

THE
KNIT
BEFORE CHRISTMAS
Winter 2022



From the PRESIDENT'S DESK

On Christmas Day, after the presents have been opened, a family member (usually me) compiles a list of the gifts we received that require a note of thanks. The list usually runs well into double digits, but the point is not the number of gifts, so much as making sure that the gifts are properly acknowledged.

The numbers for Christmas at Sea (CAS) are mind-boggling: over 26,000 handmade garments and ditty bags, created by more than a thousand volunteers. But it is not just about the numbers, as we often hear from the men and women who receive these gifts.

In mid-December of last year, SCI received a thank-you email from a captain of a vessel that reached us via a rather circuitous route. Captain James S., a master on a towboat out of Houston, TX, sent the following message:


"Recently your church donated to the Seamen's Church hand knitted caps and scarves and my boat was lucky enough to receive a few. They are very nice. I don't know who to thank and was hoping u could pass on our thanks to the right people. Merry Christmas and God Bless."

The hand-knitted caps and scarves Captain James referenced were made by members of the needlework group at St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley, an Episcopal parish in Malvern, PA. Seeing the personalized tag from St. Peter's, Captain James googled the church and sent an email to the church's Deacon. Deacon Jeff Moretzsohn forwarded the email to the head of the

needlework group, Brenda Grove, as well as to my wife, Abigail, who is the Rector of St. Peter's. She forwarded the email to me, and I forwarded Captain James's email to Joanne Bartosik. After several forwarded emails, these gifts were acknowledged.

I also emailed Captain James to share the path these gifts took to arrive on his vessel. Knitters from an Episcopal church in southeastern Pennsylvania made and then mailed them to our center in Port Newark, NJ, to be cataloged and recorded. The items were then sent to San Jacinto College in La Porte, TX, for a port packing event that produced crew boxes for vessels in the region. And SCI chaplains delivered this CAS box to his port captain who sent it on to Captain James and his crew.

On behalf of my SCI colleagues and board, I want to thank all of you who lovingly produced these gifts, volunteered for packing days, and supported CAS financially in this year-round mission. Once again, our success and our service depend on you.

Faithfully,


The Reverend Mark S. Nestlehu
President & Executive Director

The Seamen's Church Institute is the largest and most comprehensive mariners' service organization in North America. SCI serves as a voluntary, ecumenical agency affiliated with the Episcopal Church. Founded in 1834, SCI affirms a basic precept of faith communities: welcoming the stranger, regardless of faith or background.

Bruce G. Paulsen, Esq.
Chairman, Board of Trustees

The Rev. Mark S. Nestlehu
President & Executive Director



KNIT NOTES

Christmas at Sea had a remarkable year. Our annual Christmas at Sea by the Numbers gives you a broad brushstroke of the year; how many donations we received, where the donations originated, and how many volunteers participated. Twenty-six thousand, three hundred and seventy-eight (26,378) donations is an enormous achievement, **but numbers alone don't measure the success of the program.**

This year, for the first time, many of our former student volunteers from San Jacinto College in La Porte, TX, received their very own CAS gift. It is striking to see how the CAS program impacts individuals at different stages in their maritime career.

During Port Packing Week, a volunteer arrived in Port Newark wearing a Seafarer's scarf he received as a gift in 1976. It was in excellent condition!

We have volunteer knitters, crocheters, and ditty bag makers who have been doing this for over 25 years, passing along the tradition to their daughters and granddaughters.

Mariners repeatedly tell us that a CAS gift is often the only gift they receive during the holidays. Crews take the time to drop us a note of thanks along with photographs.

Letters from volunteers are filled with heartfelt messages about what CAS means to them. I save every letter.

By saying CAS had another outstanding year, we consider more than the numbers. This program touches peoples' lives in ways that cannot always be quantified as data points. This issue of *The Knit Before Christmas* will give you a behind-the-scenes glimpse into how we do what we do, the unsung heroes who make this happen, and the people we serve.

Thank you for being a part of CAS 2021. I look forward to all the amazing successes we can achieve together in 2022.

