



125
Christmas at Sea
THE SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE



THE KNIT

before Christmas

SUMMER 2023

From the
PRESIDENT'S DESK



This has been quite the year for Christmas at Sea. Our Winter 2023 issue of *The Knit Before Christmas* highlighted the 125th anniversary of the Seamen's Church Institute's beloved and iconic program. Now, two-thirds of the way through this celebratory year, we are fresh from honoring Christmas at Sea (CAS)—with its numerous knitters, crocheters, sewers, and other volunteers—during our 45th Annual Silver Bell Awards Dinner held in June in Manhattan.

The event was a joyous occasion, and our 500 guests were moved by the 125th-anniversary tribute video, thanking our CAS volunteers with warm and generous applause.

It is often difficult to grasp just how long Christmas at Sea has carried out its work and ministry. Beginning in 1898 during the Spanish-American War, the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) has provided handmade knitted and crocheted gifts of hats, scarves, and other items to merchant mariners during times of war and times of peace ever since. Given the prodigious efforts of our volunteers, SCI has likely gifted more than one million CAS items during the past 125 years.

I first learned of SCI's work while in divinity school in the mid-1990s, but I did not know about the Christmas at Sea program until a few years ago, while discussing SCI with one of my neighbors who captained a vessel with Moran Towing. Jack described being away from home for the first time at Christmas during the early 1970s and receiving a CAS ditty bag

I am often struck by the strong bonds that mariners and seafarers have with SCI through our Christmas at Sea program.

containing a hat, gloves, sewing kit, and toiletries. Forty-five years later, Jack still has the ditty bag and the sewing kit and, more importantly, knows first-hand the value and meaning of SCI's mission to address the material, physical, mental, and spiritual needs of mariners.

More recently, during the christening of SUNY Maritime's new training ship, the NSMV EMPIRE STATE, the second mate, Craig, told me that he had been sailing commercially at Christmastime and was aboard ship when SCI was delivering its Santa Sacks full of CAS ditty bags. He said every crew member was thrilled to receive the gifts. When I told him that this year marked the 125th anniversary of CAS, he just flashed a big smile, shook his head, and said, "That's amazing."

It's true. Christmas at Sea is amazing—for its longevity, its massive scale, its logistical demands, and for the thousand-plus volunteers who make it happen every year! And Christmas at Sea depends on *you*, our amazing volunteers who create the gifted items, sew the ditty bags, and pack everything up, as well as our dedicated staff who oversee the program and deliver the gifts to crews aboard vessels from Thanksgiving through Christmastide.

It also depends on our many donors who contribute financially to SCI, underwriting our mission-driven work to improve the lives of domestic mariners and international seafarers. We could not do it without your help and support. Thank you!

Faithfully,

The Reverend Mark S. Nestlehatt
President & Executive Director

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You, the volunteers, and the sponsors who underwrite our programs, make Christmas at Sea possible.

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THE KNIT
BEFORE CHRISTMAS

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The wonderful thing about Christmas at Sea (CAS) turning 125 years old is that we get to celebrate the anniversary all year long.



KNIT NOTES

CAS's quasiquintennial (I admit—I had to look that up) launched with the publication of our expanded winter issue of *The Knit Before Christmas*, which can be found on the Media and Publications page of seamenschurch.org. We hoped the commemorative magazine would capture the development of the program over the years, and from all the positive feedback, I'm happy to say it hit the mark.

In this summer edition, we continue where we left off by reporting on all the news and activities that, up to now, have made this year special. Our new logo is prominently displayed on all our printed materials. This modern interpretation of our former logo captures the essence of the program, bringing Christmas to mariners where they are: on the water.

In an SCI Pastoral Activity Report, Chaplain James Kollin recounts how SCI responded when a tragic fire recently occurred aboard a vessel docked in Port Newark, supporting the crew in their hour of need.

I enjoyed visiting members of CloseKnit in Staten Island. This is something I have wanted to do since before the pandemic hit. CloseKnit is one of our most dedicated groups and it is the Noble Maritime Collection's longest-running public program.

The highlight of the year has been the recognition of Christmas at Sea at SCI's 45th annual Silver Bell Awards Dinner in June. As part of the festivities, the evening's program featured a special CAS video, which you can view by way of a QR code on the opposite page.

Throughout all of this exciting commemorative year, we have never lost sight that Christmas at Sea belongs to you, our volunteers, and our generous supporters. I personally feel very privileged to be involved. Thank you for all you do, and happy 125th anniversary!

With gratitude,
Joanne Bartosik

Senior Manager of Development
& Christmas at Sea



Left: Attendees gather to watch the annual "Blessing of the Fleet" on the Hudson river, before the Silver Bell Awards Dinner begins.

