

The Chaplain's Handbook

Articles - Information - Prayers - Guidelines

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHAPLAINCY

During times of turmoil and war, mankind always looks to religion and religious figures for comfort. Both ancient and modern societies have turned to religion and communities have extended the comfort of religion to those serving in the heat of battle. Priests and other religious figures petitioned gods and spirits for victory in war. The Scriptures often refers to priests accompanying troops into battle. (see: *Deut. 20: 2-4; Joshua 6: 2-5)*.

The modern chaplaincy's roots and origin are essentially in the medieval church. The word chaplain dates from this period. A fourth century story tells of the pagan Roman soldier called Martin of Tours. As Martin and his men were returning from the battlefield in the middle of a severe winter, they met a shivering beggar at the city gate of Amiens. Martin had compassion on the beggar. He cut his own cloak in t wo parts and gave one to the beggar. That night Martin had a vision of Christ wearing the beggar's cloak. As a result, Martin converted to Christianity. Martin's commitment to Christianity enraged Emperor Julian by saying, *"Hitherto I have served you as a soldier; allow me now to become a soldier to God."* The Emperor later released him from the army. He was baptized and in 371, the people of Tours were so impressed by his holy life and miracles, they made him their Bishop.

Martin of Tours later became the patron saint of France and his cloak, considered a holy relic, was carried into battle by Frankish kings. This cloak was called in Latin the "*cappa*." Its portable shrine was called the "*cappalla*" and its caretaker priest, the "*cappellanus*". Eventually, all clergy affiliated with the military were called "capellani," or in French, "*chapelains*, hence chaplains. The Council of Ratisbon (742), first officially authorized the use of chaplains for armies, but prohibited "the servants of God" from bearing arms or fighting.

However, religious figures in this era often went into battle as fighting men with the army. The conflict between the religious function and the military role can be seen in the career of the patron saint of military chaplains, St. John Capistrano, who besides serving as a Church Diplomat led the army at the Battle of Belgrade in 1456. This European tradition extended to colonial America where the chaplain both fought alongside and ministered to his neighbors in the militia. The tradition in colonial America of the fighting chaplain began changing. After the Civil War, chaplains were no longer permitted to carry weapons. And today, chaplains are supposed to be issued a Geneva Convention Identity Card. Chaplains are ordained clergy, endorsed by their faith group to serve all people, regardless of religious or non-religious affiliation.

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

THE ARMY: Chaplains had no role in the United States Army until 1791. However, colonial military units were usually formed from local communities and congregations. Clergymen frequently joined the units and often led them in battle. A number of New England clerics served at Concord. Some even shouldered their muskets and fought along side their fellow soldiers.

The first appointed Army Chaplain was Rev. John Hurt in 1791. He had already served seven years during the Revolutionary War. The history of the Chaplaincy from this time on (until the Civil War) is full of uncertainties.

During the War of 1812, Chaplain James J. Wilmer was the only chaplain known to have died during this war. During the Civil War the Army Chaplaincy developed many procedures still in place today. Most chaplains became less a "fighting parson," and more "spiritual" in their emphasis. The Civil War witnessed for the first time, a large number of Roman Catholic chaplains in the field; the advent of the first Jewish chaplains; and the first Black and Indian chaplains. In addition to caring for the soldiers, chaplains also served as an advisors to their commanders in moral issues. During that time period, three Army Chaplains were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The act of 1883 mandated that the chaplain should also "perform the duties of schoolmaster" at the Post. Additionally, chaplains generally held services in civilian settlements, established Indian congregations, officiated at functions, visited the sick prisoners and soldiers in barracks, served as post gardeners, and occasionally as legal counsel.

World War I and WWII had thousands of chaplains from various faith groups serving the spiritual needs of the fighting men. Today, the Army Chaplains continue to serve the men and women of the United States Army, National Guard, and Reserves with spiritual and moral support.

THE NAVY: The Navy Chaplaincy dates back to the Continental Navy. What was critical was that the Continental Congress adopted regulations which provided a place for religion and the chaplain in the Navy. Using the guidelines of the "Mother Country," Divine Services were written into the Navy Regulations. However, few ships were authorized to be built and thus there were few Navy Chaplains. Rev. Benjamin Balch was the first Chaplain known to have served in the Continental Navy. From 1785 to 1798, there was no American Navy and, therefore, no Navy Chaplains.

The first Navy Chaplain to die as the result of enemy action was Chaplain John L. Lenhart, who was on board the *Cumberland* when she was rammed and sunk by the CSS Virginia (formerly called the *Merrimack).*

With a new edition of the Navy Regulations in 1802, additional duties of chaplains stated that they should "perform the duty of schoolmaster, instructing midshipmen." The Navy Chaplain had to be a teacher of writing, mathematics, navigation, and whatever else they might need to make them proficient, besides his religious duties. That did not change much until 1906 when the Navy established certain guidelines that eliminated the teaching function and established procedures and qualifications for Navy Chaplains and the establishment of the Chaplain Corps.

Navy Chaplains have served with distinction during WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom, and the ongoing war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Navy Chaplains provide ministry to all the sea services, including, the *Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Sea Bees, and Merchant Marine*. Indeed, the Navy Chaplains may wear many uniforms during their tour of duty.

To recount the history of the Chaplain Corps and omit two of its most revered Navy chaplains would be a grave mistake. Chaplains Joseph T. O'Callahan and Vincent Capodanno were both awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

THE AIR FORCE: Before 1939, the Army's air arm was a fledgling organization. By the end of WW II, the Army Air Force had become a major military organization comprised of many air forces,

commands, divisions, wings, groups, and squadrons, plus an assortment of other organizations. The National Security Act of 1947 became law on July 26, 1947. It created the Department of the Air Force, headed by a Secretary of the Air Force. From this beginning grew the Air Force Chaplaincy. At first the Air Force Chaplains received their training at the Army School and eventually established their own school.

THE SPACE FORCE: The United States Space Force was established on December 20, 2019, becoming the sixth branch of the United States Armed Forces. Organized under the Department of the Air Force, the Space Force is responsible for protecting American interests and military operations in space. In July 2020, the Air Force Chaplain Corps began providing spiritual care to Space Force personnel, known as Guardians. Air Force Chaplains and Religious Affairs Airmen provide religious support, spiritual guidance, and moral counsel to Guardians and their families, continuing the military chaplaincy's longstanding tradition of caring for those who serve our Nation.

THE CHAPLAIN

You were elected or appointed to the office of Chaplain, and you have an important responsibility. Whether you have been selected for your religious training, or past VFW experiences, you are expected to provide care and be the spiritual advisor to your organization and its members.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHAPLAIN

One of our first tasks is to clearly define the purpose of the Chaplain - - that is, to spell out clearly why we exist. Unfortunately, not everyone is on the same page when it comes to answering the question, *"Why does your post have a Chaplain?"* Most comrades think we exist to read the prayers at the Post meeting. But is that why we exist? Is that the purpose of the Chaplain?

The Chaplain exists to minister to veterans and their families. And according to our Congressional Charter, the Chaplain *"shall be concerned with the spiritual needs of the members, and by precept and example, point the way toward a high moral plane for the organization."*

THE WORK OF THE CHAPLAIN

Each post has a Chaplain, but how many of you really know what a Chaplain is supposed to do? Most comrades think that all the Chaplain does is show up at the post meetings and read the perfunctory ritual prayers. But that is surely not the real work of the Chaplain. In fact, most of the work done by the Chaplain takes place outside of the post meeting, and if done well, goes unnoticed by virtually everyone in the post.

First, the Chaplain nurtures the living. We do this by spending time with our fellow comrades, and when the need arises, we help them with life situations. Every one of us needs a trusted friend and confidant to turn to in times of disappointment and distress. At times, we must confront harmful and destructive behaviors. However, the Chaplain is not only there to help navigate comrades tough through times, but we are also there to offer encouragement and wise counsel as well.

Second, the Chaplain cares for the dying. Whether in the hospital or at home, the Chaplain is there to offer supportive care to dying comrades and their families. We help them as they transition to glory and assure the person that he or she will not suffer or die alone. During this time of transition, the Chaplain encourages the expression of personal feelings, anxieties, and thoughts concerning dying and the afterlife.

In caring for the dying, the Chaplain helps the person achieve a comfortable death in all areas: spiritual, emotional, and physical as the comrade transitions from his time on earth to his eternal home in glory.

Third, the Chaplain honors the dead. Working closely with the immediate family, the Chaplain ensures there is a proper burial and memorial service for the deceased. At each of our post meetings we have a moment of silence to remember our departed. And each of our posts has a plaque dedicated to our deceased comrades. In addition, each District is to hold an annual Memorial Service. According to Section 418 of the Congressional Charter By-Laws and Manual of Procedure Ritual, during the annual District Convention, the District Chaplain shall see that a fitting tribute is paid to our departed comrades. Memorial Services are also held each year at the State Conventions and at the National Convention.

BE THE LIGHTHOUSE IN SOMEBODY'S STORM

Every veteran has faced storms. Some were encountered on distant battlefields. Others are fought quietly at home through grief, loneliness, illness, moral injury, or memories that refuse to fade. As VFW chaplains, we will meet men and women navigating each of these challenges.

It is easy to believe we must have all the answers.

We do not.

Instead, think of being a lighthouse.

A lighthouse does not calm the sea. It does not stop the wind or remove the rocks hidden beneath the waves. It simply stands where it is needed, shining steadily through the darkness. Its light offers direction, hope, and the reassurance that someone is watching over the journey.

That is often the ministry of a VFW chaplain.

Your presence at a hospital bedside may mean more than the perfect prayer. A listening ear after a meeting may ease a burden someone has carried for years. A handwritten note, a phone call, or a quiet word of encouragement can remind a fellow veteran that he or she has not been forgotten.

Jesus described His followers as the light of the world. We are not called to draw attention to ourselves but to reflect His light so that others can find hope and direction amid life's storms. Often, the brightest witness is simply showing up with compassion, patience, and a willing heart.

