

## FLORIDA PORT MINISTRIES

Annie Armstrong, for whom the annual North American Mission offering is named, once commented on the international influx through the port of Baltimore, where she lived: "Men and means were not forthcoming fast enough for the great work of foreign missions, so God turned the stream this way and sent great masses of the unevangelized to come in contact with Christians." Annie Armstrong made this comment in the late 1800s. Today, the stream continues to flow. Millions of people travel through Florida ports every year.

Port Ministries focus on the thousands of seafarers that operate and maintain the ships that sail in and out of our ports. Ministries, also, focus on the people that make each port operate efficiently such as the Longshoremen, U.S. Coastguard and many more.

International seafarers are an unreached people group according to the US Center for World Missions. This diverse cultural and religious blend of people live and work together daily while facing the hardships and hazards of life at sea. Most seafarers come from third-world countries and have left their families behind to provide for them financially in a way they could not do in their homeland.

Florida ports are filled with cargo and cruise ships. Cargo ships move products from one country to another with a crew size of 12 to 35. In 2020, over 7,000 ships unloaded their cargo in the ports of Jacksonville, Canaveral, Everglades, Manatee and Tampa. Cruise ships can be as large as small cities floating on the water with crews ranging from 650 to 3000 people. The largest ship *Symphony of the Seas* has a capacity of 9,000 passengers (6,000 travelers and 3,000 crew). In 2019, 15.6 million people debarked from Florida's 5 major cruise ports. Cruise ships, normally, sail and return to the same port but it is an intense time for the seafarer. Contracts range from 7 to 9 months and the seafarer works seven days a week.

Ships stay in port ranging from just a few hours to a few days. Ships utilizing repair facilities will stay longer, sometimes as much as two months.

God uses port ministries to touch the seafarers. Many find a warm welcome at the seafarer's center. The lonely father gets to see his wife and children through free internet services. Recreational activities help to burn off cooped up energy. Free hot meals are provided. Van rides to American stores are greatly appreciated. Bible Studies, Worship Services and Prayer opportunities are provided. During the Pandemic, Canaveral Port Ministry offers *Waves of Hope*, chapel services on Facebook.

Many seafarers come to know Christ and become missionaries as they travel back home. Chaplain Steve Finnesy shares the following report from Tampa Port Ministries: *Last month was full of excitement for us at the Seafarers Center. We were able to visit 75 ships and had 52 seafarers visit the center during the month. 31 Seafarers accepted*

*Jesus Christ as their Savior. These 31 were from all around the world: Philippines, Columbia, Panama, and India.*

Canaveral Port Ministry, in 2019, reported 49,000 plus seafarer visits and 400 professions of faith. They provided Bibles and Christian literature for seafarers in over 60 languages.

Have you considered taking an international mission trip? You can take an international mission trip without leaving Florida. Contact one of the Port Ministry Directors about opportunities to serve. They are always looking for mission volunteers that can serve on a regular basis as well as those that serve for a one-day project or a week-long mission trip. These ministries can help prepare your team for missions overseas.

