349.9090

## EDITORIAL

**Mark K. Knoy**  
Chair, Board of Trustees

**The Rev. Mark S. Nestlehutt**  
President & Executive Director

**Evan Brown**  
Editor & Designer  
Director, Communications

**Naomi Walker**  
Editor  
Manager, Special Projects

**Bridgit Patterson**  
Assistant Editor  
Communications Associate

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 From the President's Desk
- 6 **Crisis Ready:** *Supporting Mariners in the Wake of Tragedy*
- 8 **SCI Welcomes the Rev. Grace Pardun to Ministry on the River Chaplaincy**
- 9 **Time For a Change?** *The Case for Towboat Simulator Model Standards*
- 11 **The Missing Crew Member:** *Quarterly Activity Report from Chaplain James Kollin*
- 12 **How CMA Helps:** *Ways SCI's Center for Mariner Advocacy Addresses the Key Challenges Facing Today's Seafarers*
- 15 **SCI's Kelly Butts Looks Back on Her CME Journey and Ahead to a New Role**
- 16 **Our Place in the Port:** *Making the ISC Stronger Through Community Connection*
- 18 **River Bell Awards Luncheon**
- 19 **Maritime Bell Awards Luncheon**
- 20 **SCI Archives:** *Revisiting the Joseph Conrad Library*
- 21 **Christmas at Sea:** *A Lifeline of Warmth and Connection*
- 22 **At The Helm:** *John Roberts, Ingram Marine Group*





# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt  
President & Executive Director,  
The Seamen's Church Institute

Whether it's the transition from fall into winter or from spring into summer, the change of seasons has always struck me as relatively predictable. Yes, spring might arrive a bit later in some years, and summer heat may linger well into the early days of fall, but the rhythm remains: spring, summer, fall, winter—reliable and familiar. And yet, despite this predictability, I still managed to misjudge the weather on a string of recent spring trips to Houston, Stamford, Boston, and Atlanta. In Houston, it was a sweltering 90 degrees in late March, and I had packed a winter suit and Barbour jacket. A few weeks later, Boston surprised me with 35-degree temperatures in mid-April, and there I was, shivering in nothing more than a windbreaker.

That moment of personal oversight—of being caught unprepared—stuck with me. As I sat down to write this letter, I couldn't help but think about the resilience and preparedness of mariners and seafarers. Unlike my brief discomforts, they navigate not just extreme weather, but also vast distances, long absences from home, and the constant demands of their job. Isolation, unpredictable conditions, and even geopolitical turbulence are part of their daily reality, not exceptions.

As this edition of *The Lookout* reaches you, many of us in the northern hemisphere are transitioning from

spring toward summer. Memorial Day—our unofficial kickoff to the season—is nearly here. Yet, while the seasons may be predictable, life around us is not. Recent political shifts and newly-imposed tariffs have generated their own impending storm clouds, for both global and domestic shipping. Longstanding trade relationships are fraying, threatening the export of American goods and, in turn, impacting the cargo available to inland and international mariners alike. Meanwhile, concerns over intensified regulation have led many shipowners to restrict seafarer shore leave in several U.S. ports, fearing crew members might be detained or delayed in returning to their ships. The phrase we hear repeatedly in global trade circles is: “buckle up.”

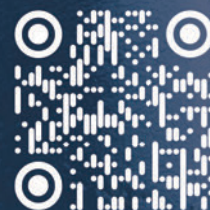
Yet amid these storms, mariners are not alone: SCI's ministry and mission remains constant, whatever the weather. This issue of *The Lookout* captures SCI's ongoing efforts and highlights the steadfast leadership guiding our industry forward. Seasons shift, storms pass—but SCI's mission holds steady. The world depends on mariners. Mariners depend on SCI. And SCI depends on you. Thank you.





PASTORAL CARE  
CRISIS RESPONSE  
ADVOCACY  
TRAINING  
FEASIBILITY STUDIES  
SUPPORT SCI

Seafarers and mariners are vital to the global economy, transporting essential goods. The Seamen's Church Institute supports these workers, but we rely on your generosity. Please donate at [seamenschurch.org/giving](https://seamenschurch.org/giving) or scan the QR code to give online. For corporate sponsorships, contact Amy Mugavero at [amugavero@seamenschurch.org](mailto:amugavero@seamenschurch.org).



OUR MISSION IS TO SUPPORT MARINERS AND SEAFARERS. **IT'S WHAT WE DO.**



## 47th ANNUAL **SILVER BELL AWARDS DINNER**

HONORING

**Silver Bell  
Award**

**Christopher J. Wiernicki**  
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer  
*American Bureau of Shipping*

**Lifetime  
Achievement  
Award**

**Joseph E.M. Hughes**  
Chairman  
*Shipowners Claims Bureau, Inc.,  
Managers of the American P&I Club*

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2025 • Pier Sixty, Chelsea Piers, New York, NY  
[seamenschurch.org/sb2025](https://seamenschurch.org/sb2025) • [SilverBell@Seamenschurch.org](mailto:SilverBell@Seamenschurch.org)





# CRISIS READY

## Supporting Mariners in the Wake of Tragedy

By the Rev. Geoffrey Davis  
SCI Chaplain

Rapid response is at the heart of the Ministry on the River (MOR). In a fast-paced maritime industry where time is often in short supply, being immediately available to mariners in moments of crisis is both essential and rare. On Thursday, January 30, 2025, I was carrying out my usual duties as Chaplain on the Lower Mississippi River when I received an unexpected call from a human resources representative at City Cruises. The message was urgent—several vessels had been mobilized for recovery efforts following the tragic plane crash in Washington, DC, and they needed a chaplain with crisis response experience. They asked if I could go.