You may not always see the results of your ministry. The veteran you encourage today may never tell you how much your kindness mattered. Faithful service is rarely measured by applause or recognition. It is measured by lives touched through simple acts of care, compassion, and steadfast love.

Whether you are beginning your service as a VFW chaplain or have served faithfully for many years, remember this: Your calling is not to rescue everyone from every storm. Your calling is to be a faithful light, shining consistently and pointing others toward hope, peace, and God's enduring presence.

Today, someone in your Post may be searching for that light.

Be the lighthouse in somebody's storm.

CLERGY VS: CHAPLAIN. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

The term “clergy” refers people who are ordained or recognized by a religious community as ritual or spiritual leaders. As such, they can perform religious duties and minister to individuals within a particular faith community.

Generally, their duties include conducting religious services, delivering sermons or religious teachings, providing pastoral care and counseling to congregants, performing religious rituals and ceremonies (such as weddings, funerals, and baptisms), offering guidance on matters of faith and ethics, and leading the overall spiritual and administrative affairs of the religious community.

Depending on their religious or denominational affiliation, clergy are referred to as pastors, rabbis, priests, or imams. With some of these religious leaders, depending on their geographical location and situation, they wear distinctive clerical clothing which sets them apart and identifies them as clergy.

Historically, the term “chaplain” referred to members of the clergy who ministered to people in a variety of settings outside a particular faith community. Chaplains can be found in a variety of settings such as hospitals, prisons, fire and police departments, educational institutions, and the armed forces.

While the clergy minister primarily within a particular faith community, chaplains minister to individuals outside of a faith community from a variety of religious or spiritual backgrounds, including those who may have no faith affiliation. Therefore, most chaplains feel it is best not to wear any distinctive clerical clothing or jewelry or do anything that could hinder their ministry.

Within the broad category of Chaplaincy, at least three different types of chaplains can be identified.

1. The Ceremonial Chaplain: Within many organizations there is a person designated as chaplain. The position is basically ceremonial, and from time to time, the chaplain may be called upon to offer a prayer. The U.S. Senate Chaplain, and those within most community and service organizations, are basically ceremonial chaplains. In most cases they are clergy, but not necessarily so.

2. The Caring Chaplain: This is a trained individual who offers person-centered, compassionate care. A caring chaplain will come along side of a person to listen, encourage, and offer comfort and guidance as a caring friend would do. They care for the whole person and treat everyone with dignity and respect. Hospital, hospice care, and nursing home chaplains are almost exclusively caring chaplains.

3. The Tactical Chaplain: These chaplains operate primarily with law enforcement agencies and the first responder community (fire departments and emergency medical services-- EMS). They are trained in crime scene protocols, dealing with trauma scenes, and helping those who have been traumatized. In addition to responding to critical incidents, they spend time in the trenches with those involved in first-responder work, establishing trust and rapport. The tactical chaplains are vital members of the first responder team. During critical incidents, they wear an outer garment that identifies them as CHAPLAIN, but nothing that indicates they are with the police department.

Historically, the chaplains in the VFW were considered ceremonial chaplains. They were called upon to offer the prayers and maybe send a card if someone was ill or passed away. That perspective of the chaplain's role has been changing. The VFW Chaplain exists to minister to veterans and their families. And according to our Congressional Charter, the VFW Chaplain "shall be concerned with the spiritual needs of the members, and by precept a

ETHICS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CHAPLAINS

Ethical Foundations

Ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with what is morally right or wrong. For chaplains, ethics can be simply understood as the commitment to "do no harm"—a principle borrowed from the Hippocratic Oath. Another guiding concept is the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would want to be treated.

Chaplain Statement of Ethics and Guiding Principles

1. Integrity: Uphold the highest standards of personal and professional integrity, demonstrating truthfulness, honesty, compassion, and attentiveness in all interactions.

2. Holistic Support: Offer objective, appropriate, and holistic spiritual care, providing a comforting and respectful presence.

3. Non-Proselytization: Do not proselytize. Ensure care recipients are free from unsolicited religious literature, symbols, evangelistic speech, or pressure to adopt specific moral values or traditions.

4. Interfaith Sensitivity: Respect all faith traditions and provide sensitive spiritual care to individuals regardless of their religious or nonreligious identity.

5. Non-Discrimination: Provide care without discrimination based on sex, age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any other factor.

6. Faith-Specific Support: Assist in locating a spiritual leader from the affected person's faith tradition when appropriate and possible.

7. Confidentiality: Maintain confidentiality out of respect for those served.

8. Professional Boundaries: Recognize personal and professional limits, maintain appropriate boundaries, and refer individuals to qualified professionals when necessary.

9. Do No Harm: Act in ways that promote healing and well-being, always striving to do no harm.

WHAT THE CHAPLAIN PROVIDES

The Chaplain is there to provide:

1. SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE: The Chaplain is available to help individuals and their families with their spiritual needs.

2. ASSISTANCE IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS: In times of crises such as hospitalization, injury, or death, the Chaplain will help and provide assistance to veterans and their families.

3. CONDUCTING/ASSISTING AT FUNERALS: The Chaplain is available to assist families with funeral arrangements, to officiate at the service, or to assist the family minister. Additionally, the Chaplain can help with organizing an honor guard, having a bugler present at the cemetery, and having a presentation of the flag as a token of service and honor on behalf of the local Post and fellow veterans of military service.

4. COUNSELING: The Chaplain is available to provide pastoral care and counsel, and when necessary, to help veterans and their families find appropriate resources for dealing with such issues as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or other critical incident stress management problems.

5. VISITATION: Visitation with veterans and their families to provide comfort and encouragement is an important function of the Chaplain.

6. ATTENDING FUNCTIONS: The Chaplain may be called upon to represent the Post at official functions or public meetings, and the Chaplain may be asked to give invocations, dedicatory prayers, or benedictions.

We must be reminded that the Veterans of Foreign Wars is comprehensive in nature, embracing all religions and faith groups within its ranks. The Chaplaincy, being non-sectarian, must seek to minister to the needs of all, without regard to either church/synagogue/mosque affiliation or non-affiliation.

WHERE TO BEGIN

It is the responsibility of the Post Chaplain to get to know the Post members if he or she is truly going to serve those who served. Here are a few suggestions that may be helpful:

First, make an effort to get to know your Post members. This is done by showing up regularly and spending time with your fellow comrades, not only at Post meetings, but at various times when members visit the Post.

Second, be friendly and take the initiative to introduce yourself to those you do not know. Remember, there should be no one in your Post who does not know you or how to get in touch with you.

Third, send birthday cards to your comrades. In addition to sending cards, it is a good idea to call each person on their birthday. Over the course of a year, you will have talked to everyone at least once.

Fourth, keep a calendar of significant joys and sorrows that members have encountered. Call them or send "Thinking of You" notes. It is important to our members that we remember and acknowledge the things that are important to them. It demonstrates we care about them.

Fifth, every WWII and Korean veteran should be contacted monthly. And who better to do this than the Chaplain.

Remember, as VFW Chaplains, we not only honor our dead, but we care for and nurture those who are still with us.

WHEN A CRISIS HAPPENS, REMEMBER A-B-C

How should a Post Chaplain, and those in leadership positions, or anyone, respond when an unpredictable crisis sends a shock wave through a Post family?
A simple procedure known as "The A-B-C Method of Responding to a Crisis," if followed, will guide you in knowing how to appropriately respond the next time a crisis occurs.

When a crisis happens, remember A-B-C. This simple phrase and three letter acrostic will help you remember to do the following three things.

A. Achieve Contact

First, achieve contact with the person or the person's family. No matter where you are, your first response upon learning that a crisis occurred is to make contact with the immediate family. This can be achieved with a simple short phone call. We should not wait until the family contacts us. We should call them. In time, a personal visit may be in order.

Remember, you are not calling to get a blow-by-blow description of what happened or to offer solutions. You are initiating contact because you desire to communicate that you are really concerned and truly care.

B. Boil down the situation

Having achieved contact, the next step is to boil down the situation. Carefully observe all the dynamics that are taking place. Listen carefully and try to grasp who is involved and what is needed or will be needed in the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

C. Cope Actively

Third, be available to those involved, and be ready to assist them as they seek to cope actively with their difficult, and many times very painful, situation.

Following this A-B-C Method when a crisis happens should help you to respond appropriately to those whose world has been shattered. In the midst of helping, seek Divine assistance and always remember: "Respond to others as you would have them respond to you when you are hurting."

HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

It is one thing to read about homicides and suicides that take place in our military and throughout our country, but quite different when it takes place with families in your own Post.

Here are some helpful tips and suggestions:

- First thing to remember is that it is always proper to make contact with the family upon learning of a difficult situation or a death. Don't delay. A simple phone call expressing concern or condolence is always in order.
- It is okay to feel awkward. But don't let that feeling of awkwardness and uneasiness prevent you from reaching out and ministering to the family and those affected by the situation.

- With a death, the next thing to do following the initial phone call is to show up. But do not show up unannounced!!! Place a second phone call and ask the family if it would be okay for you to drop by the house sometime. If they say it would be okay, ask them when would be a good time. This way they can prepare for your visit and may even invite other family members to be present, so they too can meet you.

- Allow family, friends, and Post members to talk and express their feelings. Because of the social stigma associated with homicides and suicides, people are often reluctant to talk about what happened. If a bereaved person wants to talk, then listen intently and provide a safe and supportive environment.

- Families bereaved by homicides and suicides often feel guilty, shame, anger, alone and isolated. The stigma attached to a homicide and a suicide makes it even harder for them and intensifies these feelings. Again, listen to them and provide an environment where they feel free to express whatever they are feeling or remain quiet and say nothing at all.

- Ministering to families and conducting a funeral for someone who died by homicide or suicide is always difficult – even for the seasoned minister. Please don't hesitate to seek guidance should you ever find yourself needing to deal with a difficult situation.

RELATING TO EVERYONE

As a VFW Post Chaplain, I attended the monthly local ministerial meeting. I did that for a number of years until I moved to a new post and a new district. Attending the ministerial meeting kept me in touch with the local ministers in our area and allowed me to keep them informed on issues pertaining to veterans in their congregations. Our post is not a church, but we are a vital part of the community.

