Tens of thousands of ships dock at UK ports every day with crew on board who have spent months at sea.
As a lay chaplain to ports, Ruth Campbell's area of care stretches from Southend to Silvertown in east London. It ranges from small jetties to the giant ports of London Gateway, where the container ships arrive, and London Tilbury.

Around 10,000 ships come up the River Thames every year – with cruise ships alone carrying up to 800 crew. Some stay only for five hours before heading back out – and others up to a week while their ships are unloaded.

Many crew will have had little or no contact with their families over a nine month period with some having missed key family occasions and milestones.

Ruth's role will very often mean carrying WiFi routers on board to help seafarers make contact with their families and friends.

In one case a seafarer who was distressed at the prospect of missing his daughter's sixth birthday was able to 'attend' virtually by using Ruth's mobile phone – including being there as his daughter blew out her birthday candles.

Where a ship is only in dock for a couple of hours, Ruth's team will help with requests such as a lift to a supermarket to stock up on supplies.

Her job is to provide a listening ear for seafarers who might want to talk about a range of issues from missing their families to their mental health and other areas such as pay and conditions.

The crews – with Filipinos making up the biggest nationality - are deeply religious and she will arrange services and prayers were requested.

"The seafarers who work on board these ships are the most fantastic group of people, they are doing these jobs to get a better life for their families back home," she said.

"We often keep in touch with them when they go home and they will send messages and video call me with their families. It is really important that we keep the relationships going."

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Ruth Campbell is a lay chaplain with The Mission to Seafarers. This Sunday July 9, is designated as Sea Sunday when people come together to pray for seafarers and fishers and thank them for their vital role in our lives.