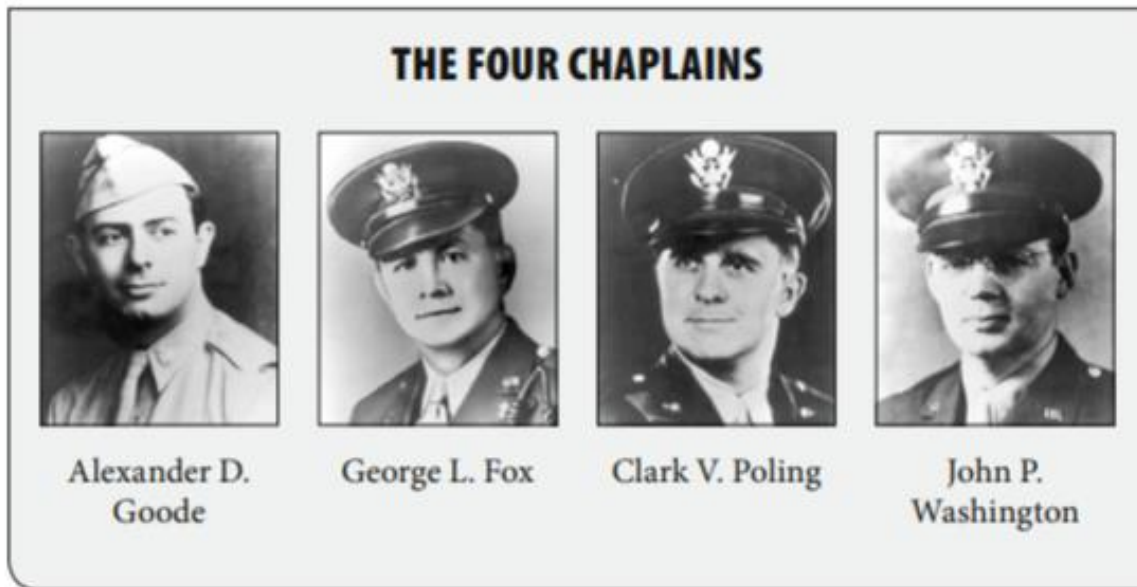


## FOUR CHAPLAINS SUNDAY

The first Sunday in February is Four Chaplains Sunday. More than 70 years after they made the supreme sacrifice, the story of these heroic chaplains – Methodist, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed – is still being told. The American Legion encourages its post, district and department chaplains to conduct or participate in a nondenominational service to honor the Four Chaplains and ensure their legacy of brotherhood and selfless service is remembered.



### The story of the Four Chaplains

On the evening of Feb. 2, 1943, USAT Dorchester was crowded to capacity, carrying 902 U.S. troops, merchant seamen and civilian workers.

Once a luxury coastal liner, the 5,649-ton vessel had been converted into an Army transport ship. Dorchester, one of three ships in the SG-19 convoy, was moving steadily across the icy waters from Newfoundland toward a U.S. base in Greenland. Coast Guard cutters Tampa, Escanaba and Comanche escorted the convoy.

Hans Danielsen, the ship's captain, was concerned and cautious. Earlier, Tampa had detected a submarine with its sonar. Danielsen knew he was in dangerous waters even before he got the report. German U-boats were constantly prowling these vital sea lanes, and several ships had already been sunk.

Dorchester was now only 150 miles from its destination, but the captain ordered the men to sleep in their clothing and keep life jackets on. Many soldiers sleeping deep in the ship's hold disregarded the order because of the engine's heat. Others ignored it because the life jackets were uncomfortable.

On Feb. 3, at 12:55 a.m., a periscope broke the chilly Atlantic waters. Through the cross hairs, an officer aboard U-223 spotted Dorchester. After identifying and targeting the ship, he gave orders to fire a fan of three torpedoes. The one that hit was decisive and deadly, striking the starboard side, amidship, far below the water line.

Alerted that Dorchester was sinking rapidly, Danielsen gave the order to abandon ship. In fewer than 20 minutes, Dorchester would slip beneath the Atlantic's icy waters.