The particular group of ministers that I met with was quite diverse. We had representatives from Quakers, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, and Catholic. Not only were different faith persuasions represented, but we had people from different ethnicities. It was quite a diverse group of ministers.

What impressed me was how that group, which was so diverse, could care for one another and work together on common projects in a harmonious manner. There was a healthy respect for one another.

Our job as chaplains requires us to work with all different types of veterans. I have been a member of two different VFW Posts. And in those posts, we had people of different faiths (including Wiccan), and those who were atheist. We had comrades who were different ethnically, socially, and economically. And I try to relate and minister to each one. This is not easy for everyone to do.

There were several churches and ministers in my ministerial area that choose not to participate in the local ministerial meetings. They felt to do so would be compromising their belief system. Unfortunately, their ministry was confined to primarily people who believed like they do, and unfortunately, they had very little impact in the community.

The bottom line is this: Our ministry as Chaplains involves relating to all of our comrades and their families--not just to a few of them. This means we should be interacting and hanging out from time to time with everyone in our post, not just those who believe and act like we do.

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF A DISTRICT 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.

PUBLIC OCCASIONS PUT THE CHAPLAIN CENTER STAGE

While a lot of the work that a Chaplain does takes place behind the scenes and goes unnoticed, there are those times when the Chaplain is thrust to center stage in the public arena. Occasions such as funerals, annual Memorial and Veterans Day ceremonies, banquets, community celebrations, and events when human achievements are honored, give us with an opportunity to provide inspiration, leadership, and ultimately impact a broader audience.

The Chaplain, and for that matter the Commander or anyone else, when asked to participate in these settings, is like an actor on stage at a theater, with the audience watching every move that is made and listening intently to every word that is spoken. Every actor knows his or her role in the production. And, whether the main star or one who makes a cameo appearance, everything an actor does has been well thought-out and rehearsed before the curtain goes up. No actor

ever adlibs! Even when it appears that the communication or action is spontaneous, it almost always has been planned. It is called "planned spontaneity." When the person is prepared, and the presentation is done well, the speaker has poise and there is smoothness and a seamless flow that emanates from the person that makes the delivery seem so natural.

Whether we like it or not, we represent ourselves, our Post, our District, our Department, and the VFW as a whole when we are called upon to speak in public. It may be unfair, but we and the VFW are being judged by those in the audience. Therefore, it is important that we are prepared and represent ourselves and our great organization well.

Here are a few pointers, which if taken seriously and followed, will greatly enhance your public speaking skills:

1. Be prepared! Think about why you have been asked to speak and what is expected of you on this occasion. Whether it is to offer a prayer, make an introduction, or some other presentation, write out what you are going to say. Then rewrite and edit what you plan to say. Those who are prepared communicate clearly and concisely and are able to speak within the allotted time frame. Long-winded speakers have not done proper preparation. It is a dead giveaway every time.

2. Look at your audience and focus on communicating and ministering to them - not on being a public speaker!

3. Speak loud enough so people can hear you.

4. Speak with clarity. It is always the responsibility of the speaker to communicate in a way that the audience can understand what is being said.

5. It is normal for a speaker to feel a bit nervous. However, no one else should know it. Never mention it or draw attention to the fact that you feel nervous.

6. Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse. When well-prepared, you should know what you will be saying without having memorized it, and how you are going to say it.

7. Finally, remember those who speak well at public occasions observe other speakers and are good listeners. They listen carefully, patiently, and even kindly to others and learn from them -- what to do, what not to do, and how to do it, -- so the next time they are called upon to participate in a program and speak in public, they will do it well.

THE CHAPLAIN–SERGEANT AT ARMS PARTNERSHIP

1. Presentation of Colors

- **Role of the Sergeant**: Oversees the Color Guard, ensuring the flags are presented with precision, dignity, and respect. This includes coordinating movements and maintaining ceremonial discipline.
- **Symbolism**: The presentation of colors honors the nation, its veterans, and those currently serving. It sets a solemn, respectful, and ceremonial tone for the meeting, reminding all present of the values we uphold.
- **Chaplain's Preparation**: The Chaplain should be in place behind the podium before the presentation begins, standing in reverent silence. It is important not to wait to be called or recognized before moving into position. From time to time, you will see a Chaplain remain at their seat and then, when called upon, the audience must wait until the Chaplain walks from their seat to the podium—causing an unnecessary delay. To maintain the flow and dignity of the ceremony, the Chaplain should always be ready and in position prior to being recognized.

2. Prayer of Invocation

- **Sergeant's Guidance**: The Sergeant ensures the room is quiet and respectful, signaling the importance of the moment. It is the Sergeant who instructs the audience to uncover and to stand at ease in preparation for the prayer. This guidance sets the tone for reverence, unity, and solemn reflection.
- **Role of the Chaplain**: The Chaplain leads the prayer, invoking divine blessing, guidance, protection, and unity. The prayer serves as a spiritual foundation for the meeting, offering comfort, inspiration, and a sense of shared purpose to all present.
- **Symbolism**: The invocation invites a spiritual presence and solemnity into the gathering. It reminds attendees of the deeper purpose behind the meeting—their service, their sacrifices, and the enduring values they uphold: faith, honor, and camaraderie.

Sequence of Events at the Opening and Closing of VFW Meetings

Opening Sequence

- Call to Attention and Salute to the Colors: The Sergeant at Arms calls the assembly to stand and salute the American flag.
- Opening Prayer (Invocation): The Chaplain leads the prayer immediately following the salute to the colors.
- Pledge of Allegiance and National Anthem: The assembly recites the Pledge of Allegiance. The National Anthem may be sung or played afterward, though this is not universally required.

Note: *The Prayer precedes the National Anthem—symbolically placing God before Country.*

Closing Sequence

- Chaplain's Closing Prayer: A final invocation is offered by the Chaplain.
- Final Salute to the Colors: Assembly stands and salutes the flag one last time before adjournment.
- Meeting Adjournment: The Commander formally adjourns the meeting.

3. National Anthem

- **Role of the Sergeant**: The Sergeant coordinates the playing or singing of the National Anthem, ensuring proper protocol is followed—such as standing, uncovering, and rendering hand salutes. This leadership reinforces the solemnity and respect due during this patriotic moment.
- **Role of the Musician**: The individual responsible for singing or playing the National Anthem should be in place behind the microphone before the presentation begins, standing in reverent silence. It is important not to wait to be called or recognized before moving into position. Occasionally, a musician will remain at their seat until called upon, causing an unnecessary delay as the audience waits for them to approach the microphone. To preserve the flow and dignity of the ceremony, the musician should always be ready and in position prior to being recognized.

Note: As the chaplain delivering the invocation, I make it a point to speak with the musician beforehand to ensure they are positioned beside me and prepared to begin immediately following the conclusion of the prayer.

- **Role of the Chaplain**: The Chaplain supports the moment by standing reverently and rendering the appropriate hand salute, modeling respect and unity alongside the assembly.
- **Symbolism**: The National Anthem reinforces patriotism and collective respect for our nation, its ideals, and the sacrifices made for its defense. It is a unifying moment that reminds all present of their shared loyalty and commitment to our country.

4. Moment of Silence or Special Recognition (e.g., POW/MIA)

- **Role of the Chaplain**: The Chaplain may lead a moment of silence or offer a prayer to honor a specific occasion, fallen comrades, or those still missing in action. This moment provides spiritual reflection and solemn remembrance.
- **Sergeant's Responsibility**: The Sergeant introduces or supports the segment, often with ceremonial gestures such as lighting a candle, placing a symbolic chair, calling the audience to attention, instructing the removal of hats, and directing attendees to stand at ease. These actions reinforce the reverence of the moment.
- **Symbolism**: This segment reminds each person of the sacredness of the occasion and the cost of service. It honors those who are not present—whether fallen, missing, or otherwise remembered—and reinforces the values of respect, remembrance, and sacrifice.

5. Coordination and Timing

- **Communication**: Clear communication between the Chaplain and the Sergeant prior to the ceremony is essential. Discussing the order of events, cues, and timing ensures that each segment flows smoothly and with dignity.
- **Shared Responsibility**: The Chaplain and the Sergeant work together to ensure seamless transitions between ceremonial elements. This includes knowing when to move into position, when to speak, and how to support each other's roles without interruption or confusion.
- **Symbolism**: This coordination reflects military discipline, mutual respect, and professionalism. It reinforces the core values of the VFW—honor, duty, and unity.

6. Emotional and Spiritual Support

- **Shared Harmony**: The Chaplain and the Sergeant at Arms work in tandem to balance heart and discipline, creating an atmosphere that is both respectful and uplifting. Their combined presence fosters a sense of unity, reverence, and purpose.
- **Sergeant's Role**: Maintains order, structure, and ceremonial discipline, ensuring that each element of the program is executed with precision and respect.
- **Chaplain's Role**: Provides comfort, spiritual grounding, and emotional support, offering words and presence that uplift and inspire those in attendance.

Concluding Remark: It is essential that the Chaplain and the Sergeant at Arms work in close coordination, guiding the assembly through each element of the program with mutual respect and a shared sense of purpose. Clear, consistent communication is vital to their success. Their partnership is key to upholding the dignity and significance of the ceremony.

THE READING OF THE PRAYERS

One of the main things that you will be called upon to do at almost every event is to offer a prayer. As a Post or District Chaplain, there are at least three prayers that are part of every meeting. The first prayer takes place at the opening of the meeting. The second is a prayer for our National Home, and the third one is the prayer that is part of our closing ceremony.

In addition, the Chaplain will have a prayer when a Post takes in a new member during the initiation ceremony. And, of course, when Memorial Services are held on behalf of departed comrades, prayers are offered. These are just a few of the many times the Chaplain will be called upon to lead in prayer.