As a Seamen's Church Institute Chaplain, I am always prepared to deploy in crisis situations. I immediately began looking for travel options and secured the earliest available flight the next morning, on January 31. By midday, I had arrived and made myself available to support the crews involved in the recovery effort on the Potomac River.

MOR Chaplains are uniquely equipped to serve inland river mariners and understand the nuances of these working environments. Unlike ocean-going ports, inland facilities vary widely in their access requirements and operational rhythms. Thanks to our experience navigating this dynamic system, MOR Chaplains can respond to calls for support at a

moment's notice—even in unfamiliar ports. Though I had previously visited Washington, DC, I had never been to its harbor. Still, I was able to quickly connect with mariners and shore staff, offering pastoral care, practical support, and a listening ear to those impacted by the unfolding recovery operations.

As I walked from my hotel to the harbor, the weight of the situation was palpable. The atmosphere was heavy with emotion, and it was clear that the community was still reeling. One of the most important lessons I've learned through my crisis response training is that individuals affected by traumatic events often minimize their own experiences. Many cope by comparing their situation to that of others who seem more severely impacted. While this is a common and understandable reaction, it can delay emotional processing—leading to more intense reactions later on.

When speaking with mariners and crew, I always encourage them not to dismiss or diminish what they're feeling. Instead, I urge them to take the time to acknowledge and explore their emotions. Seeking support early and sharing their struggles can make all the difference in preventing long-term harm. Mariners are incredibly resilient and are used to working in tough, high-pressure conditions. But being thrust into a major crisis—especially as an



unofficial first responder—is a different kind of stress, one that can have profound emotional effects if not properly addressed.

Unlike trained emergency personnel, mariners aren't typically prepared for the psychological weight of recovery operations. Without a safe space to process their experiences, they may carry unresolved trauma that can impact their relationships, performance, and overall well-being.

That's where SCI's MOR Chaplains step in. Our role is to offer immediate, compassionate support during crisis events and guide mariners through the emotional challenges that follow. Whether it's a quiet conversation, a moment of prayer, or simply a reminder that they're not alone, we provide the care they need to begin the healing process.

Being present in DC during this difficult time reaffirmed the vital role our Chaplains play in the maritime industry. I was glad to be there—to stand with these mariners, to hear their stories, and to be a source of stability during such difficult work. As always, my Chaplain colleagues and I remain committed to ensuring that those who work on our oceans, rivers, and coastal waterways are not forgotten, especially in times of great need.

**“Unlike trained emergency personnel, mariners aren't typically prepared for the psychological weight of recovery operations. Without a safe space to process their experiences, they may carry unresolved trauma that can impact their relationships, performance, and overall well-being.”**

**The Rev. Geoffrey Davis**  
*Chaplain, Ministry on the River,  
Lower Mississippi & Gulf Coast Region*



# ANCHORING THE FUTURE

The Seamen's Church Institute has a long-standing reputation for protecting the personal and professional lives of mariners with unwavering compassion and dedication, and you can be part of this legacy.

**How?** By including SCI in your will or estate plan. Your future gift can support what you are most passionate about at SCI.

Contact Amy Mugavero, Director, Advancement & Strategic Initiatives today to discuss how you can make a meaningful difference. Call 212.349.9090 or email [amugavero@seamenschurch.org](mailto:amugavero@seamenschurch.org)

# SCI Welcomes the Rev. Grace Pardun to Ministry on the River Chaplaincy

The Seamen's Church Institute welcomes the Rev. Grace Pardun as its new Supervisory Chaplain for Ministry on the River. She succeeds the Rev. David Shirk and will be based at the Center for Maritime Education in Paducah, KY. Grace is already familiar with SCI's mission, having served as an MOR Chaplain Associate since 2021.

Grace has always loved the water, and has a particular fascination with large vessels. "When you think that a 15 barge tow can carry the equivalent of over 1,000 semi trucks, it's amazing that so few mariners are responsible for moving such a lot of valuable cargo. It's a lot of pressure for an eight-member crew. When I first started working as a Chaplain for the inland marine industry, it surprised me how long a crew stays on a vessel without going home to see their family, too. There is considerable risk involved in what they do—they have to be adaptable to work in such a variety of conditions."

In her new role, Grace will oversee MOR's operations, covering the Upper Mississippi and Ohio River regions while also coordinating SCI's pastoral presence across the inland rivers, Intracoastal Waterway, and Gulf Coast. Working full-time is a prospect Grace relishes: "I am looking forward to deepening SCI's relationships with companies and shoreside support; getting to know more mariners and getting on more boats. I also look forward to overseeing the Chaplain Associate program—making sure that as many areas as possible are covered, and equipping our Chaplains to help mariners both practically and spiritually."

When asked how she sees her role with the mariners she meets, Grace replied, "The thing that makes me most excited about chaplaincy is that, at times, the personhood of the individual isn't a top priority for their environment—a job needs to be done, and they have to get on and do it. However, a Chaplain gets to

**"I am looking forward to deepening SCI's relationships with companies and shoreside support; getting to know more mariners and getting on more boats."**

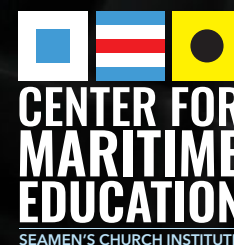
**The Rev. Grace Pardun**  
*Supervisory Chaplain,  
Ministry on the River, Lower  
Mississippi & Gulf Coast Region*



go and remind someone that they're a person, that they're loved, that they're made in the image of the divine and that they matter. We can remind people that they are beloved, even if the environment that they're in doesn't allow much space or time for that."

