

Humanizing Agents of Modern Capitalism? The Daily Work of Port Chaplains

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While chaplains are required in the military, federal prisons, and the Veteran's Administration, they are also present in a range of other settings across the United States. In ports, religiously motivated individuals and institutions have long histories of evangelizing and providing social services. We focus on chaplains in 15 of the largest American ports today to ask how they negotiate access to seafarers and how they work with them daily. Chaplains negotiate security protocols, the hierarchy of ships, and their own self-presentations to get on board vessels. In their daily work, they shift among economic, moral, religious, and advocacy roles. Chaplains access seafarers by providing economic support and then use that access to develop the relationships they see as central to their work. By being present in these relationships, connecting seafarers to broader communities, and serving as an invisible global safety net, port chaplains see themselves acting as humanizing agents of modern capitalism. The case of port chaplaincy suggests additional strategies chaplains use to gain access not yet present in the sociological literature, further illustrates how the work of chaplains is shaped by the institutions within which it takes place, and expands sociological approaches to religion "on the edge" by showing multiple ways religion appears at the water's edge not yet theorized in that literature.

Keywords: economy/economics; chaplains; clergy/ministers/religious professionals; mobility.

INTRODUCTION

Wearing a white hard hat, a bright yellow safety vest, a dust mask, and work boots, I (first author) am following a port chaplain through a scrap metal terminal. We parked the van by the gate, said a short prayer, and are now going to visit the crew of a large ship loading scrap metal. The ship, flagged in Moldova, came most recently from the Netherlands. Once full, it will depart for Turkey.

We climb the gangway and are greeted by three Filipino seafarers who, after signing us in and giving us visitors' passes, escort us to the mess. The chaplain

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I am with, Susan,¹ is known to the crew—not personally, but by role. As she lays out the materials she brought—a cookbook for the chief cook, magazines, puzzles, toiletries, safety pamphlets, phone cards, and small wooden crosses—several men ask if she can drive them to a local shopping mall. During the next hour, eight to ten men come through the mess to talk, buy phone cards, get help with their phones (Susan spends a long time on the phone with an AT&T operator), and see about transport. One picks up a religious pamphlet and another a cross that Susan blesses before he places it in the breast pocket of his work overalls. Over the water fountain hangs a girly pin-up calendar, the Ten Commandments, and a seafarer's prayer.

Sixteen seafarers work on this vessel. Most are from the Philippines, though there are also individuals from Bulgaria, Croatia, and Panama. Seafarers tell us that the captain is alright to work for but that the company is not doing so well. In one on one conversation, a few tell me about their families and hometowns, sharing stories, and photos on their phones. Susan leaves a stack of phone cards with one seafarer—others can buy them from him in the next 24 hours, and she will return for the cash and remainders—before we escort three seafarers with entry visas and a few hours off back through the scrap metal terminal to the van. Purchased with a grant from the Department of Homeland Security, Susan uses this van regularly to transport seafarers from the port to local malls and electronics stores. We talk a bit more in the van before Susan drops the men off at Best Buy and tells them where she will pick them up in a few hours. Then she turns to me and asks where I saw God in this visit.

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Susan is one of many port chaplains and ship visitors who reach out to seafarers in ports across the United States and around the world. While some go on board tankers and container ships like Susan, others work in seafarer centers supplying snacks, internet access and sometimes pool or karaoke. Still, others mostly connect with the staff of cruise ships in the few hours they have free between voyages. In these interactions, chaplains sell phone cards, supply free or low-cost transportation, offer support and advice, and occasionally lead prayer or a worship service.

While chaplains have long histories in the military, federal prisons, the Veterans Administration, and health care organizations, little is known about chaplains in ports, airports, disaster zones, fire and police departments, community contexts, and other settings where they work (Bergen 2004; Cadge 2012; Dubler 2013; Loveland 2014; Sullivan 2014; Swift 2015). Recent analyses of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that since the early 1970s, growing numbers of clergy have been working outside of congregations, some of whom as chaplains (Schleifer and Cadge Under review). A current institutional mapping suggests that as many as a quarter of theological schools have developed training programs for chaplains in the past 20 years at the Master of Divinity, Master of Arts, Doctor of Ministry levels (Cadge and Stroud 2017).

¹All names have been changed.

The growth of these programs is counter-intuitive as total enrollments in Christian graduate theological schools have been declining steadily since the early 2000s (Wheeler et al. 2013). The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, which provides clinical training for chaplains, also saw the number of units they offer increase by 29% between 2005 and 2015 (Trace Haythorn, Executive Director, personal communication). All of these changes are taking place in an American religious context in which growing numbers of people, especially under the age of 30, are not affiliated with religious organizations (Pew Forum 2012).

We contribute to growing bodies of literature about “religion on the edge,” religion “hiding in plain sight,” and chaplaincy in airports, workplaces, and other unconventional settings, a case study of how port chaplains negotiate their roles and by doing their work in the day to day play multiple religiously informed roles (Bender et al. 2013; Cadge and Konieczny 2014; Casanova 1994; Swift 2015). We do so aware of the long history of religious organizations and individuals in ports (i.e., the label “port chaplain” is new, but the presence of clergy and religiously people is not) and in conversation both with scholarship about how chaplains negotiate access to individuals in settings where the chaplain is and is not a required presence (Cadge 2018; Kverndal 1986, 2008; Rousmaniere 1995) and with sensitivity to the growing body of literature about the forms religion takes at institutional edges (Bender et al. 2013).

We pay particular attention to how port chaplains gain access to seafarers, what they see themselves bringing to the seafarers, and how that work is shaped by the religious and maritime contexts in which it takes place. Situated between post-9/11 security regulations and pressures of the shipping industry, which combine to incentivize quick turn-around times in ports, port chaplains tack between economic and religious, moral, and advocacy roles. They focus primarily on seafarers and view the economic assistance they supply as a means of connecting with seafarers to offer broader religious or moral support.