All individuals in every culture have an awareness that there is something called prayer. And almost everyone has observed someone praying at some time. The disciples of Jesus became aware of prayer by observing Him praying. One of the Gospel writers records this fact when he states, *"And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'"* (Luke 11:1).

And, most people have uttered a prayer sometime during their lifetime. Many of the prayers offered on an individual basis are what some call "prayers from the heart." They are simply a spontaneous communication offered by an individual and directed to a supreme being. One writer says that *prayer, essentially, is the expression of the human heart in conversation with God. It is intimate dialogue with the Creator.*[1] Souter, John C., *Personal Prayer Notebook*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. p.9.

While some prayers are spontaneous communications, others are written down and read. The prayers found in the VFW Ritual fall into this second category. When a Chaplain reads a prayer publicly, it should not only be his/her personal prayer, but it is a collective prayer offered to God on behalf of everyone present. In essence, it is "our" collective prayer offered by one person, and if done well, everyone will mentally participate in the prayer. When a person reads a book, the author attempts to get into the head of the reader. And, when a Chaplain reads a prayer, he should do it in such a way that the persons listening mentally follow along.

An effective oral reading of the prayers will not only get others involved in the prayer, but can greatly contribute to an audiences understanding and appreciation of the ritual. In light of this, here are some tips to improve the reading of your prayers.

- Speak slower than normal and speak clearly. You may think you are speaking too slowly, when really you appear to be speaking thoughtfully and meaningfully. Unlike printed stories, those listening can't ask you to stop and repeat yourself. You need to speak slowly enough that they can understand you. Obviously, don't overdo it!
- Speak naturally, but remember, it is your responsibility to be heard and understood. Many readings simply aren't loud enough.
- Enunciate. Don't read the words in a garbled or low-toned voice. Droning or speaking in a monotone, sends a signal to the brain of the listener that this is simply a sound without information and thus not important or meaningful.
- Hold your prayer at eye level and do not look down. You are reading your prayer to the people, not the book or the table.
- Observe thought and sentence units. Remember, punctuation marks are there for a reason. A period means pause and count to two. A comma means pause and count to one.
- Practice. Read your prayer several times out loud.
- Finally, remember that when words are spoken, the meaning is not in the words alone, but in the emphasis, the phrasing, and the expression given to those words.

OFFERING PUBLIC PRAYERS

As a VFW Chaplain, one of the main things you will be asked to do at many of the functions you attend, is to offer a prayer. This will happen within the VFW and also at other functions you attend outside of the VFW community. On some occasions, you will be asked ahead of time, and at other times, it will be a last-minute request. This is normal once people get to know that you are the chaplain.

Leading in prayer involves standing before others and addressing God on their behalf, and it should be done with reverence, some measure of confidence, and with a degree of feeling. This is true for the VFW ritual prayers and for the spur-of-the-moment spontaneous prayers.

Here are a few helpful things to keep in mind:

1. Expect to be asked, so don't be surprised. Be ready! What happens if you attend a community Memorial Day service and the local pastor, who was scheduled to give the invocation, is not present for some reason? Those in charge may turn to you and ask if you would provide the invocation. So, anticipate that something unexpected will happen sometime, and be prepared for it.

2. Speak naturally and clearly. Remember, it is your responsibility to be heard and understood.

3. Enunciate. Don't read or speak in a garbled or low-toned voice. Droning or speaking in a monotone voice, sends a signal to the brain of the listener that this is not important or meaningful.

4. Be sincere and speak slower than normal. When a Chaplain reads a prayer or offers a spontaneous prayer publicly, it should not only be his/her personal prayer, but it is a collective prayer offered to God on behalf of everyone present. In essence, it is "our" collective prayer offered by one person, and if done well, everyone will mentally participate in the prayer.

5. Don't preach, try to evangelize, or be intentionally offensive. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of lengthy controversial and offensive prayers offered at State Capitols by "guest chaplains."

6. Be careful about referring to specific deities. Public prayers in a pluralistic society are effective when the person leading the prayer is sensitive to the diversity of his/her audience. Those who lead general community prayers have a responsibility to have a clear understanding about the public nature of the occasion and to be respectful of the makeup of the audience. Be careful about referring to specific deities. This is a difficult adjustment, especially for some conservative protestants, whose faith tradition and culture teaches otherwise. The following article is quite insightful and helpful when offering prayers at civic gatherings: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/praying-in-the-name-of-jesus/.

The bottom line is to be sensitive and respect others who may not share your beliefs or passion. We should always strive to conduct ourselves in a way that does not denigrate or demean other faith traditions or offend those who have no religious faith.

PRAYERS FOR VARIOUS OCCASIONS

MEETING INVOCATIONS (Opening)

Almighty God, we bow before you at the beginning of our _____ meeting and once again recognize a being greater than ourselves. From the sacred scripture we learn that you O God are Creator, and the Giver of Life. We thank you for giving us life and the gift of this day and the senses in which to enjoy life. Be with us, O God, in our deliberations. Use our deliberations and the collective wisdom to direct us in our thinking. Amen.

We pause at the beginning of our _____meeting and once again acknowledge a being greater than ourselves. From the sacred scriptures we learn that you, O God, are a righteous, just, and loving God who abhors evil. We thank you for our great land and wisdom our founding fathers. We are thankful for those who down through the ages fought the forces of evil and gave their lives to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. We will now have a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives . . ., those missing in action . . ., those held as POW . . ., and our comrades who once attended

these meetings and are no longer with us. Help each of us to respect and value each other as we conduct this _____ meeting. Amen.

We pause at the beginning of our _____ meeting and once again recognize that you O God are the Lord of Host and a just but merciful God. We give thanks that we are physically well and able to meet together this morning/afternoon/evening. Continue Thy favor upon our order. We seek to follow your ways as we conduct (Post/District/Department/Conference) business. Help each of us to practice the spirit of true comradeship. Help us to respect and value each other, both in this facility this morning/afternoon/evening, and then as we live our lives each day. We will now have a moment of silence to honor our departed comrades. Amen.

Almighty God, as we are gathered as appointed and elected leaders for the Veterans of Foreign Wars we are conscious of your presence among us. As we begin our meeting, we are reminded that there is strength in unity. We seek to follow your ways as we conduct VFW business. Help each of us to practice the spirit of true comradeship. Help us to respect and value each other. Inspire us to worthy deeds and sound decisions. Amen.

As we come together this (morning/afternoon/evening) Lord, we bow before you with grateful hearts.

- We are grateful for the gift of Life, and particularly this day, and the various senses in which to enjoy life.
- We are grateful for our Nation and the men and women who served and are serving to preserve the freedoms we enjoy.
- As we conduct our meeting, use the collective wisdom of these dedicated comrades and guide us to make wise decisions. Amen.

O, Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, we pause at the beginning of our _____ (Conference) and recognize that you are the Lord of Hosts and a Just and Loving God who offers grace and peace to those who seek to follow your ways. Be with us, O Lord, as we gather for this important _____ (Conference). Thank you for each person in attendance. Bless the fellowship and interaction among our comrades. May Your wisdom and counsel guide us as we seek to educate and carry out the programs to benefit the citizens and especially the veterans of this great land. We will now have a moment of silence to honor and remember or departed comrades, those held as prisoners of war, and those missing in action (silent pause). At this time we will have a moment of silence to remember those presently serving around the world, as they defend freedom and fight evil. Amen.

Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we come into Your presence in hope and thanksgiving. We commit ourselves into Your loving care. We ask Your blessings upon us, Your servants of our Veterans of Foreign Wars, and especially our _____. Give him/her wisdom and guidance as he/she endeavors to serve our fellow veterans. Help us all to live our lives that we may be worthy children of Your family. For these and all good gifts, we thank You. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Almighty God, we thank You for bringing us together this day. Inspire us to worthy deeds and sound decisions and direct us toward the attainment of our goal. We pray that You would bless and protect all of our people. Guide us on the path to unity and harmony that we may serve You and Your people in keeping with Your Holy Will. Amen.

With humble hearts and a sense of our responsibility, yet proud of the confidence placed in us by our comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars; we ask Your blessings, O God, on this _____ meeting, that it may be fruitful in its accomplishments and lasting in the good it effects. Be with us, O God, in our deliberations. Inspire us with Your wisdom, direct us in our thinking, and guide us as we work for You, our Nation, and our comrades. Amen.

Be with us, O Lord, as we gather for this important conference (convention/meeting). May Your wisdom and counsel guide us as we seek to develop and carry out programs to benefit the citizens and especially the veterans of this great land. Help us to think wisely and carefully before we speak, to act with courage and conviction for the good of all

rather than simply for vested interests, and to deal charitably with one another that we may all continue to enjoy mutual respect. Thus, may our work both in our public sessions and our committees bring credit to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and be of benefit to those we seek to serve to Your great honor and glory. Amen.

MEETING BENEDICTIONS (Closing)

May God's good favor and blessing be with each of us. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization. Today we are especially thankful for all the work that has gone in to making this great event possible. Reward those involved, and especially those who worked behind the scenes, with a sense of how valuable they are. Help us as we seek to live as good citizens and carry out our responsibilities and to always honor you. Amen

May God's good favor and blessing be with each of us as we separate. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Post _____/District_____/the Department of_____. We are grateful to you O God for life, liberty, and the freedom to pursue happiness. Help us as we seek to live as good citizens and carry out our responsibilities and to always honor you. We remember those presently serving – Give them courage and strength. Protect them as they protect us. May their families and loved ones sense your loving arms around them. Amen

Almighty God, as we come to the close of this meeting, we thank you that we were able to gather and conduct (Post/District/Department/Conference) business in an orderly and respectful manner

We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We pledge to each other our mutual support. As we continue to interact with one another, may each person's life be enriched by the spirit of true comradeship. Amen

By George Washington 1790: *"May the Father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us in all our several vocations useful here, and in His own time and way everlastingly happy."* Let us go forth into the world in peace and dedicated to Your service, O Lord. Let us hold fast to that which is good, render to no person evil for evil, strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the needy and the afflicted, and honor all people. And may your good hand of blessing be upon us and remain with us always**.** Amen.