Grace joins SCI from St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Paducah, KY, where she has served as pastor since 2021. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Bethel University and a Master of Divinity from Luther Seminary, both in Minnesota. Grace also has experience with prison ministry and youth residential treatment centers. "This has given me an insight into meeting people where they are, and telling their story to others who may not have a good idea of where they're coming from." Grace is excited about her new full-time role with SCI, and we are delighted to have her on board.





# TIME FOR A CHANGE?

## The Case for Towboat Simulator Model Standards

By Capt. Stephen Polk  
*Director, Center for Maritime Education*

*Reprinted from the Waterways Journal  
May 19, 2025*

As the inland towing industry evolves, so does the importance of high-quality training to ensure the safety of mariners and the integrity of inland waterway operations. A critical tool in modern mariner training is the use of simulators, which are increasingly relied upon for everything from licensing and promotions to operational planning and accident reconstruction. With this growing dependence, the question of accuracy becomes more than academic—it becomes a matter of safety.

In 2021, the classification society DNV introduced a groundbreaking standard, DNV-ST-0033: Marine Simulator Systems. This standard requires that ship-assist tug simulation models be validated with performance data drawn from both computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations and real-world trials. By anchoring simulation behavior in verified, measurable metrics, these standards help ensure that simulator-based training reflects how vessels behave in real-world conditions. In doing so, they enhance the realism of assessments, improve training outcomes, and reduce the potential for errors during high-stakes operations.

While this standard marks an important step forward for ship-assist tug operations in coastal and deep-sea environments, the inland towing industry—comprised largely of push boats and barges navigating rivers, channels, and locks—faces a unique set of challenges. These include shallow water effects, bank suction and cushion forces, wind and current variability, wave interactions in confined waterways, and the complex hydrodynamics of barge handling. Unlike coastal ports, where vessel behavior can be measured under relatively consistent conditions, inland waterways are dynamic, constrained, and highly influenced by environmental factors rarely captured during sea trials alone.

Simulators for inland towing are now being used in increasingly critical scenarios. They support mariner licensing and assessment processes, determine hiring and promotional readiness, and even help government agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers evaluate the feasibility of infrastructure projects. In this context, the absence of a validated simulator performance standard for inland towboats would create a major gap—one with real-world operational, financial and safety implications.

*Continued* →

The inland towing industry needs a standard that mirrors the intent of DNV-ST-0033 but is tailored to its operational realities. Such a standard could begin by defining key measurable actions that reflect how inland towboats operate under typical and adverse conditions. Testing might include push pad thrust trials to evaluate thrust performance in shallow water, bollard pull measurements to determine force output, stopping distance trials both with and without barges in tow, and assessments of handling under different current directions and speeds. Additional metrics could include maneuverability benchmarks such as acceleration rates, backing power, and turning radius, all under various environmental conditions.

Creating such a standard would provide enormous benefits to training centers, mariners, and industry stakeholders. It would ensure consistency in how simulator models behave across institutions, reducing disparities in training and evaluation by ensuring that all mariners, regardless of where they trained, are equipped with the most accurate representation of vessel performance available. It would improve the fairness and accuracy of hiring and promotional decisions by standardizing performance expectations. And most importantly, it would enhance the validity of simulation-based analysis for critical infrastructure planning and operational safety.

The ship-assist tug community has already demonstrated what's possible through the adoption of DNV's standards. Their work offers a useful model for the inland sector to adapt to the unique challenges faced by inland mariners. As simulators continue to influence career advancement, operational readiness, and safety outcomes across the inland maritime sector, the time has come to ask an important question. Can we afford to

**As simulators continue to influence career advancement, operational readiness, and safety outcomes across the inland maritime sector, the time has come to ask an important question. Can we afford to move forward without a unified, validated standard for towboat simulation?**

**Capt. Stephen Polk**  
*Director, Center for Maritime Education*



move forward without a unified, validated standard for towboat simulation? The answer seems increasingly clear.

Now is the moment for the inland towing community—training institutions, vessel operators, regulatory bodies, and classification societies—to come together and define what such a standard should look like. The tools exist. The need is evident. The benefits are far-reaching. What remains is leadership. And CME looks forward to partnering with those who recognize this need and are prepared to take the first step toward advancing safer, smarter, and more standardized simulator training in the inland sector.

**E-Learning · Simulator Training · Accreditations · Maritime Feasibility Studies**

Contact SCI's Center for Maritime Education to learn more about our courses, services, and programs

**CME@SEAMENSCHURCH.ORG • 713.674.1236**

**SEAMENSCHURCH.ORG/CME**



# THE MISSING CREW MEMBER

**The Rev. James Kollin**

Chaplain, International Seafarers'  
Center, Port of New York & New Jersey



As soon as the seafarer on gangway duty learned that a Chaplain from SCI was on board, he quickly informed the chief officer of my presence. Without hesitation, I was urgently escorted to the accommodations, where I found the chief officer and several crew members anxiously waiting. The tension in the room was immediately palpable, and I wondered what had happened.

After exchanging greetings, the chief officer took out a piece of paper and a pen and asked, “Are you really from the Seamen’s Church?” When I confirmed, he continued, “Our crew has been in distress for nearly three months due to an incident at sea. One of our crew members mysteriously disappeared without explanation. After thorough investigations by all relevant authorities and personal testimonies from every crew member, there is no evidence of foul play, no accident, no crime, and no known illness. Yet, back home, the missing crew member’s family has accused us of being responsible.”

The situation escalated further when the missing seafarer’s father took his complaint public, causing the news to go viral within the maritime community worldwide. The crew was devastated, frustrated by the one-sided narrative. They felt that no effort had been made to hear the shipowner’s or crew’s version

of events, leaving them unfairly vilified and vulnerable. Adding to their distress, they had been receiving threats, leaving them fearful for their safety when they eventually returned home.