With gratitude,



Joanne Bartosik
Senior Manager of Development
& Christmas at Sea



THE KNIT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

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Seamenschurch.org | Christmas at Sea: 973.589.5828

FROM VOLUNTEER TO MARINER: How Gifts Are Packed and Prepared for Distribution



Autumn is the start of sweater weather, pumpkin spice everything, and shelves of Halloween candy. For Christmas at Sea, autumn marks the beginning of our packing season. Hundreds of volunteers within driving distance of Port Newark, NJ, and those residing along our U.S. inland waterways gather to fill drawstring cloth ditty bags and nine-inch decorated cube boxes with knits, crochets, Christmas cards, nonperishable snacks, and toiletries.

Packing Week. What was originally conceived as a one-day extravaganza has transitioned into a weeklong event, initially due to social distancing measures, then because we found we could accommodate additional teams.

What makes Port Packing Week slightly different from other packing events is that we enlist the help of our port neighbors. These volunteers work in the shipping, logistics, and maritime industries. This past November, over the course of one week, we had 9 teams, a total



We pack a little differently for international seafarers



...we cannot get them home for Christmas, but we can make them feel at home.

than we do for U.S. mariners; but the intent is identical – to make sure men and women in the maritime industry know they are appreciated. As we often say, we cannot get them home for Christmas, but we can make them feel at home.

of 52 individuals, pack 3,588 ditty bags. We are very grateful to these volunteers and would like to give them a shout-out!

- APM Terminals
- Council on Port Performance - Workforce Development Implementation Team
- East Coast Warehouse & Distribution Corp.



One of our most anticipated events is Port



- Genco Shipping
- Maher Terminals
- ONE - Ocean Network Express
- Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
- PNCT - Port Newark Container Terminal
- WISTA - Women's International Shipping & Trading Association, Connecticut Chapter

The combined efforts of Port Packing Week participants along with community and church groups, including a team of SUNY Maritime cadets and faculty, resulted in 417 Santa Sacks with 5,004 fully loaded ditty bags.

Concurrently, while packing was taking place in Port Newark for international seafarers, there were hundreds more volunteers preparing gift boxes for U.S. mariners. Thanks to the efforts of The Rev. Kempton D. Baldrige, Senior Chaplain, SCI distributed 4,077 knits and crochets to 516 vessels from 30 shipping companies. The Rev. Thomas Rhoades, Chaplain for the Lower Mississippi, Gulf and Houston Ship Channel, supplied gifts to 9,859 mariners on 1,478 vessels from 79 shipping companies.



continued



For a broader understanding of how Christmas at Sea gift boxes for river mariners are prepared and delivered, consider the enormous volume of territory that inland waterways cover. We have packing groups stretching from Cleveland and Pittsburgh to Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Chaplains Baldrige and Rhoades reach out to shipping companies to determine how many vessels are running over Christmas. Once we know how many gift boxes we will need, we identify community and church

groups interested in packing, and enlist the help of students to make Christmas cards. The knits and crochets, along with boxes, are then shipped from Port Newark to the packing sites.

At the packing locations, boxes are assembled. We track gifts by affixing labels to the boxes with the name of the shipping company, the number of knits/crochets needed, and the total number of vessels. The garments are counted and placed in the boxes, along with Christmas cards. Boxes are sealed and sorted according to company, then loaded into trailers and other vehicles, and dropped off at locations designated by each company.

Shipping companies handle deliveries differently. One company might opt to send them with port captains, while others prefer to store them in their warehouses and distribute them along with supplies. Some Gulf companies will wait for crew changes. Regardless of the route, the boxes all make it to their destinations by Christmas. ❄️

SCI'S SENIOR CHAPLAIN,
the Rev. Kempton D. Baldrige,
AKA "Chaps" has announced his retirement for early 2022. Chaplain Baldrige has left an indelible mark on everyone he has met and worked with over the past 11½ years.

All of us at SCI wish him good luck and bon voyage on his next adventure.