Tragically, the hit had knocked out power and radio contact with the three escort ships. Tampa, however, saw the flash of the explosion. It responded and rescued 97 survivors. Escanaba circled Dorchester, rescuing an additional 133 survivors (one died later). Comanche continued on, escorting the remaining two ships.

Aboard Dorchester, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men, and many more were seriously wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion, were groping in darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside, where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then the knowledge that death awaited.

Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, overcrowding them to the point of capsizing, according to eyewitnesses. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get into them.

In the midst of the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness: Lt. George L. Fox, a Methodist minister; Lt. Alexander D. Goode, a Jewish rabbi; Lt. John P. Washington, a Roman Catholic priest; and Lt. Clark V. Poling, a Dutch Reformed minister.

Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. They tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded, and guide the disoriented toward safety.

"Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live," said Wyatt Fox, son of Reverend Fox.

One witness, Pvt. William Bednar, found himself floating in oil-smearred water surrounded by dead bodies and debris. "I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," Bednar recalled. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

A sailor, Petty Officer John Mahoney, tried to re-enter his cabin but was stopped by Rabbi Goode. Concerned about the cold Arctic air, Mahoney explained that he'd forgotten his gloves.

"Never mind," Goode responded. "I have two pairs."

The rabbi then gave the petty officer his own gloves. Later, Mahoney realized that Goode hadn't been carrying two pairs of gloves, and that the chaplain had decided not to leave Dorchester.

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. It was then that engineer Grady Clark witnessed an astonishing sight. When there were no more life jackets to hand out, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men. Rabbi Goode did not call out for a Jew, and Father Washington did not call out for a Catholic. Nor did Rev. Fox and Rev. Poling call out for a Protestant. They simply gave their life jackets to those next in line.

“It was the finest thing I have ever seen or hope to see this side of heaven,” said John Ladd, another survivor who saw the chaplains’ selfless act.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains, braced against the slanting deck, arm in arm. They were heard praying and singing hymns.

Of the 902 men aboard *Dorchester*, 672 died. When the news reached the United States, the nation was stunned by the magnitude of the tragedy and the heroic conduct of the four chaplains.

“Valor is a gift,” Carl Sandburg once said. “Those having it never know for sure whether they have it until the test comes.”

That night, Rev. Fox, Rabbi Goode, Rev. Poling and Father Washington passed life’s ultimate test. In doing so, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage and selflessness.

In 1944, the Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart were awarded posthumously to the chaplains’ next of kin, and in 1961, President Eisenhower awarded a special Medal for Heroism, a one-time award authorized by Congress and intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

### **Suggestions for a Four Chaplains service**

These community services became a tradition in the late 1940s, usually conducted on or near Feb. 3 to honor the Four Chaplains and the hundreds who went down with *Dorchester*. Because of the interfaith nature of the chaplains’ sacrifice, such services are an opportunity to bring together people of all races, faiths and creeds in an observance of our shared humanity.

**Music** Appropriate selections include the “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “America The Beautiful,” “How Great Thou Art,” “God of Our Fathers,” “My Country, ’Tis of Thee,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Eternal Father, Strong to Save,” “God Bless America” and “Let There Be Peace On Earth.” The sheet music for the Four Chaplains Anthem is available upon request ([chapel@fourchaplains.org](mailto:chapel@fourchaplains.org)). In a gathering of Jews and Christians, it is preferable to have music acceptable to all, or to counter one selection with the other.

**Offering** Many posts, groups and organizations collect an offering during their service for the work of the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia.

**Special guests** To have family members of the *Dorchester* victims and the Four Chaplains is an honor. Notify the Chapel of Four Chaplains of the date, time and location of your service, and it will invite them on your behalf.

**Location** A Four Chaplains service can be conducted at your post, a fraternal hall, auditorium, church, synagogue or chapel. Representatives of different faith groups should be invited to participate. Clergy representing the faiths of the Four Chaplains is especially fitting.

**Proclamation** Invite your mayor or governor to issue a proclamation designating the first Sunday of February “Four Chaplains Sunday” in your town, city or state.

**Color and honor guards** If your post has one or both, include them in the service. If not, invite other veterans, civic or fraternal organizations to participate with their color and honor guards.

