



**Township of Toms River
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Kelaher among honorees for Chapel of Four Chaplains Award

TOMS RIVER TOWNSHIP- The Department of New Jersey, Marine Corps League, recently held their annual Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Awards ceremony.

Retired U.S. Marine Corp. Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Kelaher, also the Mayor of Toms River Township, was awarded the Legion of Honor Award at the ceremony. According to their mission, “the founding trustees established the Legion of Honor Program to publicly recognize persons whose lives model the kind of selfless service to community, nation and humanity without regard to race, religion or creed, so dramatically exemplified by the Four Chaplains.”

The story of the Four Chaplains began on the fateful night of Feb. 2, 1943. There were 902 men aboard the USAT Dorchester when it was torpedoed by a German submarine off the coast of Greenland. The Dorchester was quickly sinking into the icy waters of the Atlantic. As the terrified men began looking for ways to escape, there were four chaplains who remained calm and comforted the men. These four Army Chaplains of varying faiths were: George L. Fox (Methodist); Alexander D. Goode (Jewish); Clark V. Poling (Reformed Church); and John P. Washington (Roman Catholic.)

The Four Chaplains gave their own lifejackets to other soldiers who were without, and witness accounts claim that the four Chaplains were last seen with their arms linked together as they each prayed while the ship went down. They were later posthumously honored for their extraordinary acts of faith, courage and selflessness. There were 230 survivors that day.

The Chapel of Four Chaplains honors men and women in the community who contribute incomparable selfless service. Thomas F. Kelaher is being recognized for his many years of volunteer service, including 25 years as a volunteer member of the Community Medical Center Board of Trustees. He is an active trustee, lector and Eucharistic Minister at St. Joseph’s Parish. In 1997, Pope John Paul II designated him a Knight in the Order of St. Gregory the Great, and on September 28, 2002, he was installed as a Knight of the Holy Sepulcher in a ceremony at St. Patrick Cathedral New York City presided over by Cardinal John Egan.

Rich Basile, the Chapel Trustee, Dept. of New Jersey Marine Corps League said of Kelaher, “He is receiving this award to recognize his service to all people regardless of race or faith, and he

has devoted his time to the betterment of the community.” Kelaher attends all Veterans ceremonies and parades, including dedicating two highway signs for fallen servicemen. Basile added, “Even as a Mayor, he never forgot he was a Marine.”



(Photo courtesy of Debbi Winogracki)

Retired U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Kelaher, also the Mayor of Toms River Township, receives the Legion of Honor Award at a recent ceremony.