



Exercising Wisdom When Helping People in Need

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As chaplains we are in the business of taking care of others. We gravitate to people in need, and naturally they gravitate to us. Recently, I was talking to a veteran, and he said he hadn't had his car inspected for two years and even though he was driving illegally, the "cops" hadn't got him yet. I asked him, "Why haven't you had your car inspected for two years?" He said, "I can't afford it. I don't have the money." I immediately felt compassion and wanted to tell him to get his car inspected, and I would pay the bill. When we see or hear of a veteran in need, we instinctively want to reach out and meet the need. However, we should exercise wisdom when helping people in need.

Every year I hear several stories where a veteran was passing through a town, a crisis arose, and they stopped by the local VFW to ask for cash assistance. Naturally, as veterans we want to assist other veterans, especially those in a crisis situation. However, we need to think before we just respond emotionally. Here are some steps to follow.

Step 1: Stop and fully assess the situation.

Ask questions and gather pertinent information. Remember, people rarely have calamity randomly fall upon them where they do not have a credit card and need immediate cash. Before you dole out money, ask a lot of questions, and do your best to evaluate the specific nature of the person's request. Ask about their immediate and extended family. Ask about their network of friends. Ask if they have any church or synagogue affiliation. Ask about their employment and employment history. Ask if they are a member of the VFW and if so, get the Post number and city where the post is located. Carefully observe their reaction when you offer to call the Post and verify the information you have been given.

Keep in mind, when an urgent request is made for cash, and you begin to respond emotionally to the request, stop and fully assess the situation. With the case I mentioned earlier with the veteran who was driving illegally and did not get his car inspected, I found out by asking questions, he loves to play pool and owns sixty pool cue sticks. When I heard that, I realized his car situation was caused not by a lack of funds, but because of stupid priorities and decisions.

Step 2: Meet needs but refrain from handing over cash.

There are legitimate requests for us to help meet needs. So, attempt to meet the need by purchasing food, gas, or paying for a repair. But refrain from handing the person cash. Be clear, to the point, and polite! Simply say, "I'm sorry, but I am not able to give you money and help you in that way at this time." If the person asks why not? Don't panic. Repeat what you just told them and realize they want cash rather than for you to meet their stated need. Remember, be direct and firm.

Blessings as you serve,



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