Primarily focused on foreign-born workers as individuals rather than organizational systems or structural factors, port chaplains frame their central contributions in humanistic terms. They see themselves functioning as a kind of lubricant that humanizes and helps keep the economic system running at the micro-level rather than as change agents whose actions lead to systemic change. Their work is shaped and constrained, in other words, by the maritime and religious institutions within which they work. While some of these institutional constraints are unique to ports, airports, and other settings where chaplains are optional and their continued presence premised on good relationships with gatekeepers, others as outlined in conclusion, may be more intrinsic to chaplains’ work across settings.

BACKGROUND

In her recent book, *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care and the Law*, Winnifred Sullivan calls chaplains “secular priests” or “ministers without

portfolios” who have become, she argues, “strangely necessary figure[s] religiously and legally speaking in negotiating the public life of religion today” (6). The federal government employs approximately six thousand chaplains in the military, federal prisons and the Veteran’s Administration and thousands of chaplains work across the country in health care, universities, state and local prisons, community, sports, and other settings (Cadge 2012; Dubler 2013; Loveland 2014; Sullivan 2014). In some of these settings chaplaincy as a frame is giving way to “spiritual care,” an approach Wendy Cadge calls “strategically vague” and able to make space for a wider range of individuals, practices, and organizational negotiations (Cadge 2012).

The ways in which chaplains physically come to be present with people take various forms depending on the institutions within which they work. In her recent article about airport chaplains, Wendy Cadge describes how chaplains walk the terminals looking for people—passengers or staff—visibly upset or that they otherwise intuitively sense need a listening ear and human connection (Cadge 2018). In some hospitals chaplains also make their own rounds through units, receive referrals from other health care providers, and are available on an emergency basis via pagers (Cadge 2012). Chaplains in the military and prisons—where they are required—are more integrated with those they serve available at regular intervals at services and groups they lead as well as for individual appointments (Loveland 2014; Sullivan 2014).

Once they have access, chaplains play roles that range from ritual specialist to counselor to small group facilitator based on the sectors and organizations within which they work. Research on the mandate or basis on which chaplains do their work shows mandates ranging from legal and policy precedents to moral arguments to religious motivations (Beckford and Cairns 2015; Bergen 2004; Berlinger 2008; Hicks 2008; Holifield 2007; Loveland 2014; Otis 2009; Sullivan 2009; Sundt and Cullen 1998; Sundt and Cullen 2002). Some scholars have argued that chaplains’ unique positions as religious professionals in mostly secular organizations make a kind of marginality or organizational “in-between-ness” the defining and the most consistent characteristic of their work and roles (Cadge 2012; Hansen 2012; Paget and McCormack 2006; Sullivan 2014). In his classic *Hospital Ministry: The Role of the Chaplain Today*, Lawrence Holst devoted a whole chapter to how hospital chaplains work “between worlds.” What he calls the “tension” or “enigma” of this organizational position shapes the work; “Each world, or structure, has its own domain and demands, its assumptions and mission” (Holst 1985:12).

Recent empirical studies point, most consistently, to chaplains making arguments about presence when asked about their mandate and roles. Winnifred Sullivan explains presence as a “minimalist, almost ephemeral form of spiritual care that is, at the same time, deeply rooted in religious histories and suffused with religious references for those who can read them” (Sullivan 2014: 174). Presence was a consistent trope among the health care chaplains Wendy Cadge interviewed in large academic medical centers who spoke of it—alongside arguments about healing and hope—when describing how they spend their time and

why and how their work is important and relevant (Cadge 2012). Presence also figures prominently in the work of military chaplains—evident in memoirs with titles like *A Table in the Presence* by Lt. Carey H. Cash, a chaplain who served with the Marines (Cash 2004). Chaplains in universities, sports setting and workplaces also frequently talk about being present with people and accompanying them through a range of life transitions when asked to talk about their work (Dzikus et al. 2012; Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012; Miller et al. 2016).

In for-profit settings, less is known about how chaplains get access and consider their roles even though they have long histories in the settings. Chaplains worked for the East India Company (O'Connor 2012), as industrial chaplains in both the United Kingdom and the United States (Andersen 1980; Bell 2006; Johnston and McFarland 2010a, 2010b; McFarland and Johnston 2010; Michelson 2006), and as worker-priests closely aligned with trade unions, especially in 1960s (Arnal 1986; Fisher 2009; Heideman 1967; MacNair 1963). Chaplains in these settings frequently balanced tensions between workers and management as their presence relied on permission from management yet it was management and organizational practices they frequently sought to transform (Bell 2006). In their daily work, as a result, they often tried to frame issues neutrally, shift self-presentation depending on their audience, and code-switch in an effort to talk with different people in different frames.

Corporate chaplains are those in for-profit settings that likely received the most attention in recent years (Lambert 2009; Oppenheimer 2012; Seales 2012). Rooted in Christian evangelical history, corporate chaplains today remain primarily Christian and aim to mediate spiritual meaning and economic productivity in the settings where they work (Miller 2007; Seales 2012). In his work on corporate chaplains, David Miller describes them as, “‘walking the floor’ and being a listening ear and comforting voice for employees, many of whom have spiritual needs but are not members of a particular congregation and do not know where to turn in times of personal or professional crisis” (Miller 2007: 114). He also describes them making hospital visits, providing grief support, and holding funerals for employees and others. Their work is valued by human resources professionals, Miller and colleagues argue, who see it leading to positive organizational culture, taking the place of employee assistance programs, providing needed psychological care, and serving as a bridge to other resources (Miller and Ngunjiri 2015b; Miller et al. 2016).