I felt deeply for them. Their pain and uncertainty were overwhelming. I listened to their concerns, offered prayers, and provided them with the following guidance:

- Hold onto the truth—stick to the facts and your version of events.
- Trust the investigative process—have confidence in the work of the authorized authorities.
- Stay positive and take care of yourselves—don’t let stress consume you.
- Be mindful of overreacting—dwelling too much on the accusations could harm your well-being.
- Seek legal advice—consult with professionals to protect your rights.
- Pray for justice and peace of mind—for yourselves and all involved.

The crew was deeply grateful for my presence and counsel, and while I left with a heavy heart, I also felt hopeful that the case would be resolved fairly and swiftly.



**CENTER FOR  
MARINER  
ADVOCACY**  
SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE

# HOW CMA HELPS

SCI's Center for Mariner Advocacy  
Addresses the Key Challenges  
Facing Today's Seafarers



By Philip C. Schiffli, Esq. – Director, Center for Mariner Advocacy

Seafarers play a crucial role in global trade and commerce, ensuring the smooth transportation of goods across the world's oceans. However, they face numerous challenges that impact both their professional and personal lives. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from governments, international organizations, shipping companies, and advocacy groups. The Seamen's Church Institute's (SCI) Center for Mariner Advocacy (CMA) plays a vital part in championing the rights and welfare of seafarers.

## 1. Mental Health and Well-Being

Seafarers often work in isolated environments, spending extended periods away from their families and loved ones. This prolonged isolation, coupled with a high-pressure work environment, can lead to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Limited access to mental health resources exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult for seafarers to receive proper support.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA advocates for improved mental health resources and policies that address the psychological well-being of seafarers. CMA has done this advocacy work domestically at National Merchant Mariner Medical Advisory Committee meetings; internationally at International Labour

Organization (ILO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) meetings; and at various maritime industry events where CMA has the opportunity to educate individuals about this important topic.

## 2. Harsh Working Conditions

Maritime work involves long hours, physically demanding tasks, and exposure to extreme weather conditions. Seafarers often face risks such as equipment malfunctions, hazardous cargo, and accidents at sea. Seafarers typically spend months at sea in these working conditions, which over time can cause fatigue, thus contributing to safety concerns for the seafarers.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA works to ensure standards regarding work and rest periods, safe working environments, and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to meet the needs of today's seafarers. And where these standards fall short, CMA strives to improve them. As an example, CMA became aware that female mariners were facing challenges finding PPE that fit properly since PPE was designed with male seafarers in mind. CMA partnered with other interested parties to support a change to the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC, 2006) that would rectify this deficiency. This change to MLC, 2006 was adopted and came into force last December.



### 3. Piracy and Security Threats

Piracy remains a significant threat in certain regions, including the Gulf of Guinea, the Strait of Malacca, and parts of the Indian Ocean. Seafarers are at risk of hijackings, kidnappings, and armed attacks, creating psychological distress and endangering their lives. Seafarers also face threats of attack in conflict zones like the Black Sea and Red Sea.

**How CMA Helps:** Security agencies, maritime organizations, and governments generally focus on developing stronger anti-piracy measures and protective policies for vessels and seafarers. CMA certainly supports these efforts; however, what CMA often highlights for policymakers is the need to take into account the mental health impacts these events have on seafarers and their families. CMA encourages them to create policies and procedures that help seafarers and their families deal with the mental health impacts of these traumatic events.

### 4. Limited Connectivity and Communication

Despite advancements in technology, many seafarers still experience limited access to communication with their families due to high satellite internet costs and restrictions on personal use of communication devices. This isolation impacts morale and mental health.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA advocates for improved connectivity at sea, championing policies that guarantee affordable and reliable communication for seafarers. Collaborating with shipping companies, CMA promotes the implementation of enhanced internet access and equitable usage policies. As part of these efforts, CMA joined forces with other seafarer welfare organizations to support an amendment to the MLC, 2006 aimed at expanding internet access for seafarers, enabling better connection with family and loved ones. This amendment was officially adopted and came into effect last December.

---

*Photo—opposite page: CMA Director Phil Schifflin, Esq., addresses attendees at the 2024 North American Maritime Ministry Association Conference in Newark, NJ.*

### 5. Criminalization of Seafarers

The criminalization of seafarers is a growing concern in the maritime industry, as crew members are increasingly being held legally responsible for incidents beyond their control, often facing harsh penalties, detainment, and even imprisonment. This trend has led to fears of unfair treatment, lack of due process, and the erosion of seafarers' rights.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA works to improve seafarers' rights regarding criminalization by engaging with international maritime organizations, raising awareness of unjust criminalization, and pushing for fair legal protections. Some recent examples of this advocacy work include CMA's support of new guidelines for the Fair Treatment of Seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes and CMA's plan to attend a June meeting hosted by various international organizations, which will focus exclusively on this issue.

### 6. Shore Leave Restrictions

Shore leave is essential for seafarers' well-being, providing them with a break from the confined environment of a vessel. However, stringent port regulations, security concerns, facility access issues, and bureaucratic hurdles often prevent seafarers from accessing shore leave.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA actively campaigns for fair shore leave policies and works with port authorities to ensure seafarers have access to shore-based welfare facilities. When CMA becomes aware of seafarers unfairly being denied shore leave, CMA engages with the appropriate entities to attempt to gain relief for impacted seafarers. In an effort to address this issue in a more holistic way, CMA worked with other members of the International Christian Maritime Association to raise the issue of shore leave challenges and helped draft amendments to MLC, 2006. As a result of these efforts, shore leave amendments to MLC, 2006 have been adopted at the recent International Labor Organization meeting in April of this year.