Christmas at Sea Honored at SCI's Annual Silver Bell Awards Dinner

On June 8, 2023, the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) welcomed maritime leaders and supporters for its 45th Annual Silver Bell Awards Dinner. This year, the event honored two distinguished individuals who demonstrated exceptional leadership and dedication within their respective fields. Robert P. Burke, CEO and Principal of Ridgebury Tankers, received the Silver Bell Award. The Rt. Rev. Andrew ML Dietsche, XVI Episcopal Bishop of New York, received the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Additionally, in its 125th year, Christmas at Sea was recognized, and a special video was shown detailing the work of the program and the dedication of the volunteers and staff who make it all happen.

You can watch the video by following the link in this QR code (hold up your smartphone's camera to the code, and click the link that pops up):



SCI Assists Seafarers After Ship Fire

by Chaplain James Kollin

SCI actively assisted the 28 seafarers of the *Grande Costa D'Avario*, the ship that caught fire in Port Newark on July 5. This tragic incident, which resulted in the loss of two firefighters' lives, made national headlines. SCI was on the scene. Along with fellow Port Newark Chaplain Michelle McWilliams, I met with the crew to provide practical support and to help them process their trauma and loss by offering critical incident stress management intervention and pastoral care.

When the fire broke out, the crew tried to fight it with their own equipment, but they were ordered by the Captain to abandon ship when it escalated out of control. Most of their personal belongings, except for their cellphones and passports, were left behind. Later, the crew was transported to a nearby hotel; only those who had managed to bring their visa papers could leave the premises.

During their stay, we fulfilled the seafarers' requests for essentials. CAS provided toothpaste, toothbrushes, and other personal healthcare items. Additionally, thanks to the "SOS Fund For Seafarers," an emergency fund established by SCI during the COVID-19 pandemic and sustained by the generosity of our donors, we were able to purchase clothing, shoes, backpacks, and duffle bags for the crew.

During one of our recent visits to the hotel, we had the opportunity to attend a meeting with the seafarers and the Philippine Labor Attaché based in Washington, DC. The main objective of this meeting was to provide immediate financial aid and to advocate for the seafarers' expected claims for their declared losses and damages resulting from the fire.

During the meeting, I had the chance to share some insights into the counseling sessions we conducted with the crew



members and provided a brief overview of the services SCI offers. The Philippine Labor Attaché and the seafarers were highly appreciative of SCI's dedication to assisting seafarers in times of need.

The crew expressed their deep gratitude to SCI for the prompt and continuous support they received from day one of the fire. From talking to them in the evacuation room at the Port Authority building to providing essential items at the hotel, SCI Chaplains were there every step of the way.

That day, I was told that seven crew were to fly home, some would return home at a later date, and others would continue to work on the ship for the time being. SCI, as always, is there for mariners on their worst days, their best days, and every day in between.



Where There's a Will, There's a Way

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 to navigate the future.

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.

A charitable bequest in your will is one of the easiest and most flexible ways to build a legacy.

For information about making a bequest, please contact SCI's Director of Development, **Amy Mugavero**, at **212.349.9090**, or email **amugavero@seamenschurch.org**.



UPS Shipping Labels for \$20

Give Back Box (GBB) is a nonprofit organization offering affordable shipping rates to donors supporting their favorite charities.

Christmas at Sea is a participating GBB charity. Through GBB, you can purchase and print a UPS shipping label online for \$20 using a major credit card or PayPal.

There are some restrictions. The maximum weight of the package is limited to 70 lbs., and the combined length and girth of a package (the length of its longest side plus the distance around the

thickest part) may not exceed 108 inches.

With the price of postage continually increasing, this may be an option that works for you. When using GBB, please remember to include your contact information inside the box.

For more information about GBB, visit **givebackbox.com**.





“The museum is the perfect place to meet.”

The Noble Maritime Collection is a museum with an emphasis on the work of artist/lithographer/sailor, John A. Noble (1913–1983). Through its collections, exhibits, and programs, the museum celebrates the traditions of the working waterfront and operates a maritime study center. Most importantly for us, it is also the home of CloseKnit, the museum’s longest-running public program, open to knitters, and more recently crocheters, of all levels. CloseKnit has been a strong supporter of Christmas at Sea since its inception 20 years ago.

CloseKnit members gather at the museum on the first Thursday of every month. The dynamics of the group have naturally changed over the years, but the dedication and commitment continue to shine through, even during the difficult COVID years, when they wore masks, practiced safe distancing, and went without snacks.

I had the pleasure of visiting CloseKnit on a very hot day in July where I met and mingled with Adela, Gale (via video chat), Irene, Judy, Marie, and Susan over knitting, snacks, and stories.

“The atmosphere of the museum is the perfect place to meet,” Judy shared, acknowledging the link between knitting and the sea. She elaborated by reflecting on the deep connection between the museum and the neighborhood. Snug Harbor is located a stone’s throw away from “Tugboat Alley,” a nine-mile strip of tugboat companies, and other maritime businesses. The waterfront has deep roots within the community. Ciro Galeno, Jr., Executive Director of the Noble Maritime Collection, commented in an issue of *Hold Fast!*, the museum’s newsletter, that “the museum was built by the community for the community.”