We build on studies of access, the work of chaplaincy in for-profit settings, and growing awareness of the range of places religion is present around institutional edges by focusing here on ports, one of the world’s oldest sites of economic and cultural exchange. From floating churches in late-eighteenth century America to Catholic industrial chaplain-priests in 1960s to today’s chaplains serving multireligious seafarers from around the world, religious actors and organizations have a long history in ports in the United States and around the world (Down 1989; Hovde 1994; MacNair 1963; Mall 2002). Ministry to seafarers has been a particular part of

longstanding Christian efforts in the United States to go out to those ostensibly in need of faith who do not come to churches to get it. Dwight L. Moody, one of the most significant leaders in American Evangelical history, for example, viewed this direction of activity as a necessary method of keeping the flame of religion alive: “Now if people won’t come to our churches, let us go for them in that way and keep the church awake.... If people will not come to the churches, why not send others out after them, and why not have meetings outside?” (Moody 1877).

Aiming to save seafarers from a long list of vices, early Protestant reformers built inns where seafarers lived when not at sea; offered social services, preaching, and opportunities for religious conversion in ports; and sent religious libraries on board vessels (Hovde 1994; Knickerbocker 2014; Stam 2012). In Boston, for example, Edward T. Father Taylor, the country’s best-known sailor preacher, met thousands of local sailors and visitors who passed through the port. He held daily services at a Sailors’ Bethel built for his ministry in the North End and for almost 40 years, “walk[ed] its pulpit like a quarterdeck” (Morison 1921). In addition to Father Taylor’s preaching, the Port Society offered a reading room, taught classes in practical navigation, and hosted a union that fielded mariners’ grievances against masters and vessel owners (Leehey 1995). In so doing the Port Society was typically comprehensive in its approach to seafarers’ welfare of the day, providing both material relief and moral improvement and combining pastoral and prophetic aspects of ministry (Cadge and Skaggs 2018).

Evangelism increasingly gave way to social service provision by religious actors in ports over time as mechanization, the introduction of containers, and global economic shifts changed who seafarers were and how much time they had in ports (Cudahy 2006; Levinson 2006). The general tendency for seafarers’ welfare groups to overlook religious and denominational difference continued into the twentieth century. This was especially true among Protestants, who historically carried out the majority of maritime ministry; Catholicism’s longstanding wariness of collaboration with Protestants, as well as its emphasis on land-based parishes as organizational units, presented higher barriers to port chaplaincy than those faced by other traditions. While port chaplains remain largely Protestant or Catholic today, seafarers are now primarily foreign-born non-Protestant workers from the global south who are rarely in port for more than a day or two (Sampson 2013). The actions of religious workers, now called port-chaplains and primarily religious professionals rather than lay people, changed in turn.

We focus on port chaplains in the United States to ask who they are, how they access the seafarers with whom they work, and what kinds of roles they occupy in that daily work. While one small study focused on this question was conducted in the United Kingdom, we are not aware of any American based investigations (Palmer and Murray 2016). Considering the history and multiple roles played by religious people and organizations in ports, we pay particular attention to the strategies they use to gain access and the explicit or implicit presence of religion in their work once there. We find chaplains negotiating security regulations, the hierarchy of ships and their own-self presentations to get access to seafarers onboard vessels.

Once they have access, chaplains tack between economic and religious, moral, and advocacy roles focus on seeing the economic assistance they supply as a means of developing the relationships they think central to their roles. Shaped by the maritime and religious institutions within which they work, chaplains mostly function as a pastoral lubricant that helps keep the economic system running at the micro-level rather than as prophetic change agents whose actions lead to systemic change. We suspect these constraints are particularly acute for chaplains like the industrial chaplains mentioned earlier who work in institutions where their presence requires the permission of gatekeepers who, if they criticize too directly, can limit their access. Port chaplaincy as a case suggests additional strategies chaplains use to gain access, not yet present in the sociological literature and further illustrates how the work of chaplains is shaped by the institutions within which it takes place.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article is part of a larger project about the history of religious individuals and organizations in ports and the current work of port chaplains in the United States and around the globe. We began work on this project in 2013 by interviewing national leaders in the States, attending meetings of the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA), and shadowing port chaplains in their daily work in the first author's home city. Given the limited social science about port chaplains, this approach was necessarily inductive as we aimed to gain a basic understanding of port chaplaincy before developing specific research questions and a design that would enable us to answer them.

Based on what we learned and the significant variation in how port chaplaincy operates across individuals, organizations, and ports, we decided in 2015 that a more defined sample was needed to begin to systematically analyze this work. Aiming to describe the chaplains likely experienced by the largest number of seafarers in the United States, we decided to gather data from the largest ports in the United States as measured by vessel calls (the number of ships that enter and leave the port in a given year). While more vessels do not necessarily mean more crew (because of the varying sizes of crew on different types of ships), we assumed this would give us a rough sense of the traffic of ships and seafarers in ports in a given year. Vessels range from container and tanker ships to bulk carriers, "ro-ros" that transport cars, and cruise liners traveling domestically and internationally. We focused on 17 ports that had more than 1,225 vessel calls in 2015. The largest port in the country, Houston, Texas, had 7,981 vessel calls while the smallest in this sample, Mobile, Alabama, had 1,225.²

²U.S. Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration, 2015 Vessel Calls in U.S. Ports, Selected Terminals and Lightering Areas.

We used directories of port chaplains and seafaring centers created for seafarers as well as relevant professional associations (primarily NAMMA) to identify all of the port chaplains and chaplaincy organizations in each of these 17 ports. While we did not know if these larger ports provided chaplaincy differently than smaller ports, we intended this initial sample as just that—an initial systematic sample that would allow for future additional study. All 17 ports had at least one port chaplain or organization, and about half had more than one—usually two but in a few cases three or more. We reached out to the head port chaplain at each of these organizations, explaining the project and inviting him or her to be interviewed. We also continued to attend annual meetings of NAMMA over several years, where we met many of these port chaplains (and others) and were able to interview them in person. We also started a separate project focused on how seafarers experience port chaplains that are currently ongoing. Some of the organizations in the sample were difficult to contact. After calling repeatedly, we were able to interview 21 people representing port chaplaincy organizations in 15 of the largest 17 ports.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview guide, included as [Appendix](#). All were audio-recorded and about two-thirds were conducted by telephone. The first author also spent significant amounts of time interviewing port chaplains in the city where she lives attending port operator groups with chaplains in the port, volunteering in a seafaring center, and shadowing port chaplains on vessels. This city is not one of the 17 largest ports and not, therefore, included in the analysis that follows in an effort to have a clear sampling frame and parameters. Having spent time with port chaplains in this city and on vessels was critical, however, to building rapport with the port chaplains interviewed and understanding their language, references, and work. We provided ample time in all interviews for chaplains to speak generally about the port in which they work and ports in general and to ask questions as part of building rapport.