Almighty Father, help us to remember that freedom does not automatically perpetuate itself, that we must work at it, nurture it, and protect it. Lord, be with us now to strengthen us; about us, to keep us; above us, to protect us; beneath us, to uphold us; before us, to direct us; behind us, to keep us from straying; and 'round about us, to defend us. Blessed are You, forever and ever**.** Amen.

Almighty and Merciful God, we remember before You in this moment our departed comrades. We recall with reverence the good needs they accomplished. We honor those who fought a good fight for a just cause - - comrades both in war and in peace who have served this Country with dignity and with honor. May they rest in peace (*have a short moment of silence*). May we consecrate our hearts and lives to You our God and to this our Country and to those whom we honor, who have served faithfully and are now at rest. Amen.

Conclusion of Department Convention: Our Father, we are grateful for the opportunity we have had to gather for this ____ Annual Department Convention, and for the year we have completed. As we face a new year together, we ask your blessing on each of us as we seek to carry out our responsibilities. Bestow Your special blessings upon all who assume the duties of leadership. Give us wisdom and help us to make wise decisions and build a better Veterans of Foreign Wars organization. As we separate, may each of us commit to live lives of stainless integrity that will bring honor to you, our country, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Let us depart in peace, and in love and charity. Amen

For the year completed: Our Father, we thank You for the year we have completed, for its successes, and

for the strength You have given us to overcome its challenges. As we face a new year together, give us patience and understanding for all our comrades, wisdom in our decisions, and Your aid in building a better Veterans of Foreign Wars organization. Bestow Your special blessings upon all who assume the duties of leadership. Walk with each of us in heart and mind, day by day, so that we may continue to serve our God and our Country. Amen.

May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the way of God direct us; may the love of God go with us this day (night) and forever. Amen.

The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make His face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up His countenance upon us, and give us peace, this day (night) and forever more**.** Amen.

BANQUET INVOCATIONS

Dear Lord, may this meal that we share be seasoned from above with Your blessing, and Your grace. and Your love. Amen.

Heavenly Father: we thank You for this special occasion which brings us together. We are grateful for joyful moments we share as a Veterans of Foreign Wars family. We invoke your blessing on our gathering this evening as we come together to pay tribute and honor _____. We ask Your blessings on_____, his/her wife/husband, _____, and their family. As we enjoy this meal together, nourish our bodies and uplift our spirits, as we interact and fellowship together. Amen.

Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the Universe: You bring forth food from the earth, and sustain all Your creation with goodness, mercy, and grace. We cherish the memories of the past and with fondness and gratitude we gather with our friends and associates You have blessed us with. We are grateful for all who share our heritage and our patriotism. Nourish our bodies with the food we will enjoy and uplift our spirits by the fellowship and interaction with one another**.** Amen.

Eternal Father, bless now this food prepared for us that it may nourish and strengthen us for our duties and responsibilities. Amen.

Our Father, how great You are! You have blessed us in so many ways and we thank You. We ask Your blessing on this food. May our fellowship as we partake be an added blessing. Amen.

Thank you for the food before us, family & friends beside us, and the love between us. Amen

John Wesley's prayer: Be present at our table, Lord; Be here and everywhere adored. These creatures bless, and grant that we may feast in Paradise with Thee. Amen.

Protestant: Bless, O Lord, this food to our use, and us to Your service. And keep us ever mindful of the needs of others. Amen.

Catholic: Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

BANQUET BENEDICTIONS

Almighty God, we thank You for those who have led us so well in this (dinner/banquet). As we invoke Your blessing upon us, give us a still and quiet heart and mind. We thank You, O God, for the food and the fellowship we enjoyed. Dismiss us with your journeying mercies. Amen.

Almighty God, as we come to the close of wonderful evening, we are thankful for all the individuals that made this evening such a grand experience. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization, the

Veterans of Foreign Wars, and its Auxiliary. We are blessed to have _____ as our _____. We ask that you continue to bless him/her with good health and strength in his/her endeavors.

As we separate for a time, we are grateful to you for life, liberty, and the freedoms we enjoy because of those who served and those presently serving. Amen.

Following Volunteer luncheon or dinner: God Our Father, we give thanks for the success this year has been for _____. Please continue your blessings on_____ and especially on each volunteer. We ask for your protection upon all who have participated and made this (luncheon/dinner) possible. May the God of our Fathers, bless you and keep you. May His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May He look upon you with kindness and give you, His peace. Amen.

LOYALTY DAY INVOCATIONS

O Sovereign Ruler, we are here together on this Loyalty Day to affirm our love and loyalty to the United States of America. We thank you for our great land and wisdom our founding fathers. We are thankful for those who down through the ages fought the forces of evil and gave their lives to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. As good citizens we affirm that we hold our citizenship as a sacred trust between one another and with you; for you alone are the giver of life and liberty.

- I ask that those who lead us, our elected and appointed government officials, might be blessed with wisdom, humility, and courage to do on our behalf what is right in your eyes. May they seek to follow your ways for you know what is good and true and right.
- We pray especially for the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces who are serving around the world to defeat evil and defend the cause of liberty. We are grateful for their courage and sacrifice and ask you to comfort their families during these days of separation.

As we reaffirm our loyalty to our nation, we also pledge our lives and our sacred honor as tokens of our loyalty to you and your kingdom. Amen.

Glory be to You our Lord and our God as we behold the blessings You have given us as citizens of the United States of America. We thank You Lord, for this blessed and bountiful Land. Help us as we renew our loyalty to this great Country and enable us to rededicate ourselves in faith to Thy service. We pray Lord, in Your Holy Name**.** Amen.

LOYALTY DAY BENEDICTIONS

We have gathered here this morning, O God, to show our loyalty and patriotism for this great Nation. We are a Nation that was founded on religious principles. Our forefathers came to these shores in the hope of finding a land where they were free to worship you in the manner they choose. We cherish all the freedoms we have here in this great Land. Help us to never forget our religious heritage. May we be loyal to those who sacrificed so much so we can gather here in the shadow of these government buildings without fear. We pause to remember our men and women serving in harm's way. Give them the courage and faith and the sense of your presence in the midst of their duties and responsibilities. We thank you for all your blessings and we praise you forever and ever. Amen

Glory be to You our Lord and our God as we behold the blessings You have given us as citizens of the United States of America. We thank You again O Lord, for this blessed and bountiful Land. As we renewed our loyalty to this great Country, help us to live as good citizens. We pray Lord, in Your Holy Name**.** Amen.

Eternal and ever-loving God, we thank You for the privilege of meeting on this Loyalty day in this free nation to re-dedicate our lives to You and our Country. Dismiss us with a sense of how bless we are. Amen.

MEMORIAL DAY INVOCATIONS

Almighty God our Heavenly Father, in Your hands are the living and the dead; we give You thanks for all those, our comrades, who have laid down their lives in the service of our Country. May they rest in peace and may light perpetual shine upon them. As we come together this day, we also pay tribute to those who have served and those who are serving in our Armed Forces. We are grateful for their dedication and commitment and the countless selfless acts they perform so that we might continue to enjoy freedom. We thank you for our great land, and the wisdom of our founding fathers, and for those who down through the ages fought the forces of evil and gave their lives to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. We are grateful for life, for liberty, and for the freedom to pursue happiness. As we begin this day, we will now have a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives . . ., those missing in action . . ., those held as prisoner of war. We invoke Your blessings O God, upon the program and events that have been planned, and may each of us as individuals and as a Nation continue to acknowledge You. Amen

O Lord Almighty, remember those who lived and died fighting to protect the dignity and the freedom of mankind. Let our spirits be proud of them. Let our hearts be compassionate, and our minds clear and determined in giving them honor and respect. And let us be dependent on the loving kindness of the Lord our God. As we remember the departed, let us be true soldiers in war and in peace. Let us be courageous protectors and true guardians of freedom. Let us be the true masters of brotherly love. O Lord, guide us in the way of moral responsibility. Let this day be a day of commemoration and honor to those who sacrificed their lives to preserve liberty. Remember them, O Lord, in Your mercy we pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

O Lord God of Hosts, as we gather to honor and pay respects to our comrades who have departed this life, it is fitting that we remember first our great Nation. You have given us a rich and beautiful land for our heritage. We humbly pray that we may always prove ourselves a people constantly aware of Your favor, and therefore anxious to demonstrate our gratitude in seeking to know and to do Your will. May our land be blessed with honest and productive industry, and a people of integrity who are anxious to learn and willing to respect one another. All this we ask of You, Almighty God, in Your Holy Name. Amen.

MEMORIAL DAY BENEDICTIONS

O Sovereign Ruler, we have honored those who now enjoy Your eternal embrace. May God's good favor and blessing be with their loved ones and with each of us. Especially do we seek Your consolation for those recently bereaved. May Your grace be with them. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great Nation. Today we are especially thankful for all the work that has gone in to making this Memorial Day Program possible. Reward those involved, and especially those who worked behind the scenes, with a sense of how valuable they are. Help us as we seek to live as good citizens and carry out our responsibilities to always honor you. Amen

On this Memorial Day weekend, we are reminded that You O Lord, our God and Creator, have blessed us richly. We have memorialized those who have died in the service of our nation. They served to preserve liberty and freedom both in our own land and in the world. As we conclude this service, we remember again all those whose ultimate sacrifice helped to preserve our freedom. May our memory of them be an honorable one, with grateful hearts, full of thanksgiving to You for Your grace & mercy. The fallen, whether in the air, or on land, or in the sea, have provided for that which we appreciate today. Let us never forget. And now Lord, be gracious & merciful to us, and let Your light shine upon us, for You are our God & Savior, King of kings & Lord of lords, and onto You we ascribe glory now and forevermore. Amen.