CHRISTMAS AT SEA 2021 BY THE NUMBERS

TOP 3 VOLUNTEERS:

(Number of knits/crochets and ditty bags)

Helga K/NC.....	1,235
Beth H/IN.....	395
Sheila L/MI.....	171

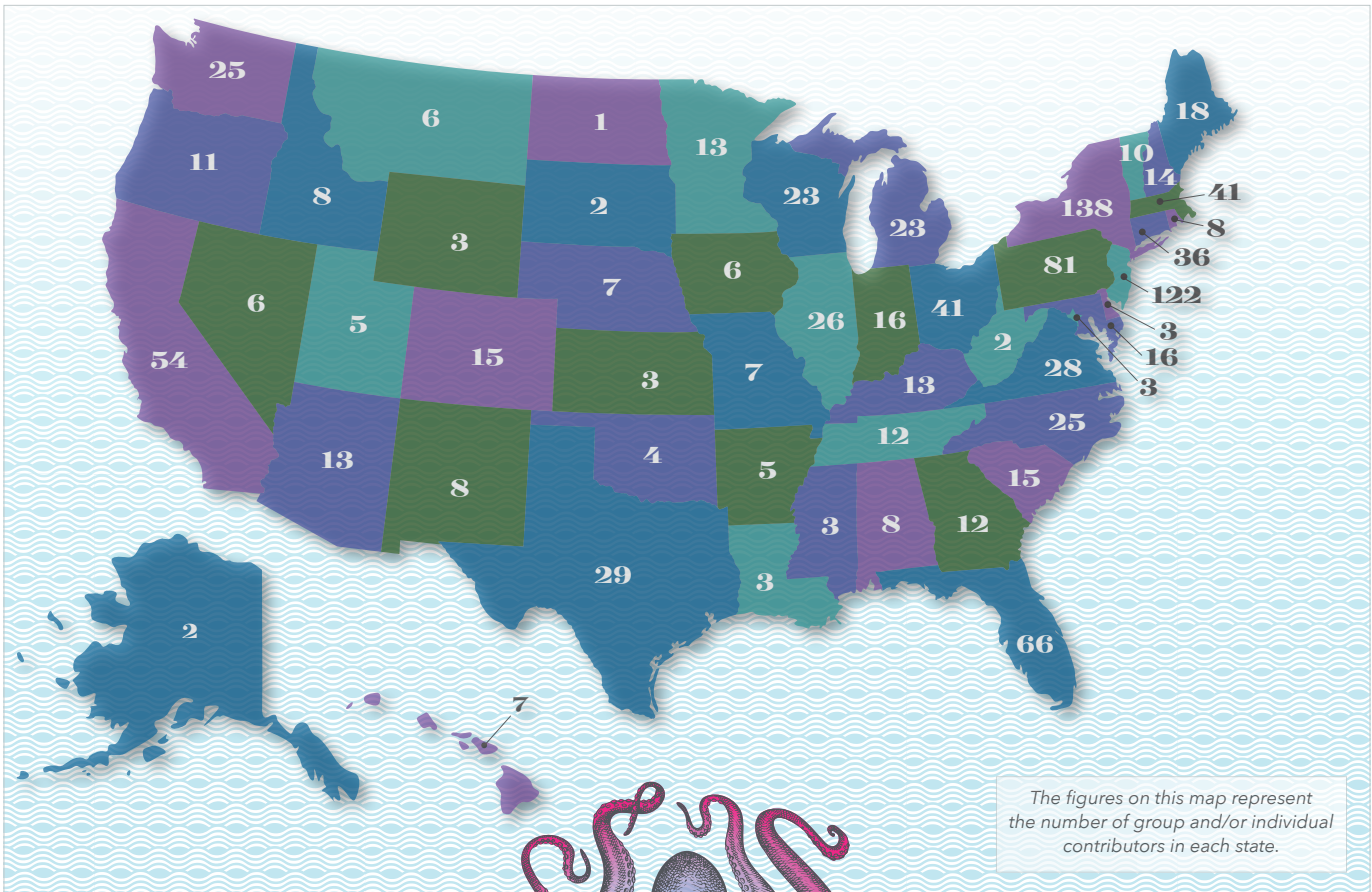
TOP 3 GROUPS:

