

On Saturday, February 1, 2020, a display in honor of Four Chaplains Day was set up at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Dickinson, North Dakota. Sunday, February 2, 2020, was named Four Chaplains Day to commemorate the events of February 3, 1943, when the troop ship USAT Dorchester sank after suffering a torpedo attack by a German submarine.

The Dorchester left New York on January 23, 1943, as part of a convoy of three ships carrying four chaplains, 902 service men, merchant marines and civilian workers. The Dorchester was torpedoed by German submarine U-223 off the coast of New Foundland at 12:55 AM, February 3, 1943, and sank less than 20 minutes after the deadly attack.

When the Dorchester began to sink, four chaplains of different religions, Lt. George L. Fox, Methodist; Lt. Alexander D. Goodell, Jewish; Lt. John P. Washington, Roman Catholic; and Lt. Clark V. Polling, Dutch Reformed were helping to calm passengers and organize an orderly evacuation. Life vests were passed out to the men, but the supply ran out before every man had one. The four chaplains gave up their own life vests to others and assisted as many men as they could into lifeboats. They then linked their arms together, reciting prayers and singing hymns as they went down with the ship.

The Four Chaplains were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross on December 19, 1944. The Four Chaplains Medal was introduced on July 14, 1960. Those medals were presented to the next of kin of each of the four Dorchester chaplains on January 18, 1961. In 2006, the chaplains were also posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

The display in the lobby of St. Patrick's Catholic Church was well-received with a lot of curiosity from attendees about this mostly unknown, unheralded World War II tragedy and story of sacrifice. Materials were made available to educate and mark the occasion.

Submitted by Department Chaplain, Sandra Petermann