*Continued* →

## 7. Seafarer Abandonment

Seafarer abandonment is a challenging issue, with shipowners sometimes leaving crews stranded without wages, provisions, or proper repatriation arrangements. The number of seafarer abandonment cases reported to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) has gone up every year since 2020.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA offers direct legal support to seafarers facing abandonment by collaborating with international organizations such as the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), IMO, and ILO. Through these partnerships, CMA works to help resolve seafarer abandonment cases, also seeking resolution on corresponding issues of unpaid wages and obstacles to timely repatriation.

CMA has participated in multiple meetings at the IMO and the ILO to assist in creating guidelines that should help reduce the likelihood of abandonments occurring, providing guidance on how to better respond to abandonment cases when they do occur. CMA is also participating as a member of a task force that is looking at how to improve the policies applicable to a joint ILO/IMO database of abandonment cases. It is critical to have good data in order to glean a better understanding of the different causes of abandonment cases, which will hopefully help us identify ways of reducing these instances.

## 8. Repatriation Issues

Seafarer repatriation arrangements can sometimes be complicated even when seafarers have not been abandoned. These complications can be caused by shipowners not properly preparing for policies and procedures in place in certain countries, resulting in repatriation not being possible. Sometimes a shipowner encounters delays in locating a replacement seafarer, so they choose to hold up the seafarer's repatriation until after their replacement arrives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, air travel for seafarers became very difficult, requiring many to

remain on their vessels beyond the end of their contract, preventing them from being repatriated. Delays in repatriation, regardless of the cause, create uncertainty for seafarers who have fulfilled their contractual responsibilities and are ready to return home. These delays can cause mental health challenges for impacted seafarers.

**How CMA Helps:** CMA offers direct legal assistance to seafarers experiencing delays in repatriation and works closely with the ITF to help ensure their prompt return home. CMA also advocates for stronger repatriation protections within international frameworks such as the MLC, 2006. A proposed amendment to MLC, 2006 addressing repatriation rights is set to be reviewed at ILO meetings this year.

In response to challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, CMA has also pushed for safeguards to prevent seafarers from being stranded aboard vessels in future global emergencies. CMA recently participated in an IMO meeting where these proposed protections received broad support. While further progress is needed before adoption, momentum is building, and CMA remains committed to monitoring developments and advocating at every opportunity to strengthen these vital protections for seafarers.

## Conclusion

Seafaring is demanding and often dangerous work. Seafarers are human, and CMA understands that the cumulative stress they endure can take a serious toll on their mental and physical health. We are dedicated to strengthening and supporting the human element within the maritime industry. Our mission is to confront these challenges through legal advocacy, policy reform, and direct welfare support. CMA works tirelessly to ensure that these individuals powering global trade are not overlooked, but cared for, recognized, and protected. In an industry that depends on seafarers' unwavering focus, resilience, and dedication, CMA stands as a steadfast advocate for their rights and well-being.



# SCI's Kelly Butts Looks Back on Her CME Journey and Ahead to a New Role

As one of SCI's longest-tenured staff members, Kelly Butts began her journey with the organization in 1997—just months after the Center for Maritime Education (CME) first opened its doors in Paducah. Nearly three decades later, she now serves as Assistant Director of CME–Paducah, appointed last year, and remains energized about supporting mariners through CME's work. Reflecting on her new role, Kelly shared her enthusiasm for helping to lead, grow, and assist the Paducah team. With several new members recently joining, she's eager to build a fully staffed unit and embark on what she describes as an exciting new chapter.

Reflecting upon how things have changed since she started with SCI, Kelly said she can see the impact SCI has had on the area of mariner training. Years ago, training courses were often met with skepticism, considering that operating towboats was usually a skill learned through shadowing those with experience. However, now even the “old guard” is excited to come back to learn new material and handle new case studies because they see the value in it—they're improving themselves and the industry. Kelly notes: “Even if they've been to train 15 times or more, they're happy to learn more. And younger mariners who are just coming to grips with the job are eager to have all the training on offer. They see that CME can equip them with the skills to handle the responsibility safely.”

And the best part of her role? Kelly doesn't hesitate: “It's the people. I love interacting with the mariners and office personnel from the different companies we serve. Sometimes I meet new people, and sometimes I see familiar faces. Some have even become good friends. Every day and every class is

**“Even if they've been to train 15 times or more, they're happy to learn more. And younger mariners who are just coming to grips with the job are eager to have all the training on offer. They see that CME can equip them with the skills to handle the responsibility safely. ”**



**Kelly Butts**  
*Assistant Director,  
Center for Maritime Education–  
Paducah*

different, and it's being around the people that I enjoy.”

With her experience, expertise, and dedication to CME–Paducah, Kelly Butts is exceptionally well-suited for her role and remains committed to advancing SCI's mission, fostering excellence in mariner training, and supporting the needs of the maritime community.



# OUR PLACE IN THE PORT

Making the ISC Stronger Through Community Connection

By Matthew Morse, Esq. – Director, International Seafarers' Center

“For the body does not consist of one part, but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body...The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you.’ Nor can the head say to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’ On the contrary...”

1 Corinthians 12:14-15; 21-22

**T**he International Seafarers' Center (ISC), located in Port Newark, NJ, sits in the eye of a perpetual hurricane of commerce. From this place of stillness, it is our privilege to offer the invaluable intangibles of care and compassion to the international seafarers who enter our port every day—and, by necessary extension, to our entire Port Newark community as well.

Port Newark does not consist of any single part, but of many—composing one body from a dizzying array of stakeholders, all of whom are increasingly interconnected with SCI's seafarers in our increasingly interconnected world.