(Number of knits/crochets and ditty bags)

St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Old Lyme, CT.....	575
Long Island Crochet Guild of Huntington, NY.....	279
St. John's Episcopal Church, Little Silver, NJ.....	246

Countries other than the United States

CANADA, ITALY, AND LUXEMBOURG



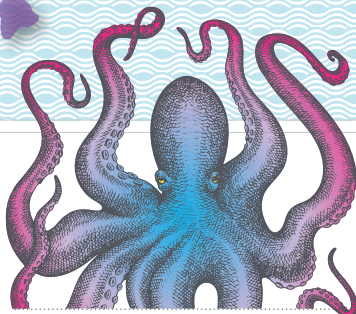
No. of CAS Volunteers: **934**

No. of CAS Groups: **119**

No. of New Volunteers & Groups:

Individuals.....**235**

Groups.....**26**



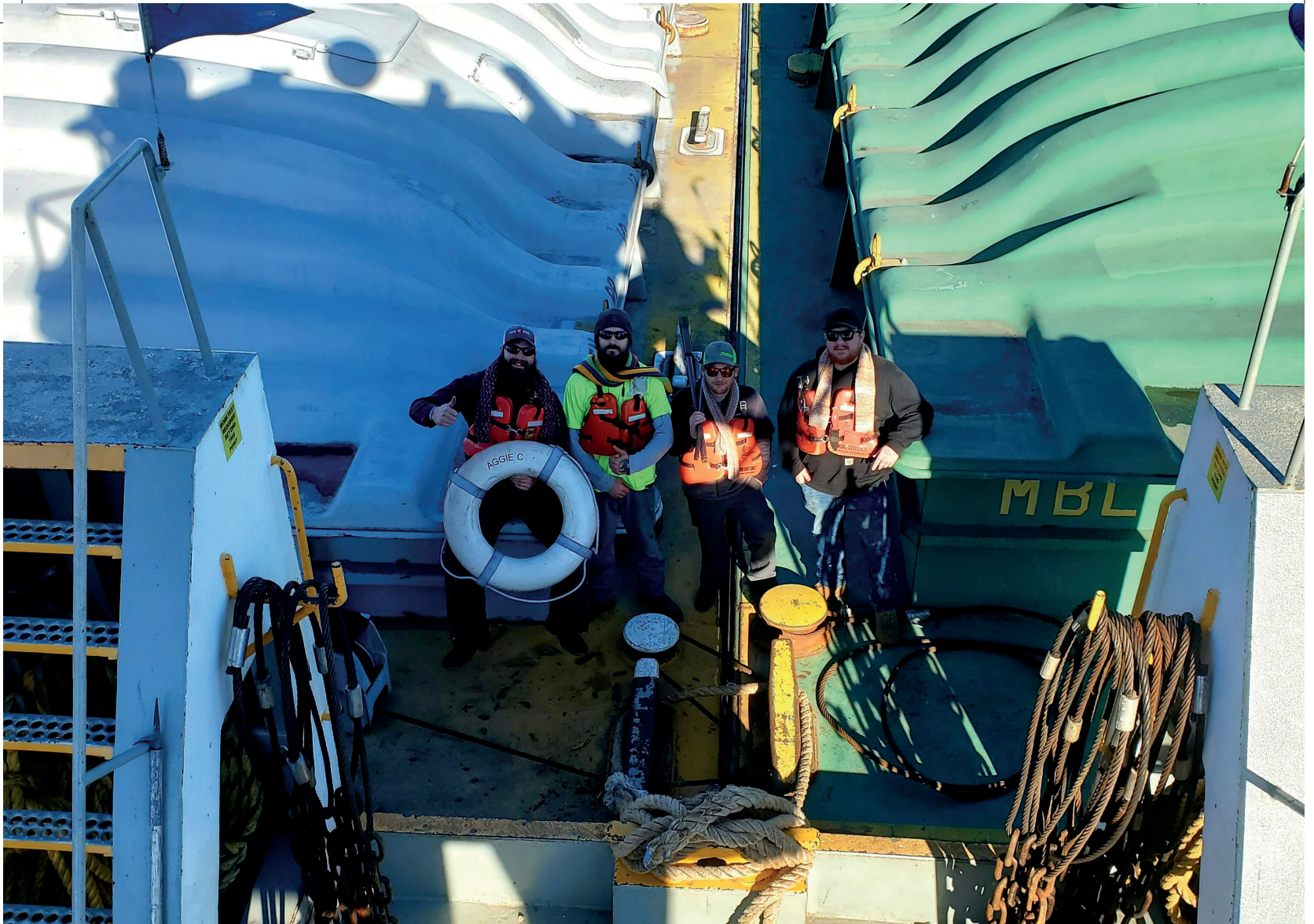
Total No. of Knit/Crochet
Garments and Ditty Bags Donated:
26,378