Because so little is known about port chaplains—they have been overlooked by sociologists as well as other social scientists—we coded the interview data inductively following the basic principles of grounded theory, first by question and then by theme. We drafted memos on relevant themes such as personal negotiations, access, and presence some of which we identified in the data and others from the literature about chaplains in other sectors that facilitated secondary coding ([Glaser and Strauss 1967](#)). We aimed to determine whether themes—like presence—prominent in current literature about chaplaincy were present in our data as well as to contribute to broader theoretical conversations about the work of chaplains, changes in the work of chaplains in light of broader religious demographic shifts, and how institutions shape and constrain the work of chaplains in them.

This article is based on interviews with 21 individuals who work in 15 of the largest 17 U.S. ports as measured by vessel calls in 2015. The majority of these respondents are men ($N = 17$) with an average age in the 60s. Only four were

women and only a handful under the age of 40. Most were Protestant (13) or Catholic (6). The other two did not share their religious backgrounds. The Protestants were almost exclusively mainline, five Episcopalians, three Lutherans, two Presbyterians, two Baptists, and one who identified simply as Evangelical. This religious distribution is not surprising given the mainline Protestant history of involvement in port chaplaincy and maritime ministry (Cadge and Skaggs 2018).

The majority of respondents was ordained in their religious traditions and had a Master of Divinity degree in addition to a Bachelor's degree. Most had been in ministry for many years and spent almost all of that time connected, in some way, to port chaplaincy. Many were second career clergy who came to ministry after a first career in another field. They worked for port chaplaincy organizations founded between 1843 and 2012 that were, in organizational and operational terms, extremely diverse. While one or two were little more than station wagons and one or two were well-developed organizations with large endowments, the majority were small nonprofits with only a few paid staff and many volunteers. While port chaplaincy organizations aim to connect to ports in multiple ways, we focus in this article exclusively on how port chaplains aim to connect with seafarers. Most of the data presented in this article were shared in response to questions about daily work, what port chaplains most bring to the port and the best and most challenging parts of the job.

FINDINGS

Coming to the Work

The chaplains we interviewed came to the work along multiple paths. A few, especially the Catholics, were assigned. "I was assigned to this," one explained, "as part of my ordination" (20). Others were asked by bishops or deacons to consider the work and see if it might be the right fit. In some cases, this was because there was an opening in the port that needed to be filled and in others, it was because of the background of the individual in question. One port chaplain remembered her bishop asking her to consider port chaplaincy. She met the current port chaplain, started to shadow him and quickly and to her surprise fell in love with the work; "It was nothing I'd dreamed of when I started seminary" (8). The opportunity to be with seafarers, the respect she quickly developed for the work they do, and the opportunity to serve them has kept her with the work since.

In a few cases, chaplains actually had backgrounds that involved working at or with people at sea. One respondent had experience as a Navy chaplain and felt his calling or vocation as deeply connected to people working in maritime contexts. He grew up, in his words, "around the maritime world" and experienced his work as a Navy chaplain and as a port chaplain as stemming from the same place personally. One or two other chaplains were retired from first careers in the Navy, had relatives who previously worked in port chaplaincy, or had otherwise worked in jobs with people connected to the sea.

About half of the chaplains were not asked to consider working in the port and did not have personal backgrounds connected to the sea. One had heard about port ministry as a child and always wanted to pursue it. The rest came to the work through seemingly random events and/or because of the workplace flexibility it allowed. One, for example, had started working with international students, really enjoyed it, and saw in port chaplaincy when he heard about it from a friend the opportunity to continue to work with people born abroad (23). Another had taken early retirement to care for an ill spouse, and port chaplaincy enabled him to work on a part-time flexible schedule. And another was asked to fill in at a meeting of a related group and was quickly drawn into the work (65).

Regardless of how they came to the work, the relationships port chaplains form with seafarers are at the core of how they describe the work. Before they can meet a seafarer, however, they must negotiate their way through the terminals where the ships dock and get on board the vessels and/or offer transportation to seafarers seeking to disembark for short periods. Then they must find a way to connect with seafarers—which they do by offering a combination of economic and what we call moral or religious support which, in some instances, includes advocacy. It is only after negotiating the security and hierarchy of the ships that they can begin what they see as the core part of their work—the relationships.

Negotiating Access

Port chaplains work onboard vessels, in seafarer centers, in vans they use for transporting seafarers, and in the port itself. In all of these settings their work is significantly shaped by the short period of time ships—and seafarers—are in port and by the security regulations that govern chaplains, seafarers, the vessels, and their cargo. While specific security regulations vary by port in the United States, most do not allow seafarers to disembark and walk more than a few feet from the ship—if at all—without an escort and/or security protocol. Most chaplains have federally issued TWIC cards—Transportation Worker Identification Credentials—that allow them to be in secure areas of ports and give them permission to escort seafarers through these areas following certain guidelines.