Eternal and ever-loving God, we thank You for the privilege of meeting on this hallowed day in this free nation to honor our noble dead and to re-dedicate our lives to You and our Country. We thank You that we are permitted to live through days of challenge, for the hours of the testing of our loyalty to our national heritage, and for our devotion to the high ideals for which others have lived and died. Bless, O God, the thousands of disabled veterans in our hospitals today and also the homeless veterans in our land. Ease their suffering and bring them in contact with those who will cheer them

and give them hope. Help us to respond gladly and generously to their needs of body and spirit. On this day of sacred memory, we ask for grace and power to live truer lives, to be better servants of the living God, finer fathers and mothers, nobler sons and daughters, and loyal citizens of this great Country and of Your world. Lord, grant that we may yet see the day when war and fear of war shall no longer be; the day when peace shall become our common possession; the day when Your will shall be done on earth as it is in Heaven. O Lord, hear our prayer for our sakes. Amen.

Gracious God, grant that we may appreciate and treasure the freedom that is our gift and our heritage, and that we may never forget the great price at which it was purchased. We remember this day before You all who serve in the Armed Forces of our nation. Protect and defend them in the day of battle, and in the time of peace. Grant that they may serve with honor and dignity both to Your great glory and to the credit of this Nation. We ask also that You will watch over the veterans of this land, inspiring them to serve You and this Country in ever new and creative ways. Comfort our ill and wounded comrades who languish in hospitals or homes. Lighten their burdens, relieve their suffering and pain, and restore to them the blessings of good health. For those who have given their lives in the service of our Country (*moment of silence)*, and for those, our fellow veterans who have served this Nation both in time of battle and in time of peace. May light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

As our Nation unites again to celebrate the gift of liberty, we give thanks for all those patriots and defenders of our Nation's ideals who have sacrificed so much for the sake of others. Give to us a renewed dedication to the preservation of the finest principles of freedom and justice which have shaped our Nation's destiny and help us to call to mind the part that Your revealed truth has had in bringing this all about. To You we give all honor and praise. Amen**.**

VETERANS DAY INVOCATIONS

Almighty God, be with us as we come together this day to pay tribute to those who have served and those who are presently serving in our Armed Forces. We are grateful for their dedication and commitment and the countless selfless acts they have performed - and the sacrifices of their families - so that we might continue to enjoy freedom. We thank you for their service to their nation and we thank you for their commitment and service to their families, to their communities, and to society in the years since they served. We are mindful of the fact that many of their comrades sacrificed their very lives on the fields, on the seas, and in the air where the battles of the war were fought; we remember those today with great reverence and thanksgiving. We thank you for our great land, for life, for liberty, and the freedom to pursue happiness that constitute the legacy of our forebears and the ongoing ideals of our Republic. Continue Your blessings upon us as we conduct this ceremony. Amen

Almighty God, be with us as we come together this day to pay tribute to those who have served and those who are serving in our Armed Forces. We are grateful for their dedication and commitment and the countless selfless acts they perform so that we might continue to enjoy freedom. We thank you for our great land, and the wisdom of our founding fathers, and for those who down through the ages fought the forces of evil and gave their lives to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. We are grateful for life, for liberty, and for the freedom to pursue happiness. As we begin this day, we will now have a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives . . ., those missing in action . . ., those held as POW. Continue Your blessings upon us as we enjoy the events that have been planned and may each of us as individuals and as a Nation continue to acknowledge You. Amen

VETERANS DAY BENEDICTIONS

As we conclude this ceremony, we remember again all those who served and are serving in our Armed Forces. Today and every day, may we honor our veterans. May we continue to highly esteem those worthy men and women who gave their best when they were called upon to serve and protect their country. And now Lord, be gracious & merciful to us, and let Your good favor and blessing be with each of us. Help us as we seek to live as good citizens and carry out our responsibilities to always honor you. Amen

Our Heavenly Father, we ask for Your benediction to rest on us this day. As You have graciously preserved our Nation through the years, and have led us in wondrous ways, grant that we may be worthy of our high calling as a Nation. Amen

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we ask that Your blessing be bestowed on our friends and loved ones. We thank You for this opportunity to share with them this special occasion to honor our veterans. Let us always honor the memory of those brave men and women who sacrificed so that we may experience freedom in our country. Heavenly Father, keep their families in Your kind care. Let us be reminded of Life, Liberty, Justice, Freedom, and Democracy, that we may be ever grateful to You for those veterans who served and protected our freedom. We ask Your blessing upon this program and when we depart, grant us Your continued fellowship that makes abiding peace. We ask this in Your Name. Amen

PEARL HARBOR REMEMBERANCE DAY OPENING REMARKS

Today, as President Roosevelt declared it, we remember a *"Day that will live in infamy."* On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, an act that pulled the United States into the Second World War, perhaps the darkest, most costly, and civilization-altering conflict in the history of human existence. English Prime Minister Winston Churchill, writing in a memoir about his reaction to FDR's December 7, 1941 telephone call to inform him of the attack said, *"The fate of the Empire rests on this enterprise. Every man must devote himself totally to the task in hand."* And every man and every woman in the United States did devote themselves totally to the war effort. That conflict pitted institutional tyranny against champions of religious and civil liberty, and the value of individual human life. In the end, at unimaginable cost, freedom prevailed. Today we are honoring and remembering those who paid this price to secure a victory for hope and virtue. I offer this prayer of thanks for their strength of resolve.

PEARL HARBOR DAY INVOCATONS

Heavenly Father, we are gathered here to commemorate those who gave their lives at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. Let us always honor the memory of the brave men who sacrificed so that we may experience freedom in a Country that is free. Let us be reminded of life, liberty, justice, freedom, and democracy that we may be ever grateful to You and those veterans who gave so much for their Country. We ask Your blessing upon us this day and grant unto us Your continued fellowship that makes abiding peace. Amen

Dear God, not everything that happens in your world reflects your goodness and grace. You have given us freedom to choose, and with that freedom, individuals sometimes choose to do evil. Today we remember a time of great evil in our world – we remember December 7, 1941 – the day Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, an act that pulled the United States into the Second World War. We also remember those who stood their ground against great evil, those who fought here at home and on the battle fronts to insure that evil would not prevail. We thank you that in the hour of need you gave men and women the strength and resolve to stand, whatever the cost. May those brave souls who still remain here with us feel today your hand of favor and strength. In their last years here on earth give to them renewed hope and an awareness of our gratitude for their bravery and sacrifice. And Lord, as we invoke your blessing on all we say and do in this Memorial Service today, we lift up to you praise and thanksgiving for the grace you have shed upon us and may each of us as individuals and as a Nation continue to acknowledge You. Amen**PEARL HARBOR DAY BENEDICTION**

Dear God, we thank you for this occasion to pause and remember these heroes. Help us to draw courage from the example of the brave Americans we honor. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great Nation. As we go from here, may we be ever vigilant and ever valiant. And may each of us as individuals and as a Nation continue to acknowledge You. As in the words of these great hymns of faith, we pray "Guide us, O Thou Great Jehovah," and we ask that you grant us wisdom and courage in the days ahead. I ask all this in your name. Amen

PRAYER FOR DEPARTED COMRADE

Heavenly Father, as we remember and honor the memory of our departed comrade, we are indeed grateful for his/her service and sacrifice. May we continue his/her efforts as courageous protectors and true guardians of freedom. Let us be masters of brotherly and sisterly love. O Lord, guide us in the way of moral responsibility and enlighten us and make us true believers in justice and peace. Enkindle within us a flame of selfless, unwavering devotion to duty that we may never be found wanting in those qualities of spirit and mind which alone are able to preserve our homes, the peace of our Nation, and the tranquility of the world. Remember our departed comrade, O Lord, in Your mercy, and have compassion on us. Amen

MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

Eternal Lord God, who alone governs the heavens and rules the raging seas, mercifully take under Your Almighty and most precious protection our Country's Armed Forces members. Preserve them from danger upon the sea, on the land, and in the air, and from the violence of the enemy, that they may be a safeguard for our Country and a security for its people; that we may in peace and quietness serve You, our God, to the glory of Your name. Amen

O God Almighty, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, we ask that You strengthen and protect the members of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. In the day of battle, may they be courageous and strong, resourceful and capable, resolute and victorious. In the time of peace, may they serve with dignity and honor, as effective emissaries of good will for this Nation. May their devotion and loyalty to You and to their homeland inspire them in moments of challenge, and comfort them in tribulation and long separation from loves ones. And finally, we ask that they may return safely to serve You and our Country in the days and years to come. Amen

MEDAL OF HONOR

Almighty God, we are here today to pay tribute to those of our Nation who have been bestowed the highest award our Nation can offer to her fighting men and women. They have answered the call of courage and bravery by offering themselves in self-sacrifice and beyond the call of duty. Accept our thanksgiving for their sacrifices and acts of bravery and courage. Let our spirits be proud of them. May Your Holy presence be with us now. We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen

KOREAN WAR REMEMBERED

( ) years ago the Korean War began. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women served their country in that War and thousands gave their lives. Let us pray.

O Lord, we thank You for the sacrifices our Korean Veterans made for us and for peace. We gather here in these moments to remember them. We pray that You would bless and protect all Your people. Guide us on the path to unity and harmony that we may serve You and Your people in keeping with Your Holy Will. May this day be a day of commemoration and honor to those who sacrificed to give South Koreans liberty and assure greater freedom in our world. Amen

VIETNAM WAR REMEMBERED

Almighty God, we are here today to pay tribute to brave men and women, living and dead, who have gone to a distant land called Vietnam. Accept our thanksgiving for their sacrifices and the sacrifices of their families. Cause us to never to take for granted their devotion to liberty. Grant, we pray, joy and fulfillment to those still living; and for those who are at rest, remember them, O Lord, in Your mercy, and have compassion on us. Make us a generation of wisdom, discipline, and good faith. Amen

PRAYER FOR VFW MOTORCYCLE RIDE

"Dear _____, we gather today with hearts full of gratitude for the opportunity to come together for this vfw motorcycle ride. We ask for your blessing upon each rider, grant them safety as they journey on the open road. May their spirits be lifted, and may this ride be a symbol of unity, camaraderie, and support for our veterans and their families.

