



The Role and Responsibility of a District Chaplain

Rev. Peter R. Hook, Past National Chaplain

The Veterans of Foreign Wars is, at its core, a volunteer organization made up primarily of unpaid individuals who share a common bond. We joined the VFW for various reasons, and over time, some of us are elected or appointed to various positions. In my case, someone discovered that I was a “Reverend,” and I was then asked to serve as the Post Chaplain.

When I became Post Chaplain, no one explained my duties or what was expected of me beyond offering prayers at the meetings. Since that time, I have written quite a bit about the role and responsibility of a Post Chaplain and how to minister effectively to Post members and their families. I have also developed a Handbook for Chaplains and several other resources.

Up to this point, I have written virtually nothing about the role and responsibility of the District Chaplain. There is, in fact, a great deal of ambiguity surrounding this position. Take for example what is said on page 84 of the Manual of Procedure for District Chaplains:

“During the annual District Convention, the District Chaplain shall see that a fitting tribute is paid to our departed comrades. The Chaplain shall perform such other duties as may be incident to the office or as may from time to time be required by the laws and usages of this organization or lawful orders from proper authority.”

Even after serving as a District Chaplain for a number of years— and functioning at the State and National levels—I am still not entirely sure what it means to perform such other duties *“as may from time to time be required by the laws and usages of this organization or lawful orders from proper authority.”*

At the present time, in my Department, we have twenty-five Districts and twenty-five District Chaplains. Each District Chaplain should realize that,

in addition to offering prayers and conducting the annual District Memorial Service, he or she is called to serve as a role model, coach, and mentor to the Post Chaplains within the district.

Where to begin

- The District Chaplain should take the lead and reach-out and attempt to establish a collaborative relationship with each of the Post Chaplains within their district. Developing relationships takes time. Begin by calling each Post Chaplain. Be genuine and sincere. Introduce yourself and explain that, as District Chaplain, you want to make yourself available to support and assist them, whenever needed. Ask them how they are doing and invite them to share how they understand their role and responsibilities.
- Be available to answer questions and provide guidance when appropriate.
- Help them become familiar with the resources that are available to them.
- Respond to e-mails and text messages in a timely manner.
- Encourage them to attend District meetings and set aside time to meet with them personally.

In nearly every organization—and especially within the Veterans of Foreign Wars—those in leadership positions are expected to support and encourage those they serve. District Chaplains are no exception. They are called to lead not only through words, but through presence, availability, and example, serving faithfully as coaches and mentors to others.

Blessings as you serve.

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