The challenges security presents, particularly post-9/11, to accessing seafarers were mentioned repeatedly in interviews as something that must be negotiated to get access to seafarers. A chaplain from New Orleans responded to a question about challenges saying, “The challenges are getting people on and off the ship ... ever since 9/11 it is an extra responsibility ... [you] now have to escort them everywhere. They can’t just get off and walk where they want to go” (28). This chaplain and others emphasized the logistics they must negotiate and the time it takes, not just for them, but for seafarers who already have only a few hours in port. “Out of a four hour leave you can almost lose two hours just checking in and checking out and maybe another hour of transportation by the time you get to where they are going [...] people don’t have a lot of time to do their shopping” (28). A chaplain in New York similarly explained, “Depending on the terminal you visit you have to go through certain checkpoints.... I’m thinking especially

of two terminals ... you cannot go directly to a ship. You have to wait for the security man to escort you..." (35).

In some ports, chaplains have been able to obtain physical space inside of the secure areas for their work and/or more permanent roles for themselves as security brokers. One group of port chaplains, for example, has what they call a "glorified trailer" right on the dock where, the chaplain explained, "the crew can come in and for a few hours they're here touch base with their family, have free internet access, and access phones to call home. They don't have to be transported off the terminal and that is unique to here" (15). At another port the chaplain explained there is a "no man's land" between the berth where seafarers depart and a checkpoint. Seafarers must be escorted in this area. Port leadership approached the chaplains a few years ago to see if they could help. They ended up collaborating on a grant to the Department of Homeland Security to get a few more vans, and this port chaplaincy organization is now the officially designated escort within the port for seafarers as well as port workers—what one called a creative response to "draconian security problems" (61).

Once through port security, chaplains take some seafarers to seafarer centers—where they can relax, use computers, play pool, etc.—and others to local shopping malls. Some crew are not able to disembark, either because they do not have visas or because they do not have time off while the ship is in port. Chaplains spend time with these individuals on board the vessels. "I structure my visits [to ships] to stay as much on ships as possible," one chaplain explained. "My rationale is that for every seafarer who I take out [off the ship] there are at least two or three who don't have the luxury to go out" (35).

While some vessels request that the chaplains come—usually to provide transportation for seafarers—chaplains also do a lot of cold calls. "On a given day," one chaplain explained, "there might be three of us visiting vessels ... maybe half of what we do is going to a crew that has requested a ride or some other type of service though most often it's a ride. And then the other half is cold-calling to see what the crew needs" (9). In these cold calls, chaplains must negotiate the hierarchy and social dynamics of the ship. Once on board, many tend to head for the crew's mess—after a stop to see the captain as the person ultimately in charge of the vessel—because it is where seafarers gather. Some highlighted the chief cook as the person who is most important to talk with because he moves between people of all ranks on board. In the words of one chaplain,

We go on board and our first step ... is to go to the galley and check in with the cook ... cause the cook knows everything that goes on ... because he is the only person that goes between the officer's board room and their mess and the crew's mess. So they know who is having a bad day, whose got a problem at home, whose wife was diagnosed with cancer ... in our "go bags" that we take aboard vessels I probably have more cooking magazines than I do Bibles because the first thing I do is give the cook a cooking magazine and recipes and that gets the dialogue going. (61)

In addition to working with the crew, chaplains are also available to the higher-status officers on board who at least sometimes connect with them. One port chaplain was advised to see a ship's chief engineer struggling with the recent

suicide of his son at home. "I knocked on the door and he sees my clerical collar and he says, 'hey pastor, so good to see you!'" After talking for twenty minutes the chaplain remembers, "he buried his face in his hands and he cried bitterly for minutes saying my son is dead and my wife says it's all my fault because I'm never home" (65). Another chaplain similarly described a captain putting his head down and crying after describing the enormous stress he was under from the management of his company (16).

In their work in ports and onboard vessels, chaplains make strategic choices about dress to help them negotiate access, hierarchy, and issues of language and culture. Many wear clerical garb to help people identify them and to make their negotiations through security and on-board vessels go a bit more smoothly. A Protestant port chaplain explained, "I'm wearing a clergy shirt. I'm identifiable ... [people] come to talk to me when they have something" (35). Similarly, at another port, "Most of our liturgical chaplains wear collars so we're pretty distinguishable ... so we tend to get approached" (61). While English is the international language of the sea, seafarers vary in their English language speaking abilities, another reason many chaplains wear clerical garb so their presence and role do not get lost in translation.³

The Work: Tacking Among Economic, Moral, Religious and Advocacy Roles

Once onboard vessels or with seafarers in vans and seafaring centers, chaplains tack between economic and religious or moral roles, occasionally including advocacy.⁴ The economic roles are largely transactional. Port chaplains sell phone cards, work as package delivery services, offer low-cost transportation to local shopping centers, and, in some cases, run MoneyGram terminals through which crew members can send paychecks to loved ones. Some do this onboard and others from seafarer centers located close to the port. They do all of these things at (very) low-profit margins as a way both to be of service to seafarers and to get access to them for the relationships they see as at the center of their work.

Examples of chaplains doing this economic work were present in every interview. A port chaplain in California who works from a seafarers' center, for example, explained "it is a building that provides a place where the seafarers do come—we have a little store, a little commons area where we sell food and drinks ... we have a place to transfer money ... we also provide transportation for seafarers to local stores" (44). Another port offers free transportation to and from the seafarer center and also "takes them shopping to the malls and things like that. If crew are restricted to the ship [don't have visas to disembark] and they need things like from Best Buy or the mall they give us a list and we go shopping for

³Few port chaplains speak other languages and fewer the languages of seafarers larger from China, India, and the Philippines.

⁴At one of the ports studied, the chaplaincy organization decided to separate the economic and religious/moral roles so business ship visitors respond to economic needs and chaplains to pastoral ones.

them. Our drivers take phone cards and stuff like that on board to sell” (65). In some ports, chaplaincy groups enable seafarers to order packages online and have them delivered to their address. For a small fee, they hold the package and then deliver it to the seafarer when he is in port. As one port chaplain explained, “If they want to order something from Amazon, a seafarer working on a cruise ship can’t get it delivered to the cruise ship. So these packages get delivered to our location and when they come ashore they can check for their package ... they might pay a dollar or two extra for that” (28).