Guide their hands as they steer their motorcycles, watch over them with your protective grace. Bless the organizers, volunteers, and all those involved in making this event possible. Let it be a source of joy, connection, and purpose. Amen

GUIDELINES FOR VFW CHAPLAINS OFFERING PRAYERS IN A HOSPITAL SETTING

1. Respect the Patient's Wishes

- It is natural to assume that chaplains are present to offer prayer. While this is often welcomed, never assume it is desired.

- Always ask respectfully: "Would you like me to pray with you now, or would you prefer another time?" This gives the individual a comfortable way to decline or defer.

- Be prepared for the possibility that they may say no — and that's perfectly okay. Our goal is to support, not to impose.

2. Keep Prayers Personal and Brief

- A short, heartfelt prayer is often more meaningful than a long, generic one.

- Base your prayer on what the person shares with you — their concerns, hopes, or fears. This makes the prayer more personal and comforting.

3. Make the Visit Client-Centered

- Let the patient or family guide the conversation. Their needs, emotions, and preferences should set the tone and direction of your visit.

- Be present, listen actively, and offer spiritual support in a way that aligns with their comfort and beliefs.

HOSPITAL PRAYERS

Upon Entering a Hospital Lord, I ask you to take (my name or name of individual) hand in yours and walk with (me or him/her) to healing through these doors. Make calm (my or his/her) heart and keep (me or him/her) without fear. Impart your strength that (I or name of individual), may be secure that You are watching from above. May (I or he/she) trust in You and Your unfailing love. Amen

For the Sick, Wounded, and Dying (*Catholic)* O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You. I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they offend You, my God, who are all and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the occasions of sin. Amen

For the Sick, Wounded, and Dying *(Protestant)* Almighty and most Merciful God and Savior, extend to Your servant comfort of Your gracious care. Help (*him/her*) to see this sickness as a time for strengthening both (*his/her*) spiritual and physical well-being. If it be Your will to restore (*him/her*) to health, assist (*him/her*) by Your Holy Spirit to lead the rest of (*his/her*) life in godly respect and for Your glory. Amen.

For the Sick, Wounded, and Dying *(Jewish)* O Lord, my God and God of my fathers, my destiny is in Your hands. If it be Your will, grant me speedy healing of my wounds (illness). But if not, then grant me complete trust in Your wisdom and love, that I may accept whatever may be in store for me. Give me the power to understand that only with You is perfect knowledge and only through You can one find boundless happiness and eternal peace. Most sincerely and humbly I acknowledge my faith and trust in you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!

For the Sick, Wounded, and Dying *(Orthodox)* O Master and Almighty Lord, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have told us You desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, and that You desire not the

death of sinner but that (*he/she*) turn and live. We therefore implore You to absolve Your servant from all sins from (*his/her*) youth until now. You alone can release the bonds and restore the contrite. You alone are the hope of the despairing and can remit the sins of everyone who trusts in You. Receive now in peace the soul of Your servant and give it rest in that place where all Your saints dwell; through the grace of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ, with whom You are blest. Amen

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK

Almighty God, we pray Your healing grace on behalf of (*name*). May (*name*) know the blessing of good health in the coming hours and throughout life. Bless all who minister to (*name*) in body, mind and spirit and grant that we may always give praise to you, our Heavenly Farther. Amen

O God the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers, mercifully accept our prayers on behalf of our comrades and loved ones who are ill or shut-in, remembering especially (*name*). We know not what is best for them, but You know. Grant them patience and endurance, relief from pain and suffering, and, if it be Your will, the blessing of a swift recovery. Amen

CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRUST: A GUIDE FOR VFW CHAPLAINS

Confidentiality is essential to effective chaplaincy. Your credibility depends on it. People rarely share personal struggles immediately; they first decide whether you are approachable and trustworthy. Building that trust can take months, so remain patient, present, and consistent.

For VFW chaplains, confidentiality is primarily a moral and ethical duty, rather than a legal one. While most chaplains are not legally bound by confidentiality statutes like clergy and those in the medical field, we still serve in a quasi-clergy role—meaning we offer spiritual and emotional support similar to clergy—even if not formally ordained. Thus, we should hold ourselves to the same high standards of privacy and discretion.

Confidentiality and Digital Communication

In today's environment, confidentiality also applies to texts, emails, and social media.

- Avoid sharing sensitive information via texts or email unless explicitly permitted.
- Never post updates about someone's health or personal situation on social media without consent.

Why Confidentiality Matters

- Sharing personal information without permission can cause lasting harm. It will destroy trust.
- Broken trust is extremely difficult to repair. A Harvard study notes it may take eight positive interactions to counteract one negative experience.
- Chaplains may not get a second chance to rebuild credibility. With some people, once trust is broken, it will never be restored.

Legal Considerations

1. HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996)

- VFW chaplains are not technically covered by HIPAA but they should follow its principles.
- When visiting someone in the hospital, always seek permission before sharing details.

- Example: "Would you like me to let the post know you're in the hospital?"
- Example: "Are you comfortable with visitors or phone calls?"
- Always ask — never assume.

2. Inquiries from Others

- Well-meaning individuals may request updates. Without explicit permission, you must protect the person's privacy.

Exceptions to Confidentiality

Confidentiality must be broken only in the following circumstances:

- Threats of harm to self or others: Notify appropriate authorities immediately.
- Suspected child abuse: Report concerns, even if not legally mandated. Professionals will determine next steps.
- Post-related concerns: If an issue could affect the post, consult the commander or direct the individual to them.

Quick Reference: Confidentiality Do's & Don'ts

Do:

- Be consistent, approachable, and trustworthy.
- Ask permission before sharing personal information.
- Respect privacy when visiting hospitals or homes.
- Protect information when others inquire.
- Break confidentiality only in cases of:
- Threats of self-harm or harm to others
- Suspected child abuse
- Post-related concerns that require commander involvement

Don't:

- Assume someone wants information shared.
- Disclose details without explicit consent.
- Underestimate how difficult it can be to rebuild trust once it has been broken.

Upholding confidentiality is not just about protecting information—it's about honoring the dignity of those we serve. As chaplains, our *integrity* is our most valuable asset.

HOSPITAL VISITS AND SAFEGUARDING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Most people value their personal privacy. And most people also prefer to have their personal business kept private. Financial affairs, relationship issues, and health matters are regarded by most people as subjects that are kept private, unless they choose to share that information with someone they trust. And even then, there is an expectation that the information will be held in strictest confidence.

However, when a person enters a hospital, no matter who it is, knowledge of that seems to spread rapidly with little or no regard for the wishes of the patient. Within minutes, details of the person's condition can spread throughout an organization, the United States, and even around the world. We should realize that not every hospitalized person wants that information known. And, unless given permission, we should not disseminate indiscriminately.

It is important for us to realize that not everyone wants information about their hospitalization known or shared with others. In fact, a patient, if he/she so desires, has the right to be in the hospital anonymously. And every hospital has policies in place to protect the privacy rights of those being admitted.

If such a request has been made by a person when being admitted to a hospital, the hospital must honor and respect the rights and wishes of the patient. In such cases, the patient's presence or room number may not be divulged to others by hospital staff.

All of us should keep in mind that the patient should be the one who determines what information is shared, how it is shared, and with whom.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when someone you know becomes hospitalized.

1. Ask before visiting. While many people appreciate visits, not everyone does. Call ahead to find out if your friend can have visitors, feels well enough to see you, or wants to have you visit them.

2. Don't stay too long. Patients typically get very little rest when hospitalized. They are being woken up by staff throughout the day and night for vital sign checks, medications, and for other procedures. Remember, it's the fact that you have taken the time to visit, and not the length of time you stay, that gives your patient the boost.

3. Leave the room if a doctor, nurse, or other health care provider arrives to examine or talk to the patient. Unless you are a parent, spouse, or someone else who is an official advocate for the patient, that conversation is not your business. You can return once the provider leaves.

4. Safeguard confidential information. ANY health-related information regarding a patient, whether given to you directly by the patient or a staff member, or information gleaned indirectly through what you may observe or overhear, must be held in strict confidentiality. The only use you may make of that information is in determining how to best minister to the patient. Upon leaving the hospital, all of that information must remain confidential and should not be shared with others. ***You should never assume that you may share any information with fellow comrades, church, or synagogue members, for the purposes of keeping them updated or for prayer support, unless you have the direct, specific permission of the patient.***

For quite some time now, the use and release of a patient's personal health information has been governed by HIPAA (Health Information Portability and Accountability Act, 2003) legislation and regulations. Chaplains are often the link between the patient and the Post. We should keep HIPAA regulations in mind and continue to maintain our comrade's privacy and confidentiality. Please get your VFW or Auxiliary member's permission before sharing information about their hospitalization. Ask the person what he/she wants you to share with other Post members.

Hospital Visitation Protocol



- Call before visiting the patient
- Take appropriate note card
- Sign in and get a visitor's badge
- Stop by the Nurses Station prior to your visit
- Pay attention to door notices that are posted
- Wash your hands before and after your visit
- Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when appropriate (Masks, Gloves, Gowns)



Visitation Etiquette

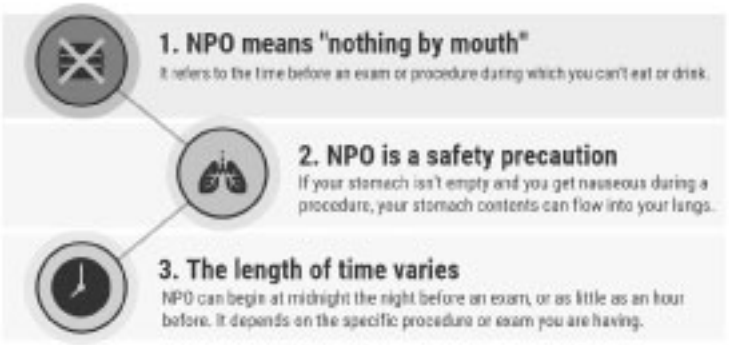
- If Medical personnel enter to do a procedure, you should excuse yourself and exit the room.
- Mealtimes happen
  - If the person is eating (unless they are nearly done); you might offer to come back in 15 minutes.
  - If you are visiting a person and a meal tray arrives, cut your visit short.
- Become familiar with hospital signs and symbols





NPO

- Things you need to know about NPO



- The person you are visiting may ask you for a drink

Visitation Etiquette

- If a patient is sleeping when I arrive to visit them, I generally do not wake them.
  - Find a waiting room, check your email, get a coffee and return in 20-30 minutes.
- When there are two patients in the room, make sure you greet and acknowledge the other person.