No. of Knit/Crochet Donations:
(2.5% increase from 2020)

22,055

No. of Ditty Bags Donated:
(40.8% increase from 2020)

4,323



I would just like to THANK YOUR VOLUNTEERS for knitting

my husband a beautiful pair of slipper socks. He was so excited to receive them on the boat this hitch around Christmas, as his spirits were particularly low as he was missing being home for the holiday. He would love to send the volunteer that knit his socks a personal thank you card. Is there any way to find contact information for volunteers? Or a way to get a message to them? His volunteer was Lauren W. from NJ. These are the photos he sent me of him happily wearing his slipper socks while on watch. He is the **relief captain of Kirby's m/v Houma** that runs between Houston and Nola.

Thank you all so very much!

The Aubrey Harwell crew wants to extend our gratitude to you thanking you for gifts we had received. The card was heart-felt & scarves and other gifts were very appreciated. It was a lovely addition to our gifts to give to the crew. Merry Christmas from us to you all.

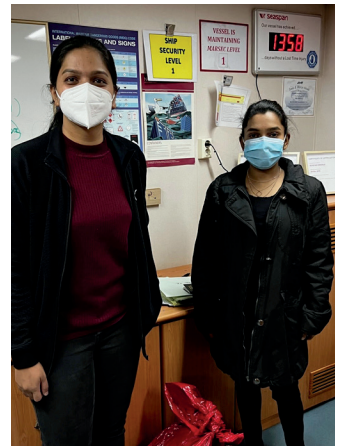
Sincerely, The crew of the Aubrey B. Harwell Jr.

A Note of Thanks



GOOD MORNING! The crew of the M/V Aggie C. would like to thank everyone at the Seamen's Church for your continued support and assistance to mariners across the country. Your institute provides a much-needed safe haven during these trying times. We recently received a box of handmade knits, and I must say these are some of the nicest quality scarves we have ever seen. Chicago winter is setting in, and this gift could not have come at a better time.

Thank you very much and Merry Christmas!!



A note of thanks. Your gifts were well received and appreciated. We primarily run towboats on the upper Illinois River. There are a lot of windy, bitter cold days on this end of the river. The knitted scarves and hats come in handy. Whole crew thinks it's pretty cool that you did this for them. So thank you again.

*God bless and Merry Christmas.
M.V. Cody Boyd Crew. ACBL*

DONOR PROFILES: Spotlight on Robin Marko and Kathryn Cupp



Robin Marko received North American Maritime Ministry Association's (NAMMA) 2021 Volunteer Dedication Award.

Approximately 15 years ago, **Robin Marko** read an article about CAS. She doesn't remember where, but she thought it was a good idea and introduced parishioners from her church, Calvary Lutheran in Cranford, NJ, to the program.

Robin, who studied home economics at Ohio University and Montclair State University, developed an early interest in sewing. As a seventh grader, Robin saved \$50 to buy her first sewing machine. Although Robin credits her mother for teaching her how to

knit, Robin taught her mother how to sew.

After a career spanning almost 30 years as executive assistant to the Westfield chief of police, Robin has the time to devote to her many volunteer activities. In addition to knitting and sewing for CAS and as a regular in the CAS workroom, Robin supports several local and not so local good causes.