While chaplains are clear that seafarers need these economic services, it is by providing them that they get access to seafarers and can build the relationships most see as at the center of their work. While some port chaplains develop long-term relationships with seafarers, many are short interactions. Port chaplains describe most frequently talking with seafarers about personal family and marital issues and the challenges of being away from home for 9 months, the usual contract length. “With seafarers, especially European seafarers, divorce rates are very high just because of the nature of their life on the ships. Being away for months and months, they get estranged and don’t see each other enough ... that is one example of how relational issues come up” (35). In the words of another chaplain, “You look at people’s eyes. You look at the way they move ... and you can pretty soon figure out who needs to be talked to, who needs a hug and a hand, and we’re there to be friends. That’s all we do” (16).

None of the ports we learned about have protocols that lead chaplains to always be called in certain situations, but they seemed to be called in instances of death, especially when a death occurs on board. Many chaplains shared stories of supporting crew when there was a death on board both generally and through ritual. In one case, a deceased seafarers’ body was stored in the refrigerator until the vessel came into port, standard procedure in such circumstances. The chaplain was called and, in his words, “the cook wanted me to stand in the refrigerator and pray with them” and also to use holy water and “just go over the vessel and pray where the man died, and where he worked and all of that,” which the chaplain did (9). In other cases, chaplains described just being with the crew and trying to support them in whatever ways were needed. In one unusual case, a chaplain was called to bless a ship where seafarers said a seafarer had died years before and was, in death, causing problems for them on board.

Chaplains also spend time supporting and counseling seafarers when deaths occur at home. Several told stories of being with seafarers mourning the loss of family members at home and of helping them to attend funerals by Skype while in port. In one case, a port chaplain spent an hour with a seafarer whose 12-year-old had found his mother dead in bed. “We prayed, we talked, we looked at all of his options, and I met with the ship captain” (57). Together they found a way, with the captain and shipping agent, for the seafarer to go home for the funeral and then return without breaking his contract. Another chaplain remembered learning in a 5-minute conversation that a seafarer’s niece had died in a tragic accident. “He shared this with me,” the chaplain remembered, “and then he had

to go back to work in five minutes ... and I asked him what was their next port so I could then tell the chaplain so that someone would know of the deep grief..." (9). In all of these cases, chaplains aimed to connect with seafarers, to offer a human touch and to bring a broader framework of meaning to the port and the economic work that takes place therein.

In some cases, chaplains are also called on to advocate for seafarers and, as clergy, see themselves as people seafarers can approach confidentially with problems. Such problems range from medical emergencies to safety issues to the non-payment of wages. Chaplains frequently help find medical help for crew members in emergencies, such as a port chaplain who brought a cruise ship worker suffering from appendicitis to the hospital for emergency surgery (20). In one case a seafarer approached a chaplain about being verbally and physically assaulted on board the vessel; working with the Coast Guard, the chaplain was able to get him removed from the vessel at his request and flown home free of charge (9). In many other cases, chaplains work with the International Transport Workers' Federation to get seafarers paid when there are issues with wages.

Many of the ways chaplains build connections with seafarers are improvisational, though in some cases they rely on religious rituals both for seafarers and for ports. In some ports, chaplains offer Catholic mass, especially for ships with large numbers of Catholic Filipino seafarers, and many chaplains offer communion if it is requested. In a few cases, chaplains are seen as chaplains for the port more broadly and are ritually called on for ceremonies in the port. "Whenever a port event takes place," a chaplain in one city explained, "I'm asked to come to the invocation which gives me three paragraphs to articulate a vision for compassion and justice and awareness of the needs of the poor and the weaker people" (56).

Port chaplains tend to be excellent code-switchers, able to speak to seafarers, broader port audiences, and their donor bases in very different frames (Cadge and Sigalow 2013). While most told us they downplay explicitly religious language with seafarers unless seafarers bring it up, they use it often when talking with congregants and religious donors. With the exception of one group that trains seafarers to be ministering seafarers and lead Bible studies on board, most of the port chaplaincy organizations we studied make Bibles and religious educational materials available in their seafaring centers but do not explicitly speak about religion unless invited to do so by seafarers.

Creating Relationships in the Port

As they transport and spend time with seafarers, port chaplains aim to build relationships with seafarers, making the port a site not just of economic activity but of broader human connection and concern. While most do so out of their personal religious beliefs and the religious missions of their organizations, the ways they do the work are more broadly humanistic. They told me that they rarely describe their work with seafarers in religiously explicit language while they are doing it. Reflecting on the relationship between their economic and transactional roles and more religious, moral or caring roles, chaplains are generally clear

that it is the latter that is most important. “We simply ask them [seafarers],” one port chaplain told me, “how they’re doing, what their journey has been like.... We don’t typically ask them right away what they need. We ask them how they are.” This type of conversation, which this chaplain said often takes place over food in the mess, “fosters kind of a way to make a conversation and a relationship. And then it gets more into the transactional issues—maybe they need to change money or send money home or maybe they need some shopping done or to go to the pharmacy and we can help them with that” (36).

Chaplains use various terms to describe these relationships, all of which emphasize the human connections they bring. Like chaplains in other sectors, some emphasized the “ministry of presence” they offer (Sullivan 2014). “We not only provide resources or facilities or phone cards,” one explained; “we provide ourselves as human beings and therein lies the crux of what we do. We call it ministry of presence ... or non-anxious presence ... we show up and remind people from our faith perspective that God shows up whenever two or three are gathered in God’s name” (36). In the words of another chaplain, “we don’t want anything ... we just want to engage with them on a human level, one to one” (37). Presence as a theme was also prominent in the UK study of port chaplains (Palmer and Murray 2016).

