

The Baltimore International Seafarers' Center

A Ministry of Caring



Bishop Wolfgang Herz-Lane Right, the bishop the Delaware-Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Rev. Gerry Rickel, an ELCA pastor, discuss the ministry that Pastor Rickel serves as one of the chaplains in the Port of Baltimore.

Pastor Rickel is a Pastor in the Delaware-Maryland Lutheran Synod who is working half-time as a port chaplain and half time as chaplain for Maryland's Correctional system. Pastor Rickel's port position is funded by the Seafarers and International House of New York City.)

Pastor Rickel sees three similarities between the clientele of his two ministries. Both the prisoners

and the seafarers are separated from their families, they suffer from a tremendous sense of isolation, and they have a great degree of loneliness. Many seafarers are away from their families 10 months of the year. They accept this condition as part of the job, a job which has helped them to educate their children to become teachers and doctors. But, nevertheless, being away is a hardship. To society they are often invisible yet they help deliver 70% of the food and goods on which our society depends.

Chaplains can escort visiting crews from their ship to the terminal gate. (Since 9/11 the crew members cannot leave unescorted.) The chaplain often takes them shopping or visiting the Inner Harbor.

Congregations also get involved with this ministry – many congregations collect toiletries, warm socks, gloves, and hats, and other items and prepare Christmas-at-sea boxes. The boxes are distributed to visiting crews at Christmastime. A Swedish captain once expressed how meaningful these gift boxes were to the crew – he said that it shows them how people do truly care for them.

Bishop Herz-Lane concluded with a word of thanks to all of the congregations that have assisted in this important ministry.

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