In her leisure time, Robin and her husband, Richard, enjoy traveling, especially on cruises. Robin and Richard always sign up

family drove him back to the Port of Newark, where they were treated to a ship visit. This might have been Robin's first time on board a commercial vessel, but not her last. She fondly reminisces about the time SCI Chaplain Cora DiDomenico took her on a RoRo (roll on/roll off) container ship.

In addition to giving so generously of her time and talent, Robin is a donor. Robin cites the many tax advantages of making a charitable gift such as a Qualified Charitable Distribution from a retirement account,

"I like to challenge myself. I like to try new things."

to have dinner with the ship's officers. Robin finds it fascinating to hear their life stories. Many of the cruise ship personnel she has met began as crew members on cargo ships, to which she can relate.

Robin's father was originally from Bristol, England. His best friend was a captain on a merchant ship. He used to come to dinner at her house and afterward, the

and has successfully applied to her husband's former employer, Exxon Mobil, for matching gifts.

When asked why she does all that she does, Robin explained it this way: "I like to challenge myself. I like to try new things. I'm always looking to grow and learn about the world around me and you don't have to go far." In short, she said, "it's just my thing." ❄️

Kathryn Cupp's aunt introduced her to CAS. Her Aunt Mary read about CAS in an issue of *Better Homes and Gardens*. The magazine article included an offer to send patterns to readers. This was before cell phones and computers, so when Aunt Mary wrote to SCI to request patterns, she wasn't sure she would receive them, but she did, and she made copies for Kathryn.

A lifelong resident of Uniontown, PA, Kathryn is a self-taught knitter. Her grandmother first attempted to teach her, followed by her Aunt Mary; however, at the time, she prioritized other crafts, such as cross stitch, rug hooking, and plastic canvas. She eventually learned how to knit and crochet by reading books.

Now that she has mastered the skill, Kathryn loves knitting. It sustains her and gives her purpose. Years ago, while working as a nursing assistant, she suffered a serious back injury from which she never regained a full range of motion. Her Aunt Mary is a great source of encouragement. They speak on the telephone three times a week and keep each other

motivated. They found the Scrappy scarf especially challenging. They couldn't figure out how to carry yarn up the side until they had a friend show them. To this day they refer to the Scrappy scarf as the up-the-side scarf.

Originally, it was all about the patterns; but the more she learned about SCI and its mission the more engaged she became. In particular, she is inspired by the work of the Port Newark Chaplaincy, which she supports through a recurring monthly gift. Kathryn recognizes that seafarers and mariners have a difficult and dangerous job. She appreciates and admires the work of the chaplains;

how they are present for seafarers every day. "When my friends ask me about SCI, I tell them it will make you feel good that you are helping someone. You just have to get involved."

Her Aunt Mary doesn't need any convincing. She visits Kathryn, and her 12-year-old rescue cat, Motee, in the fall and they stage their own personal CAS packing event. They add Christmas cards and lip balm before mailing the package to Port Newark. Kathryn repeatedly insists she "just loves to do this. God has brought me to where I am, and I want to pass on the blessings." ❄️



Kathryn Cupp and feline pal, Motee

A SAFE HARBOR

A Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) offers tax advantages. A QCD is an otherwise taxable distribution from an individual retirement account (IRA) owned by a person who is 70½ years old or older that is paid directly from the IRA to a qualified charity.

A QCD allows traditional IRA owners to deduct their required minimum distribution on their tax returns if they give the money to a charity. By lowering your adjusted gross income, the QCD rule can effectively reduce your income taxes. Additionally, a QCD can satisfy all or part of the amount of your required minimum distribution from your IRA.

*For information on how you can include SCI in your estate plans, please contact **Amy Mugavero**, Director of Development at 646-629-0409 or email amugavero@seamenschurch.org.*



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Untangled

Untangled is our members-only Facebook group for Christmas at Sea supporters. It is a warm and welcoming community of knitters, crocheters, and ditty bag makers. Untangled is the perfect place to post questions about patterns, stay current with all things Christmas at Sea, and pick up interesting tips and tricks from experts. It's also entertaining and fun.

Join the conversation!

facebook.com/groups/untangled.sci

