The Year in Review

We have always been mission-driven. We don't spend very much money on support services (e.g. administration and fundraising) – less than 17%, and we're careful not to build monuments to mission greatness. We just do the mission – pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer for seafarers, immigrants and other sojourners.

Sometimes along the mission road, however, one needs to look at infrastructure, and 2014 has begun a period of tending to the bricks and mortar that support the mission.

First, our Guesthouse celebrated its 50th anniversary with the building's original elevators whose speed and reliability hadn't improved with age and for which replacement parts were nearly non-existent. So last year we took a leap of faith and signed a contract for two new elevators. Elevators are not inexpensive, but they're also not optional in a thirteen story building.

Second, we've developed a five-year capital improvement plan for the 84 guestrooms, including new lighting fixtures, new furniture, new guestroom lock systems and new carpeting (made possible through a significant grant from the Snug Harbor Trust).

Third, we've modernized the Guesthouse's online booking systems and have developed links with several booking engines.

How does 2014's emphasis on infrastructure relate to our being mission-driven? An answer may be found in Ephesians 4:7-16. “To each of us grace has been given . . . some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith . . .”

We strive to be Harbor of Hospitality for all the seafarers who arrive in our ports, for all the immigrants who arrive at our shores and for all people who visit our Guesthouse. How do we show hospitality? We offer some amenities of course and an elevator to access them. The critical piece of infrastructure, however, is our staff of dedicated people, for whom I am so very grateful.

Blessings,

Marsh Luther Drege

Our Guesthouse offers temporary lodging for seafarers, immigrants, domestic violence survivors and New Yorkers displaced from their homes by fire, gas leaks and crane topplings.

Did you know, however, that our Guesthouse also accommodates church gatherings and civic groups traveling to New York City in connection with their missions and needing safe, affordable lodging. By staying here, you help to support our mission to seafarers, immigrants and other displaced persons.

One of our guests, Allen B. wrote, “This place now gets 5 stars. I have stayed here numerous times in the past 4-5 years. Clean, small basic rooms at a great price.” So, stay here. Sleep well by doing good.
Who are We?
Seafarers International House is a mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, but the people we serve are multi-national and multi-faith.

What do We Do?
In addition to Guesthouse lodging, our seven port chaplains provide pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer to seafarers in six ports on the eastern seaboard. Our social work intern provides social assistance and advice to seafarers in the Guesthouse and in the union hall in Jersey City, NJ, as well as social assistance to immigrants. Our corp of volunteers regularly visit non-criminal immigrants imprisoned in private detention centers.

Why is It Important?
Because seafarers operate the ships that bring us “90% of everything we own, wear, use and consume” – over $230 billion annually in the ports served by Seafarers International House alone. While seafarers are vital to our lives, their well-being goes by largely unnoticed. They spend months at a time aboard ship traversing the world’s oceans in virtually total isolation, with only brief respite in ports of call to call or skype overseas to their families and only very limited opportunities to get off their ships and enjoy a few hours of shore leave.

For a nation built on the energies and talents of immigrants, the United States today treats the most needy immigrants – asylum seekers – abominably. Stoked by xenophobia and a homeland security moral paralysis, asylum seekers are immediately imprisoned upon arrival to this country. They languish in private prisons while their claims for asylum are slowly processed. Our Government pays the private prison operators handsomely for warehousing people as cheaply as possible with no privacy and only very limited social contacts.

For lonely seafarers, a visit from the port chaplain and the experience of being treated as a human being rather than just expendable labor or a risk to port security is priceless. For asylum seeker finally released from prison, the intervention of a social worker to assist with employment, housing and other acculturation needs, is priceless. For those asylum seekers and other immigrants still locked up in a detention center, a visit from one or more of our Mission Volunteers, is priceless.

For our port chaplains, our social workers, and our volunteers, the opportunity to interact with and assist the seafarers and immigrants who might otherwise fall between the cracks in humanity, is very simply a witness to their faith and compassion. And for all of you who assemble Christmas-at-Sea satchels and bake cookies or support Seafarers International House with your donations, we are profoundly grateful.

Meet our Port Chaplains and Social Work Intern

Ruth Setaro
Port in Connecticut/Rhode Island

Rev. Arnd Braun-Storck
Port of New York/New Jersey

Rev. Luisito Destreze
Port of New York/New Jersey

Sigrid Erickson
Port of New York/New Jersey

Rev. William C. Fensterer
Port of New York/New Jersey

Rev. William M. Rex
Port of Philadelphia

Rev. Gerry F. Rickel
Port in Connecticut

Gabrielle Rizzuto
Social Work Intern