Other chaplains describe this connection by emphasizing the community they offer and the visibility they provide for crews. “We bring community,” one chaplain explained, “it’s such an industrialized complex ... sometimes, the human element is not cared for as much or you just get caught up in all of the business of it all” (37). “We are serving a silent community” another chaplain commented. “People don’t know—they see the ship come in, they don’t know there are human beings on board ... [the chaplains] makes their lives better, safer, less stressed when they know that somebody is out there looking out for them” (65). Part of bringing seafarers into this broader community, another chaplain said, is “bearing witness” to their work so they are not just a “forgotten people,” a source of migrant labor (44).

Many see seafarers—despite their relative invisibility—as key to the world economy, making it that much more important to provide care to them: “The world economy is based off these twenty, twenty-five, thirty people on one ship.... I’m here to bring hospitality and care for the people we depend on so much but know very little about” (44). Chaplains see this community being built on vessels as well as in seafarers’ centers, where some chaplains get to know the sailors and learn about their weddings, the birth of their children, and other family changes over time. It is a form of “sanctuary,” explained one chaplain, when speaking about a board meeting he was having that was interrupted by happy screaming outside the door. “We walk in there and this seafarer saw his baby for the first time on Skype and he is so excited he is carrying on ... that is a form of sanctuary that’s really important to these folks” (71).

Only the Catholic chaplains (and then only rarely) seem to explicitly connect the community they offer seafarers with the mission of the church. “This

[these people] is a concern of the church ... they are what we call invisible people. They are our parishioners beyond borders. They just come and go. They are invisible in the sense that the general public does not notice them" (22). The Catholic Church has explicitly addressed the needs of migrant workers and travelers through a top-level department that offers a framework through which some Catholic port chaplains situate their work.⁵

While this relationship building takes place in specific ports, many chaplains also see in the relationships between port chaplains and centers a kind of "linked safety net" that spans the globe. "The seafarers know that our group exists throughout the world; whether it's the Catholics or the Baptists or whatever. They know there are places out there where they can go when they are having problems and get some help with the family ... or their contract ... or help issues," one explained. In the United States and Canada, most of these groups are linked through the North American Maritime Ministry Association, whose members gather regularly to collaborate and consider ways to provide the best support. Seafarers can go to their companies with concerns, but port chaplaincy offers an alternative—in the words of one chaplain, "a sympathetic ear ... instead of dealing with the company" (28). "They're away from their families for a long time and they experience weddings, births and deaths while they're away from home and they need the comfort of the seamen's centers around the world. I truly believe that and that's why I'm there," explained another chaplain (65).

Occasionally a seafarer writes a letter to a family member describing problems on board; the mariner then contacts a port chaplaincy group, who can locate the ship and have a chaplain quietly check on the individual in question. "We've had calls where a seafarer writes a letter and he's having a problem and the mother will call Stella Maris ["Star of the Sea," a reference to Mary and the name by which many Catholic seafarers' centers operate]...." These and other port chaplains and their organizations act as a kind of global safety net in the absence of any others becoming, in the process, humanizing agents of modern capitalism.

Through this work, many chaplains do provide advocacy in particular situations but almost always remain focused on caring for individuals rather than advocating for structural change. One port chaplain stated this clearly, saying "We're not trying to end the maritime shipping industry in any way. We're not trying to bring seafarers out from their occupation..." (44). They are providing care and concern to these individuals as they do the work. While the work is difficult, port chaplains reflected on the importance of these jobs for the seafarers

⁵http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/index.htm. Before August 17, 2016, this body was known as the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. On that date, Pope Francis merged this Council with several others to form the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20160817_humanam-progressionem.html.

and the extent to which the work enables them to support their families (and others) in their home countries. Chaplains help to facilitate this economic system and care for people in it, rather than attempt to reform it at the macro level. This is, at least in part, because they depend on the ports and shipping companies for access to vessels, and criticizing them too sharply could threaten their ability to do the work.

In their work, most of the chaplains we interviewed were clear that they do it out of their own religious commitments, as ways to live them out in practice. Borrowing a phrase mentioned in many interviews, one chaplain said he preaches the gospel not with words but through actions: “You are an example by living your faith but not by talking about it.” Others spoke of living out their baptismal vows in this work that they view as requiring them to care for others, whom God views as sharing a common humanity (71). Others referenced biblical teachings about caring for strangers: “These guys come in, they are strangers. They know nothing of our city and sometimes very little of our language. We need to take care of them while they’re here. We’re asked [by God] to take care of them” (16). Such an emphasis might also reflect an American emphasis on individualism; we would need data from port chaplains operating outside the United States to fully assess this. We do not think this emphasis is related to the role of unions, which are intrinsically pitted against management and view themselves as defenders of the right to fair working conditions. The chaplains we interviewed instead understand their work as simply addressing whatever needs seafarers may have, with effort expended toward advocacy of labor issues only rarely. The interviews we conducted did not indicate a widespread suspicion of ship owners or other management actors on the part of chaplains, and their descriptions of the work they do focused almost exclusively on conditions inherent to seafaring, rather than anything in the reasonable control of employers.

At meetings of the North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA), we met port chaplains who are much more explicitly evangelical in their approach but did not hear such themes in my interviews, either because they were filtering them out for me as a researcher or were not at the ports included in this sample. Similar findings about evangelicals not evangelizing those to whom they provide social service have also been present in other studies ([Lichterman 2005](#))

CONCLUSIONS

Unlike chaplains in the military, federal prisons, or the Veterans Administration, whose presence is required by law, chaplains in health care organizations, airports, ports, and a range of other organizations work at the pleasure of the organization. They remain present because their organizations and individual chaplains negotiated (and continue to negotiate) access to those spaces. While the histories of the port chaplaincy organizations we studied vary dramatically,

the chaplains they employ today all regularly negotiate access to seafarers. They do so by working through security regulations, understanding the hierarchy of ships, and dressing in ways that emphasize their status as members of the clergy.