CloseKnit members are friends, neighbors, and fiber art enthusiasts. Their camaraderie is evident as I listen to their tales of knitting triumphs and woes, including frogging, a term that describes the act of undoing a project. Knitting is very much a part of their lives, even outside the group.

The conversation about textiles in 90-degree weather made me curious about working with yarn during the hottest months of the year, but stoically, CloseKnit does not miss a beat. Marie offered her advice for knitting in the summer heat: she uses wooden needles so her hands do not sweat, which is a tip I will remember.

From my vantage point at the back of the air-conditioned classroom, I could see baskets of colorful yarn. The museum appreciates donations of yarn, which is given to the members of CloseKnit. The museum generously covers the cost of postage to send donations to Port Newark.

I asked the CloseKnit group, many of whom have been with the program since its inception, what keeps them coming

back, month after month. According to Gale, that is an easy question to answer: “We enjoy doing things for other people.”

CloseKnit celebrates its 20th anniversary in September. On behalf of SCI and Christmas at Sea: congratulations, and here’s to many more!



Let’s hear it for the ladies who knit, pictured here in the Maurice K. Shaw Navigation Classroom, a replica of an early 20th century tugboat wheelhouse.

Photo credit: Zachariah E. Bartosik

Spotlight on CloseKnit at the Noble Maritime Collection

by Joanne Bartosik

Situated along the North Shore of Staten Island, New York, is Snug Harbor. This 83-acre park was founded in the 18th century by Robert Richard Randall, the heir to a family shipping fortune, who died in 1801. His will, drafted by Alexander Hamilton, required that the family fortune and estate be used to build and operate a retirement home for “aged, decrepit, and worn-out sailors.” The Sailor’s Snug Harbor, which opened in 1833, is one of the first retirement homes established in the United States.

The grounds and buildings are operated by Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden, a nonprofit, Smithsonian-affiliated organization. Snug Harbor is now a major cultural and entertainment destination. It is home to a unique and historic landscape, which includes a music hall, botanical gardens, a center for contemporary art, an artist residency program, a music conservatory, and several museums, including the Noble Maritime Collection.

Full Speed Ahead, Christmas at Sea 2023

by Joanne Bartosik

The summer issue of *The Knit Before Christmas* traditionally kicks off the start of our gift-giving season. Fiber artists, who may temporarily put down their needles and hooks during the heat of the summer, find renewed interest in crafting as temperatures drop. We receive a steady number of donations all year long; however, that number spikes significantly in the fall. We are prepared and would like to help by answering any questions you may have.

For your convenience, there are resources available online on our website: seamenschurch.org/programs-services/christmas-at-sea. On the patterns and publications section, you can download for free all our specially-designed Christmas at Sea patterns. We have updated this section to include photographs, making it easier to identify the exact pattern you are looking for, and we've added the skill level for each pattern.

You will also find a "frequently asked questions" section on our website where we cover an array of topics including, but not limited to, guidelines about color and fiber, gift tags, when and where to mail your donations, and how to become involved if you are not a fiber artist.

Our most comprehensive resource guide is the CAS Handbook. This digital publication was developed under the guidance and direction of a Master Knitter and Certified Technical Editor, and a Certified Master Crocheter, with input from the CAS Angels, our volunteer group of expert knitters and crocheters who are uniquely familiar and experienced with our patterns.

For guidance from fellow Christmas at Sea volunteers you can turn to Untangled, our members-only Facebook page (facebook.com/groups/untangled.sci) or the Christmas at Sea group on Ravelry.com. These online communities are visited by individuals, like you, who share a love of the craft and align with our mission of serving mariners.

In addition to the information available online, you are always welcome to reach out to me. Please do not hesitate to phone or email: [973.589.5828](tel:973.589.5828), jbartosik@seamenschurch.org.

SCI has been distributing gifts to mariners at Christmas-time since 1898. We owe our thanks and gratitude to you, our volunteers and supporters, for the success and longevity of Christmas at Sea. Happy 125th anniversary!



Far left: CAS garments are welcome as mariners work on barges on the U.S. inland river system in all weathers. *Left:* Chaplains Tom Rhoades and David Shirk talk with an inland river mariner aboard his vessel. *Below:* International seafarers at Port Newark are delighted to be given CAS gifts by SCI Chaplain Michelle McWilliams.





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Follow us online: seamenschurch.org



Untangled creates connections

Connections are forged when you ask for help and receive it, along with support, perspective, advice, and validation. You can find all that and more in Untangled: Christmas at Sea's members-only Facebook group.

Untangled is an international community of more than 600 people who share a love of knitting, crocheting, and sewing, as well as allies who support SCI's mission of bringing joy to mariners at Christmastime.

Photographs of finished projects are inspiring; pattern tips and tricks are invaluable to fiber artists at every skill level. Personal stories from SCI's chaplains serve as a poignant reminder as to why we do what we do.

Experience Untangled for yourself.

Visit facebook.com/groups/untangled.sci

