Christians in Germany purchase boat to aid shipwrecked migrants

by Dawn Araujo-Hawkins in the September 9, 2020 issue

The crowd-funded ship Sea-Watch 4. (Photo by Chris Grodotzki, courtesy of Sea Watch)

A rescue ship purchased via crowdfunding, organized by the Evangelical Church in Germany, set sail from Spain in early August. Named *Sea-Watch 4*, the ship will aid migrants and asylum seekers attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe.

The voyage across the Mediterranean is notoriously dangerous, with boats capsizing and killing hundreds of people at a time. Between 1993 and 2018, volunteers at United for Intercultural Action logged 27,000 known migrant deaths at sea, although the total was almost certainly much higher. An estimated 400 people have drowned just in 2020.

And yet, the last rescue ship—Doctors Without Borders's *Aquarius*—ended operations in 2018, citing harassment from European nations. In June of that year, Italy refused safe harbor to *Aquarius*, which was carrying more than 600 migrants.

The following year, the Evangelical Church in Germany decided to get its own ship.

"As long as people seeking protection in the Mediterranean drown and government action fails, we will do our utmost to support civilian rescue services," said Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chairman of the Evangelical Church in Germany, in a statement at the time.

At the *Sea-Watch 4* mission launch in February, Bedford-Strohm reiterated: "One does not let any single human drown. End of discussion."

While the rescue ship will help people at sea, the church will continue to lobby for fair asylum procedures and legal migration opportunities.

In 2015, more than a million people arrived in Europe, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The continued influx of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers is largely thought to have caused a spike in far-right extremism and xenophobia on the continent.