This means that for the ISC to lean even more fully into its mission to welcome strangers and meaningfully care for seafarers, we must also reinforce engagement with our community—a key component of the SCI strategic plan. It is through the strengthening of that community that SCI's core mission is bolstered in Port Newark and in other ports our Chaplains visit, places that thrive on trust and relationships.

This assertion is borne out in part by the ISC's 2024 performance metrics. In 2024, the ISC increased the number of seafarers and vessels visited, the number of transports provided, and expanded the geographical reach of SCI's mission. Credit for this significant accomplishment belongs firmly to the ISC's dedicated staff and dedicated Chaplains, who bring their hearts as well as their professional skills to work each day. However, credit should also be shared with our Port Newark and other port communities, and this must be recognized if the ISC wishes to continue meaningfully building upon its successes. The ISC cannot do its good work without the support and goodwill of these communities. We have been able to visit more vessels, transport more



individuals, and deepen our mission at ISC in no small part because of the care we show and the strengthening connections we are building with those communities.

Those alliances will continue to bear fruit in 2025 as the ISC assumes the role of landlord for longtime port community presence, Titan Cement. Additionally, the ISC will explore the establishment of a first-of-its-kind Employee Health and Occupational Medicine Center for the benefit of our seafarers and the entire port community, furthering SCI's mission as an organization and its strategic goals.

I joined SCI in 2024 because I had grown tired of a for-profit career as an in-house counsel, where what I was creating amounted to "value for my shareholders." In SCI, I saw an opportunity to be a part of creating something of infinitely greater value: the care and compassion manufactured from this place of stillness through the passion and dedication of SCI's staff and Chaplains. It is a privilege to work with them and facilitate their vital work.

I have been humbled in my time so far at SCI by the conversations I have held with seafarers from every part of the world—from Ukrainians suffering existential anxieties about the fate of their country and their families, to Filipinos struggling with marital and familial issues, to Indians handling mental health crises and economic uncertainties. I am not a minister, but I am a person of faith, and I view these interactions as sacred things.

The ports of the 21st century are increasingly busy and progressively mechanized spaces, where the demands of speed and efficiency can threaten to eclipse our humanity. In these environments, the work of the Seamen's Church Institute is more important than ever before. We exist in no small part to insist that the essential humanity of every seafarer cannot and must not be lost within the intensifying latticework of industry.

During my time with the ISC, I've come to understand that when we care for our community, the community, in turn, cares for us. This mutual support has enabled our Chaplains to access vessels more swiftly and be welcomed aboard with greater

**"When we extend the same dignity and compassion to those who work alongside our seafarers each day as we do to the seafarers themselves, we more fully embody the mission at the heart of the Seamen's Church Institute."**

**Matthew Morse, Esq.**  
*Director, SCI-International  
Seafarers' Center*



ease. It has also helped our team stay well-informed and better equipped to navigate the complexities of our environment—both logistically and relationally. As a nonprofit, SCI's ISC thrives on the investment and goodwill of our local partners, and the best way to nurture this support is by ensuring that every member of our port community feels valued, heard, and cared for. When we extend the same dignity and compassion to those who work alongside our seafarers each day as we do to the seafarers themselves, we more fully embody the mission at the heart of the Seamen's Church Institute. In other words, and to paraphrase the scripture that opens this piece: "The terminal operator cannot say to the seafarer, 'I do not need you.' On the contrary..."

From the terminal operators who guide vessels into port, to the ILA members who handle cargo, and the motor carriers and rail workers who move goods from Port Newark across the country—the entire port community plays a vital role. "The body does not consist of one part, but of many." While seafarers have always been and will remain the ISC's overriding priority, in the 21st century, both our seafarers and the International Seafarers' Center are inextricably linked to and dependent on the broader port community.

*Photo—opposite page: ISC Director Matthew Morse, Esq. with Chaplain James Kollin meeting a seafarer in Port Newark.*



# River Bell Awards Luncheon

Paducah, Kentucky – December 5, 2024

On December 5, the Seamen's Church Institute hosted the 2024 Annual River Bell Awards Luncheon in Paducah, KY, bringing together nearly 600 members of the maritime community. The event raised almost \$500,000 to support SCI's core mission areas: training, advocacy, chaplaincy, and crisis support. We extend our sincere gratitude to our guests, sponsors, and donors, and offer our congratulations to this year's distinguished honorees.

## Photos

**1. 2024 River Bell Award** (L to R): Mike Ellis, SCI Board of Trustees; **Robert M. (Bob) Blocker**, SVP, Dry Cargo Division, American Commercial Barge Line; The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, SCI President and Executive Director.

**2. 2024 River Legend Award** (L to R): Alison Phillips, Director of Communications, Parker Towing Company; **Charles A. Haun Jr.**, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors, Parker Towing Company; The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, SCI President and Executive Director.

**3. 2024 River Bell Distinguished Service Award** (L to R): John Roberts, President and CEO, Ingram Barge Company; **Matt Woodruff**, Vice President of Public & Government Affairs, Kirby Corporation; The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, SCI President and Executive Director.

**4. 2024 River Bell Lifesaving Award:** The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, SCI President and Executive Director (right), with the **Crew of Canal Barge Company's M/V Hallie M. Merrick**, recipient of the 2024 River Bell Lifesaving Award.

**5. 2024 River Bell Lifesaving Award:** Mary McCarthy (left), Director of Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility at Moran Towing Corporation, and The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, SCI President and Executive Director (right), with the **Crew of Blessey Marine's M/V Capt. Rodney Adams** (center), recipient of the 2024 River Bell Lifesaving Award.