**Focal points** Create a focal point for the service: four lit candles, four red roses, a life jacket, or four empty seats near the altar or podium. For a breakfast or banquet service, consider an empty table set for four.

**Programs** Printed programs add to the dignity and importance of the service. Send a copy of your program to the Chapel of Four Chaplains for its archives.

**Publicity** Spread the word about your Four Chaplains service through local newspapers, radio and TV stations, and social media. Encourage reporters to write about the upcoming service or to do a follow-up story. Again, send copies to the Chapel of Four Chaplains for its archives.

**Rehearsal** A rehearsal prior to the event always makes for a smooth service.

## SAMPLE PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, February 3, 20\_\_\_\_, will mark the \_\_\_\_ anniversary of the sinking of the troopship USAT Dorchester, which carried to their deaths four U.S. Army chaplains of three faiths who stood united in prayer as the ship went down; and

WHEREAS, these four chaplains, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Protestant, gave their own life jackets to four soldiers and thus sacrificed their own lives to save the lives of others; and

WHEREAS, the heroic deeds of Chaplains Lt. George L. Fox, Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Lt. Johnny P. Washington and Lt. Clark V. Poling, and their combined act of supreme devotion and sacrifice for American liberty and human freedom, are an inspiring and ever shining example of real brotherhood for all time to the people of the world; and

WHEREAS, we must all see to it that their supreme sacrifice to the common cause of human freedom and justice for all shall not have been in vain;

NOW THEREFORE, I, \_\_\_\_\_ (title) of (city/ county/state) of \_\_\_\_\_, do hereby designate Sunday, February \_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, (the first Sunday in February) to be observed as Four Chaplains Sunday, and call upon all our citizens to commemorate the day with appropriate observances in public places and by prayers in their homes and houses of worship.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of \_\_\_\_\_

This \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (title)

## **Suggested formats for a Four Chaplains service**

### Breakfast or banquet program

Posting of the colors

Pledge of Allegiance

“America the Beautiful” (assembly or solo)

Welcome

Invocation

Meal

Introduction of guests

Message (focused on the Four Chaplains and sacrificial service)

Tributes to the Four Chaplains (wreath laying or candle lighting by four clergy, one of each faith)

“Let There Be Peace on Earth” (assembly)

Benediction

Retirement of colors

### Short program

Pledge of Allegiance

“America the Beautiful” (assembly or solo)

Invocation

Welcome

Introduction of guests

The collect (read aloud by assembly)

Message (focused on the Four Chaplains and sacrificial service)

Benediction

### Major program

Posting of the colors

Pledge of Allegiance

National anthem

Welcome

Invocation

Introduction of guests

The collect (read aloud by assembly)

Musical selection (choral or band)

Message (focused on the Four Chaplains and sacrificial service)

Tributes to the Four Chaplains (wreath laying or candle lighting by four clergy, one of each faith)

“Let There Be Peace on Earth” (assembly)

Benediction

Moment of silence

Taps

Retirement of colors

### **Suggested introductory remarks**

On Feb. 3, 1943, the troopship USAT Dorchester was hit by an enemy torpedo and sank to the bottom of the North Atlantic. Of the 902 young men on board, only 230 survived, and they owed their lives to the courage and leadership exhibited by the heroic Four Chaplains, who, in sacrificing their lives, left a unique legacy of brotherhood.

This service is a tribute to those courageous chaplains and the 672 brave young men who lost their lives on the fateful night. Further, this ceremony honors all those who have served, and whose courage and faith have sustained our country.

We have a responsibility to teach our children and youth about these great events and great sacrifices, for they are our future. They must know and understand what selfless service on behalf of others can accomplish.

### **The Collect**

*This prayer is interfaith in nature and may be read aloud by those in attendance.*

God of our fathers and our God, we thank you for the unity that the Dorchester chaplains, these four men of God, demonstrated in life and in death.

Unity that is not uniformity.

Unity that strengthens within each of us every worthy loyalty of faith and practice.

Unity that transcends all our differences and makes us one in loyalty to our country and our fellowmen, and to You, our God.

