

NEW HOME, FRESH START

After twelve years of great effort on the part of many good people, The Chapel of Four Chaplains has a new, permanent home in Philadelphia. Having acquired property in Valley Forge in 1990, the Chapel began plans to raise five million dollars to build and endow a new chapel complex there. From the beginning, there were problems.

The five million dollar figure was daunting, and even though some American Legion Posts, Districts and Departments rose immediately to the challenge, the speed of progress was discouraging. Also, as time went on, more and more expensive homes were built on the surrounding properties. Fearing that the Chapel attendance and resulting parked cars would interfere with local traffic, the property owners in the development vigorously opposed the construction of any new chapel building on the property. The Chapel of Four Chaplains is in the business of making friends, and we were not prepared to deal with this hostility. Faced with this public relations problem and with the staggering cost of new construction, we found ourselves wondering what next to do.

At about the time the Philadelphia Navy Base was preparing to close down, the Chapel sponsored an awards service at the base chapel. The Philadelphia Scottish Historic and Research Society was most helpful in the service, which honored several Philadelphia and Delaware Valley veterans and community leaders. After the service, some of the leaders told the Navy officials about the problems the chapel was having.

The conversation held that day set things in motion for a wonderful new opportunity for The Chapel of Four Chaplains to have a permanent location in an historical place connected in tradition to the military and dear to the hearts of veterans. The movement was slow, but gradually the base was turned over to the Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development. The Philadelphia Naval Business Center was born, and various companies and non-profit organizations began to lease property.

From the beginning, Chapel Board Members were in contact with the city, doing their best to secure the beautiful chapel. After five years of negotiations, The Chapel of Four Chaplains signed a lease in December of 1999. After much neglect, the chapel building was in desperate need of repair. Everything from plumbing to electrical wiring, from air-conditioning and heating to underground telephone and power lines, had to be replaced. Painting, roofing, carpeting, and window replacement all had to be accomplished.

On February 15, 2001, we moved to 1201 Constitution Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19112. Negotiations have begun to acquire additional land in order to construct an adjunct building for the museum, a hall, and office space. The Dedication Ceremony took place on Sunday, November 11, 2001 (Veterans Day) with 450 people in attendance. It was a day of victory for the chapel and for veterans across this country of ours who have stood behind us and made it possible.

Throughout these years of struggle, The Chapel of Four Chaplains has never faltered in any of its efforts. The lack of a chapel building forced us to see the chapel as more of a movement than a place. Our focus has become less upon where we are and more upon what we do. It has been a productive time. Our State Chaplains have held ceremonies in every state to honor citizens who have done exemplary service in their communities. The Legion of Honor Award is better recognized nationally now than it has ever been. More communities than ever before observe Four Chaplains Services each February. Our Youth Programs have grown by leaps and bounds.

We couldn't be at a better place for a new beginning.