# Maritime Bell Awards Luncheon

Houston, Texas – March 27, 2025

On March 27, 2025, the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) welcomed over 300 guests to its annual Maritime Bell Awards Luncheon at the Hilton Americas–Houston. This signature event honors the maritime community of Houston and the broader Gulf Coast region, celebrating leadership and service across the industry.

This year, SCI proudly presented two distinguished awards:

**John Roberts**, President and CEO of Ingram Marine Group, received the Maritime Bell Award for his outstanding leadership and dedication to the industry.

**Scott Glatter**, Training Specialist–Kirby Inland Marine, was honored with the Outstanding Trainer Award for his exceptional commitment to mariner education and safety.

"We look forward each year to gathering with our partners and friends from Houston and the Gulf Coast," said the Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, President and Executive Director of SCI.

"We're proud to recognize John Roberts and Scott Glatter, and we're deeply grateful to all who support SCI's mission."

Formerly known as the Maritime Training Benefit Luncheon, this year's event marked the debut of its new name: the Maritime Bell Awards Luncheon. The event raised \$275,000 to support SCI's wide-ranging programs, including chaplaincy, crisis response, mariner training, and advocacy.



Above (left to right): Mary Roberts; John Roberts, President & CEO, Ingram Marine Group; Aaron Barrett, Chief Operating Officer, Ingram Barge Company. Below (left to right): Jim Guidry, Executive Vice President of Vessel Operations, Kirby Inland Marine; Christian O'Neil, President & Chief Operating Officer, Kirby Corporation; Scott Glatter, Training Specialist, Kirby Inland Marine; The Rev. Mark Nestlehutt, President & Executive Director, The Seamen's Church Institute.





## Revisiting the JOSEPH CONRAD LIBRARY

By Stefan Dreisbach-Williams  
*SCI, Archivist*

It has been over a century since the death of Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, better known as Joseph Conrad, seafarer and author of often nautical tales such as *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *The Shadow Line*. His death came during the planning stages for an addition to SCI's most prominent building, 25 South Street. Among the amenities benefiting seafarers in the 25 South Street annex would be a library, which we named in honor of Conrad.

The critical chorus of activist seafarers on New York's waterfront rolled their eyes at this honor for "the officers' writer," but other seafarers were inspired by his example and his work, which helped bridge the divide between boat laborers and the public. Conrad's writing fostered empathy for the seafarer's condition and helped develop interest in SCI's activities.

The library drew the interest of a literary crowd that included the likes of Christopher Morley, Felix Riesenbergh, and Alan Villiers. Villiers is best known for sailing, documenting, and preserving the last great sailing ships beginning in the 1920s, including the iron-hulled full-rigged ship *Joseph Conrad* (ex-*Georg-Stage*). Villiers sailed the *Joseph Conrad* around the world and wrote three books about the experience,

including the beloved children's book *Joey Goes to Sea*, which is about one of the ship's cats (the other cat was named Conrad, of course).

The Conrad Library continued SCI's tradition of providing reading rooms for seafarers as an alternative to less edifying pastimes and as an opportunity for self-improvement and spiritual and/or professional development. The library shipped out towering bundles of books and periodicals with seafarers and ship visitors so seafarers could carry those library services with them at sea.

When SCI left 25 South Street for new quarters at 15 State Street in 1968, the library came along and continued its work. Our final Manhattan center at 241 Water Street featured a gallery devoted to Conrad. Among the artifacts was a bust of Conrad resembling a figurehead and a porthole from Conrad's last ship. Our archives include correspondence with Conrad's widow, Jessie.

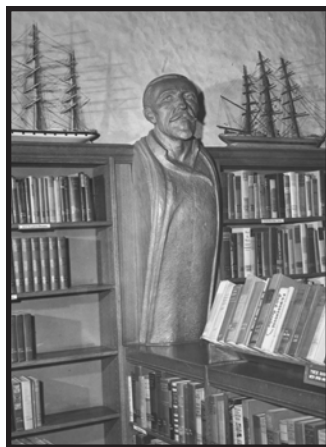
SCI's library services were part of a larger tradition of benevolent organizations putting books on boats that dates back to at least 1823. These included the American Seamen's Friend Society (ASFS), which provided library cases to ships with a mix of religious and popular literature. Initially, these were intended as a permanent collection for the ship to keep until they were worn out. Beginning in 1859 their services



“The landscape may have changed, but SCI’s commitment to mariner enrichment has not.”



Stefan Dreisbach-Williams  
SCI, Archivist



were organized more formally with a crew member charged with the library’s care and keeping. By the early 20th century, SCI began working closely with ASFS and notably with the American Merchant Marine Library Association (AMMLA) to collect book donations and distribute them to seafarers. The AMMLA’s efforts continue today as part of the United Seamen’s Services.

Modern digital technologies have all but eliminated the seafarer’s library. Today’s seafarers can download their

preferred media over the WiFi at our International Seafarers’ Center. SCI education programs provide inland mariners with downloadable courses and online training modules to promote career advancement. The landscape may have changed, but SCI’s commitment to mariner enrichment has not.

For more images of SCI’s Joseph Conrad Library, visit [seamenschurch.org/conrad](https://seamenschurch.org/conrad)

## Christmas at Sea

### A Lifeline of Warmth and Connection

Christmas at Sea is one of the Seamen’s Church Institute’s most cherished programs, embodying the spirit of generosity, dedication, and community. Established in 1898, CAS serves as a meaningful bridge between SCI, maritime companies, Chaplains, and the mariners and seafarers we serve. More than just a warm hat or thoughtful gift, this initiative ensures those spending the holidays at sea feel seen, valued, and remembered.

At the heart of CAS are more than 1,000 volunteers—skilled fiber artists who knit and crochet thousands of garments, others who craft beautifully sewn ditty bags, and countless individuals who contribute handwritten holiday cards, toiletries, and nonperishable treats. In 2024, an extraordinary 27,833 items were donated, including 22,942 garments and 4,891 ditty bags, created by 780 individual volunteers and 150 groups.

