

Rev. Howell Maurice Forgy

January 18, 1908 – January 20, 1972

In 1938, a young Princeton Seminary graduate, Howell Maurice Forgy, made his way to Murray from Fort Collins, Colorado, to become the minister of the College Presbyterian Church at Main and 16th Street. The congregation consisted of nine people. After helping to increase membership to 100 by 1940, he enlisted as a chaplain in the Navy after writing President Roosevelt asking how he could help his country in time of need.

In his biography, Forgy recounts lying on his bunk aboard the USS New Orleans, the morning of December 7, 1941, in Pearl Harbor. When the bombs and torpedoes struck, the ship's crew went on deck to man the 5" 25 caliber anti-aircraft guns that were manually loaded and fired. The ship's electricity was cut, disabling the power-driven mechanical hoists used to convey the shells topside. The ammunition had to be passed up by hand from man to man. Padre Forgy, as he was affectionately called, went into the hull with the men. As a chaplain, he was not allowed to touch any munitions, so he helped by patting the men on their backs, encouraging them to "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition."

Frank Loesser later heard the catchy phrase and wrote the song "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." Recorded by the Merry Macs in 1942, it became the number eight song on the Billboard Chart. In 1943, it was recorded by Kay Kyser and his Orchestra, reaching number one, selling over two million records and one million music sheets. The tune was so popular that the Office of War Information restricted its performance on the air to once every four hours so that the public would not tire of it.

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