Grant us now Your abiding presence, and may we remain faithful to the spirit of our Four Chaplains who, having learned to live and serve together, in death were not divided.

## **The candle lighting ceremony**

At 12:30 a.m. on Feb. 3, 1943, the bell on USAT Dorchester rang twice and never was sounded again. The troopship was torpedoed by an enemy submarine, and 672 young men died as it sank to the bottom. Among them were four men of God: a rabbi, a Roman Catholic priest, a Methodist minister, and a Dutch Reformed minister. All were Army chaplains.

These four chaplains gave their life jackets to save four soldiers and, in so doing, gave up their only means of survival. They were last seen on the deck of the Dorchester with their arms linked and their heads bowed in prayer as they went to their watery graves in the North Atlantic. Each chaplain received the Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross posthumously, and in 1960, a special Medal for Heroism was presented to their next of kin – an award intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

At this time, a candle will be lit for each of the Four Chaplains.

### **“I light this candle in memory of Chaplain George L. Fox ...”**

George Fox was the oldest of the Four Chaplains. In Vermont, he was called “the little minister,” because he was 5’7”. Lying about his age in 1917, he enlisted in the Army as a medical corps assistant. He received the Silver Star for rescuing a wounded soldier from a battlefield filled with poison gas, although he wore no gas mask himself, and the Croix de Guerre for outstanding bravery in an artillery barrage that left him with a broken spine. After the war, he became a successful accountant. He was happily married with two children when he heard God’s call to the ministry. Fox went back to school and later was ordained as a Methodist minister. When war came, he once again enlisted, telling his wife, “I’ve got to go. I know from experience what our boys are about to face. They need me.” Before he boarded Dorchester, he wrote a letter to his daughter. “I want you to know,” he wrote, “how proud I am that your marks in school are so high – but always remember that kindness and charity and courtesy are much more important.”

### **“I light this candle in memory of Chaplain Alexander D. Goode ...”**

Growing up in Washington, D.C., Alexander Goode was an outstanding athlete and scholar. Following in his father’s footsteps, this young man – known for his laughter and love of life – became a rabbi. Even as he pursued his studies, he found time to serve in the National Guard. The return of the body of the Unknown Soldier to Arlington National Cemetery had a profound effect on Goode. He attended the ceremonies, choosing to walk the 15 miles there and 15 miles back rather than take a car or a bus because he thought it showed more respect. Goode married his childhood sweetheart, and they had a daughter. He was serving a synagogue in York, Pa., when World War II broke out. One day, Mrs. Goode received a telegram from her husband that read, “Having a wonderful experience,” and she knew that her husband had found companions with whom he could share his faith and good humor.

### **“I light this candle in memory of Chaplain Clark V. Poling ...”**

Clark Poling was the youngest of the Four Chaplains and the seventh generation in an unbroken line of ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church. When World War II broke out, he was anxious to go, but not as a chaplain. “I’m not going to hide behind the church in some safe office out of the firing line,” he told his father. The elder Poling replied, “Don’t you know that chaplains have the highest mortality rate of all?”



As a chaplain you'll have the best chance in the world to be killed. You just can't carry a gun to kill anyone yourself." So, the young man left his pastorate in Schenectady, N.Y., and became an Army chaplain. Just before he sailed, Poling asked his father to pray for him – "not for my safe return. That wouldn't be fair. Just pray that I shall do my duty ... and have the strength, courage, and understanding of men. Just pray that I shall be adequate." Indeed, he taught his men to not harbor personal hatred for the Germans and the Japanese. Hate the system that made your brother evil, he said. It is the system we must destroy.

**"I light this candle in memory of Chaplain John P. Washington ..."**

John Washington grew up in the toughest section of Newark, N.J., poor, scrappy and determined. One of nine children born to an Irish immigrant family, he was blessed with a sunny disposition and a love for music. He also loved a good fight and was a member of the South 12th Street gang when he was called to the priesthood. He played ball with the boys of the parish, organized sports teams and, then the war broke out, went with his "boys" into the Army. Raised in song and prayer to comfort those around him, Washington's beautiful voice could be heard above the cries of the dying in his final moments on Feb. 3, 1943.