

Dear Friends,

Today is known as Four Chaplains Day for what transpired on February 3, 1943 during World War II. The U.S. Army transport ship, the *Dorchester*, was crowded to near capacity as it carried servicemen, merchant seamen, and civilian workers. Making its way from Newfoundland toward an American base in Greenland, it was torpedoed by a German submarine.

The catastrophic assault resulted in 672 deaths and there were 230 survivors. Twenty minutes after the attack, the *Dorchester* sank into the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean. In the 20 minutes of chaos and terror, four Army chaplains brought hope and gave help. One was a Roman Catholic priest, one was a Rabbi, and two were Protestant ministers.

A description of the event reads: “Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. There they tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded, and guide the disoriented toward safety. One witness, a Private, found himself floating in oil-smeared water surrounded by dead bodies and debris. He said: ‘I could hear men crying, pleading, praying. I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going.’”

On deck, the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. And when there were no more lifejackets left, the chaplains did an astonishing thing. They removed their own and gave them to four frightened young men. One survivor said of the selflessness: ‘It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven.’ As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could hear the chaplains praying, and see them with their arms linked, as they braced against the slanting deck.”

Each year on February 3, I think about the interfaith witness of Reverend George Fox, Rabbi Alexander Goode, the Reverend Clark Poling, and Father John Washington. I reflect on their extraordinary courage and selflessness – undoubtedly fostered and fueled by their religious beliefs.

This year in the midst of a different sort of battle, I am thinking about the chaplains, counselors, first responders, and healthcare providers on the front lines of fighting the pandemic and caring for the ill and the dying. At times, these caregivers have risked their physical health and their mental health, and even the well-being of their loved ones.

On this day and all the days ahead, let us pray for people on various frontlines as we give thanks to God for lives of service, sacrifice, and compassion.

God bless,  
Jane

P.S. It was a pleasure to see so many of you via Zoom at our annual meeting last Sunday. I deeply appreciated your tribute in honor of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of beginning my pastorate in Portland on February 1, 2006. Also, I was surprised and delighted by the generous and thoughtful delivery of flowers, chocolates, and a lovely note from “my flock” in celebration of the day. Many thanks for these gifts. As I’ve said before – and continue to say – it is a privilege and a blessing to serve as your pastor!