

INTERNATIONAL SEAFARER MINISTRY PRESBYTERY OF NEW COVENANT



WHAT IS THE SEAFARER MINISTRY?

It is a group of chaplains of four different denominations, within which we have two Presbyterian Chaplains, who are tasked by their denominations with a listening, praying, caring and outreach ministry to seafarers who come to the Port of Houston. They all work both at the two seafarer centers and go to ships calling at the Port of Houston to go aboard and visit with the crew.

WHO ARE THE PRESBYTERIAN CHAPLAINS? ARE THERE OTHER CHAPLAINS, AND IF SO, WHERE DO THEY COME FROM AND HOW ARE THEY PAID?

The Reverend Doctor Benjamin Stewart and Reverend David Wells are the two Presbyterian Chaplains. Ben was called to this ministry in 1997 on a full time basis, and David came to the ministry in 1999. Currently, they labor together with three Catholic priests, one Episcopal priest and one Lutheran pastor, as well as several lay volunteers. All of the other ordained chaplains are compensated through some form of church or parish or diocese assignment. Our two chaplains have no such assignments for compensation purposes.



**Chaplain
David Wells**



**Chaplain
Ben Stewart**

WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL SEAFARER MINISTRY BOARD? WHY DOES THE BOARD EXIST AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Seafarer Ministry Board is a group of volunteers from several different churches who meet monthly to provide assistance and support to our two chaplains; do mission fairs; meet with church outreach or mission or benevolence committees and seek, through whatever means, to raise the funds necessary to support these two chaplains. It was formed in the 1970's, shortly after the Presbytery initiated this ministry for this purpose.

HOW IS THE MINISTRY SUPPORTED FINANCIALLY?

The ministry, which is to say, these two chaplains, is supported through a small contribution from the Presbytery Outreach Committee, and from the fundraising efforts of the board members in convincing churches within the Presbytery to include the ministry in their budgets annually, and when possible, to increase that support. Currently, about \$6,000.00 is expected to come from Presbytery, about \$70,000.00 will come from current church contributions and the remainder from the rapidly dwindling reserves. Those reserves will be totally depleted within a year and a half if no further support is found.

WHAT ABOUT RESERVES?

The reserve fund was built up many years ago when Presbytery was more robust, more people were attending churches and more funds were coming in to the Presbytery. Additionally, at that time, compensation levels were not as high as currently, due to the chaplains being newer in their ministry.

WHAT DOES THE MINISTRY COST ANNUALLY?

Reverend Stewart, being on a call, currently is being compensated at the very bottom of the Minimum Terms of Call scale due to severe financial restrictions. He does receive the Board of Pensions package, which adds 31.5% to the cost, plus the ministry pays for his mileage at IRS rates and for his cell phone, which is a major piece of his ministry equipment.

Reverend Wells is laboring on Contract. He is actually under the care of the Board of Pensions due to a disability caused by an accident, dating back to his days as a Presbyterian missionary in Thailand, and

this both limits the amount that the ministry is allowed to pay him and provides the benefit package through the BOP. Combined, the two costs the ministry an approximate annual total of \$93,000.00.



WHERE DOES THE MONEY RECEIVED GO AND HOW MUCH IS SPENT ON ADMINISTRATION?

All of the monies received go to the Presbytery office to Mr. Forbes Baker, Director of Finance for Presbytery, who administers the special accounts as well as all other financial matters. Presbytery pays Mr. Baker, so there is no administrative cost for his services, and since this is an adjunct ministry of Presbytery, there is no other administrative charge of any type. All of the board members absorb any expenditures they might have and have also paid for any printed materials from their own pockets.

WE SENT MONEY TO THE SEAFARER CENTER. ISN'T THAT THE SAME?