Each December and January, SCI’s Ministry on the River Chaplains deliver these heartfelt gifts to domestic maritime companies along U.S. inland waterways and the Gulf Coast, while Port Newark Chaplains distribute “Santa Sacks” to seafarers at the Port of New York and New Jersey. Many seasoned mariners still wear the gifts they received early in their careers—proof of the program’s lasting impact.

This vital work is made possible by the compassion of SCI’s volunteers, staff, Trustees, donors, and sponsors.

Learn more at [seamenschurch.org/cas](https://seamenschurch.org/cas) or join the CAS community on Facebook in the group “Untangled.”



# JOHN ROBERTS

President and CEO,  
Ingram Marine Group



## Who were some important mentors or role models for you?

My grandfather, Archie Roberts, taught me so many life lessons, showed kindness to everyone, and had such a wonderful outlook on work, life, and family love. My father, Doug Roberts, who was my first mentor in this industry, showed me what being tough but fair meant, and reinforced my grandfather's life lessons. My brother, Scott Roberts, is my ultimate hero. Red Griffin saw something in me and guided me towards attaining a college education, with a sales career in this industry as incentive. He truly put my path in an upward-trending direction. Orrin Ingram was a great example to me, reinforcing my own belief in personal integrity and accountability, doing the right thing even when no one is looking. Dennis Pasentine demonstrated love and loyalty to those we lead. I have had so many mentors and role models, but these gentlemen are rooted in who I am today and how I lead. I would have to say that the biggest influence in my life, though, is my wife. The love of my life, Mary, who has shown me what support, trust, security, love, and what home means.

## Do you remember your first leadership role?

I do. I was promoted to Personnel Manager with Coastal Towing in 1984 at the ripe old age of 20! It was my job to recruit and hire all of our mariners, assign them to their vessels, and manage their crew changes, payroll, benefits, and training.



## How has your view of leadership evolved over time?

I think I have evolved from a culture of “do as I say” and trying to make all decisions, to a leader who promotes decision-making at the job level with support, training, and information. I have been told that I am a teacher, and that is a compliment that fills my heart because I love to share lessons learned and knowledge earned through outcomes. I don't take myself so seriously anymore, but I am very serious about what we do and how we accomplish things together.

## What is your view on the impact of organizational culture on individual and company performance?

My view is that culture is everything. Our company performance is a direct reflection of our individual associates buying into who we are, which is defined by Integrity, Accountability, Empowerment, and Drive. These pillars are surrounded by our common goal of Zero Harm to anyone, any equipment, property, and environment, including cyberspace and security.



### **What advice would you give someone who is beginning a career in the maritime industry?**

Listen, watch, learn, and lean into the culture that fits you and who you are. Finding that "birds of a feather" sense of belonging is a strong foundation for a successful career.

### **How do you hire?**

I believe in prioritizing the right fit, sometimes even before defining the job description. Throughout my career, I have hired individuals based on their alignment and then tailored the role to match their strengths. The cultural aspect plays a significant role in this approach. At the core of our hiring process, we look for candidates who demonstrate honesty, integrity, accountability, and drive, in addition to meeting the specific qualifications for the role. Sound familiar? To me, cultural fit is essential.

### **What is the role of innovation in your work?**

Everything. I believe that just because we have been doing things a certain way does not mean we need to continue doing them that way if a better approach is found. Innovation is key, whether through technology or process. I believe in constantly challenging the status quo to see if we can improve ourselves, our company, and beyond.

### **What inspires you?**

People. I love watching people hit their stride and find that spark. You can watch folks do great work, and they are awesome associates, and then they find that right spot for them, and bam! It's like fireworks, as they crash through the boundaries of their own self-imposed goals. That's what inspires me! It is all about the people.

### **Is there something else you'd like to say?**

I am a Christian and not shy about acknowledging that God has blessed me and my family for so many years through this industry. From growing up with a dad who supported our family by working in this industry to my own personal journey of 45 years within it, it has been an incredible, continuous lesson—one from which I learn something new each day.

I watch and admire so many, whether working with me at Ingram or elsewhere, as they take care of so many through what we do. I love thinking about the connections, the lives, the stories, and the economic impact of our work. Everyone feels the effects of what we do, and I hope we continue to improve at sharing our story. It is incredible, and I believe our industry's best days are yet to come because I am so inspired by those just beginning their journey.

# **SEE YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN!**

## **JOIN US FOR THE 2025 SCI MOUNTAIN CHALLENGE**



**SCIMOUNTAINCHALLENGE.ORG**



**SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE**  
**MOUNTAIN CHALLENGE**  
**September 25 to 28, 2025**  
**SUNDAY RIVER, MAINE**



50 Broadway, 26<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10004

SEAMENSCHURCH.ORG

follow us  
online



## ADOPT A CREW

A new volunteer initiative from the  
Seamen's Church Institute

This year, SCI is excited to offer a new volunteer opportunity! We are inviting volunteers to assemble individual care packages that SCI Chaplains will deliver to vessels. Care packages include items that are difficult for mariners to obtain and will remind them that their vital work is seen and appreciated. We have prepared a "How To" guide containing a list of items to purchase along with suggestions on how to make this an event at your worksite.

**Adopt a Crew** is the perfect project for any size group. It is an activity that can be accomplished from any location, at any time. For more details, please contact Joanne Bartosik, Senior Manager of Development & Christmas at Sea by email: [jbartosik@seamenschurch.org](mailto:jbartosik@seamenschurch.org) or phone: 973.589.5828.