Once on board the vessels, port chaplains move between economic, religious, moral, and advocacy roles. The economic support they provide enables them to develop the relationships they see as at the center of their work as they seek to relationally embed seafarers shifting their workplaces from those that are purely economic to spaces that also have humanistic components. While port chaplains want to make sure seafarers get the phone cards or packages or shopping done they need to, they seek more broadly to embed them in a global community of care and a safety net that might change their experiences of their work. Whether these efforts are effective from the perspective of seafarers is an important question we are exploring with colleagues in another ongoing project that includes fieldwork with seafarers onboard vessels.

While the chaplains mostly do this work out of personal religious conviction, they rarely talk with seafarers about their convictions choosing to live out their beliefs in action, rather than word. This approach reflects the mainline Protestant history of chaplaincy—which emphasizes actions over evangelism—and the fact that the majority of chaplains interviewed are mainline Protestants. Chaplains aim to change seafarers' experiences and to function as a kind of lubricant that helps keep the economic system running at the micro-level rather than as change agents working toward systemic reform. Any moral or prophetic witness they see themselves offering is in their presence and in the witness they bear to seafarers doing largely invisible labor central to the global economy.

In addition to being shaped by their Protestant histories, the work of port chaplaincy is influenced by the maritime institutions within which they work. Their access in most ports, given security concerns, is contingent on continued good relationships with gatekeepers in the port as well as with ship owners who make all final decisions about who has access to their vessels. It is likely for these reasons—much as in the airport contexts Wendy Cadge describes in her recent article—that port chaplains do not seek to change the economic system or advocate for structural changes to the shipping industry (Cadge 2018). Because chaplains have no fundamental right to access port environments, they must rely instead on goodwill and the demonstration of their willingness to offer a ministry of presence rather than economic or moral disruption. Rather they continue to support and advocate for seafarers through relationships, one person at a time, becoming in the process humanizing agents of modern capitalism.

While some of these institutional constraints may be unique to ports, airports, and other settings where chaplains are optional, they raise questions about how the work of all chaplains are shaped by the institutions within which they work and about limiting constraints on that work, for example, do any chaplains try via other, nonphysical means to reach those they are prevented from accessing (e.g.,

social media, phone, etc.)? Or do any chaplains enjoy access to those in need but carry out more overtly religious work? The institutional constraints discussed above also continue to raise questions about how the organizational position of chaplains—particularly related to the individuals funding and giving them access to the people for whom they care—shape the mandate of their work and its every day, rather than crisis or emergency, orientation (Cadge Forthcoming; Miller 2007; Miller and Ngunjiri 2015a).

While port chaplains are but one example of religious actors operating within spaces not primarily religious, the unique nature of their geographic location offers a compelling example of how and why religious actors operate in nonreligious environments as motivated by personal convictions arising from religious belief. This case adds a new chapter to studies of religion on the edge—in this case the water’s edge—facilitating continued theorizing about the factors that shape the forms religion takes in such settings, the impact of that presence, and the ways it is experienced by chaplains and religious professionals as well as by others—in this case seafarers—which are the subject of our next articles on this subject. The work of port chaplains described here offers one, starting example of how religious actors operate “on the edge”: rather than proselytizing, offering only religious or spiritual services, or otherwise constraining their service along religious lines in any way, these religious actors bring religion to nonreligious settings on the edge as a personally motivating force that impels them to offer humanitarian assistance as defined by seafarers.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide for Port Chaplains

Thank you for participating in this study. I’m hoping to learn a bit about your work, how you came to this work, and how you see religion and spirituality in your daily work. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Background

1. To start, can you tell me a bit about chaplaincy at the port where you work?
 - a. When did it start?
 - b. How did it start?
 - c. Is there a mission statement—what are the goals of the chaplaincy?
 - d. Who is involved—both people and organizations?
 - e. How is the work divided?
 - f. Are chaplains paid or volunteers?
2. Can you also tell me a bit about any chapel or meditation space here?
 - a. What is its history?
 - b. Why was it opened?
 - c. Who do you see using it?
3. And how about you, how did you come to work as a chaplain in the port?
 - a. Education
 - b. Previous positions
 - c. Formal certification or licensure
 - d. Which organizations were involved in training? In endorsing?
 - e. Did you feel called to this work in some sense?
 - f. What has kept you doing this work over time?
 - g. Who is your boss?
 - h. Where is God for you in this?
4. Can you tell me about a usual day?
 - a. Walk through a day
 - b. Are there other things you do in a usual week? Month? Ask about attending formal ceremonies, giving prayers, etc.
 - c. Are there times or situations in the port in which you are always called?
 - d. Tell me about the people you work with – their demographics including religious demographics
 - e. Who do you work most closely with in the port?
 - f. Are there people here that you don't work with much at all?
 - g. Do you have an office?
 - h. When you are not in your office, what are the usual places you go?
 - i. Do you have a formal relationship with a local congregation?
 - j. To what extent do you work as an educator? What are you educating about?
5. What do you bring to the port as a chaplain?
 - a. Why do ports need chaplains?
 - b. What do you most bring to the port?
6. What is the best part of this work for you?
 - a. Can you tell me about an especially memorable situation?
 - b. How about a situation in which you felt like you really made a difference

7. What is the most difficult part of this work for you?
 - a. What makes it challenging?
 - b. How often and in what ways do you deal with death or end of life situations?
 - c. How often and in what ways do you deal with conflicts?
8. Can you give me a sense of how religion and spirituality are present in the port apart from your office?
 - a. Do you think spirituality or religion informs the work of your non-chaplain colleagues? How?
 - b. How often do you talk with non-chaplain colleagues about spirituality and religion? Can you give me an example?
 - c. What do you mostly talk with your non-chaplain colleagues about?
9. How do you work with people who are religiously different from you?
 - a. Can you give me an example of a situation that went well?
 - b. Does the port have a formal policy about religious diversity?
10. What questions am I not asking that I should be to better understand your work?

Demographics:

- Gender
- Religion
- Formal certifications
- Age range
- Time in chaplaincy / religious work
- Time at the port
- What professional organizations do you belong to?

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