No, it is not. The Seafarer Center is the physical building that is open to seafarers run by a strictly secular corporation. It is actually two different buildings in two different locations, funded by two large events annually, Port of Houston voluntary tariffs or taxes, the occasional grant and private industry. It has nothing to do with the support of the chaplains who work out of there, and who rent their space for \$1.00 per year, just to keep things on a business like basis. Monies sent to the center support the upkeep and operation of the buildings, not the Presbyterian chaplains. The center has been very good about passing most of these contributions from Presbyterian churches on to our two chaplains to go to Presbytery, but the center does not pay the chaplains. Support for the ministry must go to Presbytery, noted for the Seafarer Ministry. That way, it gets into the account that is used to pay these two.



HOW CAN CHURCHES BECOME INVOLVED IN THE MINISTRY?

Churches can become involved in a number of ways. The following are the best known ways of involvement; that of preparation of Christmas shoe boxes to give to the seafarers; holding small group visits with snacks and soft drinks or even a cookout out by the pool, donations of puzzles, books, magazines, DVD's and Blue Ray disks; joining the chaplains and others in one of the twice per year Christmas Caroling cruises on the M/V Sam Houston down the ship channel and most importantly, putting the ministry into the budget for annual support and finding the means of adjusting that support upward whenever possible.

A major way of becoming involved would be if several churches agreed to go together to fund a chaplain. In this manner, no one church would be carrying the entire load, but several could call on the chaplain for special events, occasional preaching, weddings and to be able to say that Chaplain X is our seafarer chaplain. The approximate annual cost of a chaplain at minimums is between \$70,000 and \$75,000.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE MINISTRY?

The Seafarers calling at the Port of Houston are the immediate beneficiaries of the ministry in that the chaplains are sometimes the only means they have of reaching their loved ones from here through cell phone SIM cards and phone airtime cards, both sold by the chaplains; rental of MIFI units, which are cell phone based mobile Wi-Fi units and through the caring and listening ear of the chaplains. The chaplains all answer to whatever title they are called, be it Padre, Father, Rabbi, Reverend, Pastor or hey you!

Some of the seafarers lack the proper credentials required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to even descend the gangway to the pier, and are liable for arrest and indefinite confinement if they do go on the pier. This is not because they are criminals, just that they lack the proper credentials now required as a result of 9/11.

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT SEAFARERS? I NEVER SEE THEM AND THEY DON'T DO ANYTHING FOR ME!

If any of you happened to watch the ABC television weeklong news item about Made In America back in March of 2011, you will recall that a Dallas area family allowed the news crew to go into their home and remove anything and everything NOT made in America. They came home to a totally stripped and empty house, with only one glass vase holding a rose and the food in their pantry. Supper was a PB & J sandwich and they slept on the floor in sleeping bags.

This illustrates vividly just how much every one of us is dependent on the work of seafarers. Check the label in your clothing to see where it was made. Check your TV, your cell phone, your car, the fuel you burn in it, your plates, glasses, shoes, furniture and hundreds of other items made overseas, and other than some items coming from either Canada or Mexico, 100% of the rest came from overseas and was carried on ships manned by seafarers. Even some of our fresh produce and frozen seafood is of foreign origin. There are no freeways from here to the Far East, or Africa, or South America, or Europe. Only shipping lanes filled with seafarers.

We each are affected daily by the work of seafarers, and that is why we need to care about them and their welfare. This is a very large part of what the chaplains do every day, and we are asking for your help in putting this ministry in your church budget. Think of it this way, these two chaplains are Presbytery's missionaries to the seafarers and all the churches need to support them.

WHO ELSE BENEFITS HERE IN HOUSTON AND THE SURROUNDING AREA?

Because of seafarers coming to the Port of Houston, several hundred thousand persons have employment in a wide variety of industries that rely on the maritime trade and commerce. This extends well beyond the boundaries of the City of Houston and even beyond the boundaries of the State of Texas.

BUT WE DO CHRISTMAS BOXES SO ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

The 11,000 to 16,000 Christmas boxes donated annually are wonderful, and a very loving and caring gift from families to seafarers that they will never meet, but for this ministry to continue, money is needed to pay the salaries, expenses and benefits of the two chaplains. It is these two chaplains, together with the other chaplains, who go to visit the ships and take the boxes to give to the seafarers. The seafarers do not go to the seafarer center to get them.

WHAT IS THE FORECAST FOR FUTURE CHAPLAINS OF THIS OR OTHER DENOMINATIONS? WHERE WOULD THIS BOARD LIKE TO SEE MORE CHAPLAINS?

Several of the current chaplains are either eligible to or are nearing retirement eligibility. Replacements are needed and there is a question as to whether the Catholics are going to continue to provide the necessary funding for their chaplains. The overall ministry has already lost one of the founding denominations, the Methodists.

The Presbyterian Seafarer Ministry Board would like to be ministering to seafarers in the Beaumont/Port Arthur/Orange Golden Triangle and in the Texas City/Galveston/Freeport Coastal Triangle, but current funding levels prevent this. The need is there, but the funds are not.

HOW MANY SHIPS DO THE CHAPLAINS VISIT ANNUALLY?

Currently, approximately 6,500 to 7,000 ships call in the Port of Houston, from the Head of Navigation not far from downtown all the way down to the Bayport terminal in Seabrook, some thirty plus miles away, and across the channel in Baytown. There are docks and terminals on both sides of the ship channel. The chaplains attempt to visit every one of these ships at all of these widely scattered docks.

WHAT IS THE EXPECTATION FOR FUTURE GROWTH OF TRAFFIC?

The Port of Houston is tentatively projecting that this level of traffic will continue to grow in the coming years both as the overall world economy rebounds and with the opening of the new sea level wider and deeper Panama Canal in 2014. That growth will be slow and incremental, but in five years, it could reach 7,500 to almost 8,000 ships.

WHAT IS THE NEED JUST WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF PRESBYTERY?

As previously mentioned, more chaplains are needed to replace those who retire, and those who choose to move on to parish ministry. This is a rough and dirty life that is taxing on the body to be climbing sixty to eighty step gangways, then sometimes another four to six or seven decks up in the ship and to do that six or eight times per day, five days per week. Also, as mentioned, we are not ministering to the seafarers in the Golden Triangle or the Coastal Triangle.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THIS SEAFARER MINISTRY BOARD?

Our goal is twofold. The first is to make every church within Presbytery aware of this ministry and of how seafarers affect every single person here in the U.S., and the second is to ask each church to prayerfully consider putting this ministry into your annual church budget. If this ministry could receive as little as \$750.00 from every church that is not currently supporting the ministry, the reserves could be rebuilt and another chaplain could be added.



WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO?

Contact one of us on this Board at the addresses shown below and let us come out and meet with the committee and even invite us to come and do a minute for mission. If you are having a mission fair, invite us; if you are looking for a way for small groups to reach out, call us and we can assist in making congregation involvement possible. Most importantly, add this ministry to your church outreach giving annually.

Board Members:

Jim Keith – Chair – Pasadena First Presbyterian

jwkjr45@hotmail.com

Bert Anson – Member – Houston First Presbyterian

bertanson@yahoo.com

Forbes Baker – Ex Officio Member – Westminster Presbyterian

fbaker@pbyofnewcovenant.org

Harry Bristol – Member – St. Andrews Presbyterian

harryb@hal-pc.org

Robert W. (Bob) Collier – Member – Spring Branch Presbyterian

robert081523@prodigy.net

George Dobbin – Member – St. John's Presbyterian

gdobbin@mcgriff.com

Peter Ham – Member – Memorial Drive Presbyterian

peterham@sbcglobal.net

Dwight Koops – Member – Kingwood First Presbyterian

dhkoops@kingwoodcable.net

Chaplains”

Rev. Dr. Benjamin Stewart III – Chaplain – At Large

benhstewartiii@yahoo.com

Rev. David Wells – Chaplain – At Large

wells6652@msn.com