Pre-Surgical Visits



- Patients now arrive in the surgery area the morning of surgery and are usually eager to be ushered right into wherever it is they must go.
- There is a tight schedule and multiple medical personnel that need to attend and communicate with the patient.
- If you attempt to see them prior to surgery, you will be in the way.
- Call the person or try to meet with the patient the day (or sometimes two days) before surgery. Why sometimes two days? For some surgeries, the patient must take laxatives or other medicine. The resultant situation is not conducive to a visit!

Acute Care Visits



- Different culture with its own language
- Remember, you are on their turf
- Abide by rules & signs
- Most ICU and Acute Care units will ask you to keep your visit to 10 minutes. I suggest you keep it to 5 minutes.

Hospice and Palliative Care

- These two terms are often used interchangeably, but it is important to understand there is a distinction between the two.
- Both hospice and palliative care are available for an individual who is suffering from a chronic disease, such as but not limited to dementia, congestive heart failure (CHF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and/or cancer.
- The goal of both hospice and palliative care is to focus on symptom management and ensuring the patient's comfort.
- Palliative care permits the patient to continue to consult with their specialists and physician for ongoing treatment of the illness, hospice is provided for those who have decided to no longer pursue aggressive treatments of their disease process.

Be a Good Hospice or Palliative Care Visitor

1. Call ahead and ask when you should come. Ask if you can bring a certain food, candy, or gift.
2. Sit, don't stand. Take off your coat. Be at eye level with the patient and make eye contact.
3. Greet as you always have: a big hug or a handshake.
4. Don't be anxious. Talk about a time you have shared, or mutual friends who wish them well, or even the weather. You are bringing the gift of presence; the sound of your voice or the touch of your hand.
5. Talk about shared memories. A good phrase to begin with: "What I know I'm going to remember is …"

Be a Good Hospice or Palliative Care Visitor

6. Visit more than once, or visit in other ways: by phone, in texts or email, in short videos or an old-fashioned letter.
7. Let the conversation go where the patient wants it to go. Listen to their anger or fears or tears.
8. It's OK to laugh.
9. If they do trust you with their feelings, do not correct or pontificate or talk about your feelings. You are there to listen.
10. If they are in another world, join them. A veteran may be re-fighting a battle; a 93-year-old woman may think she's in the house with her mom and dad. Don't reason with them. You could ask questions about what they are experiencing. Or, gently assure them, in touch and tone, that they are safe, and that you are right here.

Be a Good Hospice or Palliative Care Visitor

11. It is good to remember that conversation is not the most valuable part of your visit. You might not know what to say. Your loved one or friend might not be very talkative while you're there. This is okay. Your presence is the most meaningful thing.
12. If a conversation is awkward or isn't going to happen, simply sit with the person. Do not take it personally. This isn't your fault. Know that your presence is still meaningful, even when a visit feels more awkward than usual.
13. Don't promise to come back unless you will. Say what's true: that you love them, or are praying for them, or are thinking of them, and that you are glad you visited.

FUNERALS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: What is the difference between a Funeral and a Memorial service?

A: If the body or ashes are present, it is a Funeral service; if not, it is a Memorial service.

Q: What is the purpose of a Funeral Service?

A: Every culture throughout history has marked death with a ritual or ceremony. Primarily, it is an opportunity to remember the life of our loved one. Such remembrance is a strategic time of reflection on the value and meaning of life. A service helps to comfort those who are in grief and provides hope and encouragement to those who remain.

Q: Isn't viewing the body an inappropriate focus when the real person is already gone?

A: A dead body is indeed a lifeless shell, for the true person (the individual's spirit) has already departed. Yet, it is often a source of comfort and a part of healthy grieving for loved ones to see the body and say "good-bye."

Q: Is cremation dishonoring to God? Will the destruction of the body prevent future resurrection?

A: There is nothing in the Bible which excludes the practice of cremation. However, there are several religions that prohibit cremation or prefer burial over cremation. The Eastern religions (i.e., Dharmic faiths) such as Hinduism and Buddhism mandate the use of cremation.

Q: Where should a Funeral/Memorial Service be held?

A: The service can be held at the Funeral Home, a place of worship, or at the grave site. For those who have a regular place of worship, it is sometimes a fitting place to hold the service.

FUNERAL PLANNING

Preparing ahead of time for the decisions which must be made at the time of death can relieve the stress of making choices at a time of deep sorrow. It will also ensure that a person's desires are carried out, and it can help avoid unnecessary expenses. The Post Chaplain can encourage comrades to think about end-of-life issues and begin to get important papers together.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

- Military Funeral Honors: Upon the family's request, the law requires that every eligible veteran receive a military funeral honors ceremony, which includes the folding and presentation of the United States flag, and the playing of "Taps." The Department of Defense is responsible for providing military funeral honors, and the request should be made by the family through the funeral director. Military Funeral Honors and burial flags are provided at no cost to the family.
- Burial in a Private Cemetery: The VA suggests that if burial will be in a private cemetery and a government headstone or marker will be requested for the veteran's grave, that the family apply for one in advance so that the application can be placed with the veteran's military discharge papers for use at the time of need. The VA furnishes, upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world.

- Burial at a National Cemetery: Gravesites in Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) national cemeteries cannot be reserved in advance. Families are encouraged to prepare in advance by discussing cemetery options and collecting the veteran's military information, including discharge papers (DD 214). The following is very important to pass on to comrades and families who desire to have their loved one buried in a National Cemetery with Military Honors.

  1. During the meeting with the funeral director, the deceased veteran's family must tell the funeral director that the deceased was a veteran, who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, and present the director with a copy of the DD 214.

  2. If one wishes to be interned in a Veteran's cemetery with Military Honors, the family must make that known to the funeral director. Military Honors are not provided by the national cemeteries. Honors must be arranged in advance by the family and the funeral director.

  3. The funeral director will then contact the Veteran's Administration and make arrangements for burial in a national cemetery. If the funeral director is not sure of the procedure, detailed information can be found on the National Funeral Directors Association website.

  4. The funeral director must indicate to the Veteran's Administration that the family has requested Military Honors.

  5. The Veteran's Administration will make all the arrangements for internment, and together with the funeral director, schedule a date and time for the internment.

  6. It is suggested, but not necessary, that when the family is notified of the schedule, they contact the cemetery administration to ensure that Military Honors have been scheduled.

CONDUCTING A FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE

The VFW Chaplain may be called upon to conduct a Funeral or Memorial Service for a deceased comrade. Here are some guidelines you should follow.

1. If the Funeral Director did not contact you regarding the funeral, you should contact the Funeral Home as soon as possible. You will need the following information:

   - Date, time, and place of visitation.
   - Date, time, and place of funeral.
   - Place of burial or interment.
   - Key family contact person (spouse, child, etc.)

2. Contact key family person and ask:

   - Are there any specific requests for the service?
   - Are there any special scripture passages, poems, or writings they would like?
   - Will any family members want to read or say something at the service?
   - Any information you can get about the individual will help you to plan a meaningful service.

3. Things to Remember:

   - The Service is for the living.

- The Service is about the deceased.
- Affirm the great spiritual truths of life.

TEMPLATES FOR FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE

TEMPLATE #1

Funeral / Memorial Service

Name

Age

Opening Sentences

There is no social gathering that tugs at our heartstrings the way a funeral service at does. It can be a bittersweet time. On the one hand we reminisce. We remember the good times, the fun times, the experiences together. And then of course the sadness, the finality of it all. Grief is an experience common to all of us. We all lose someone we love at some point in time. In the twinkling of an eye, we go from life to afterlife – from temporary to eternal. We cannot change the past or bring back a loved one, but we can live with gratitude for having that person in our lives.

We gather here today to thank God for giving us life in the first place, and to thank God for _____ (name of deceased). What we need at a time like this is comfort, and since the Lord is our ultimate source of comfort we turn to His word. (Read Psalm 23 or some other appropriate scripture here).

A Brief Obituary

(Can insert obituary and something about deceased military service at this point)

Sharing Remembrances

Today is a day of remembering. When we hear of the death of a loved one our mind begins to race. We remember the good times we shared together. We remember the fun times. We remember the experiences we had with _____ (name of deceased).

(Have a family member and maybe one or two others prepared to read or say something about the deceased)

You remember the happy years you spent together, sharing the special occasions and family traditions.

- Interactive reading of "We Remember Them"

Chaplain reads first part and people respond with "We Remember him/her

At the rising of the sun and at its going down – We remember him/her

At the blowing of the wind and the chill of winter - We remember him/her

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring - We remember him/her

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer - We remember him/her

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn - We remember him/her

At the beginning of the year and when it ends - We remember him/her

As long as we live, he too will live on; for _____ is a part of us and we will remember him/her

Memories seem to grow sweeter as the years go by.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we also remember that God has prepared a place for those who have placed their faith in Him, and that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now for the family, for the loved ones and friends we ask that you comfort and strengthen them in the days ahead. Amen.

TEMPLATE #2

Funeral / Memorial Service

Name

Age

Purpose**:** To provide comfort and hope with a sensitive caring attitude. Acknowledge the pain of grief and affirm the hope of the Gospel.

Welcome

The family of _____ is grateful for your presence here this _____ (morning/afternoon) and the many words of consolation and encouragement they have received during this time of bereavement.

We gather to not only mourn the loss but celebrate the life of _____ a most loving husband/wife, father/mother, grandfather/grandmother, and friend to all.

Poem and Verses of Comfort

Poem

There is no time that we could set for parting.
We who must remain are never ready for such pain.
Even our prayer would be: "Not yet! Not yet, dear God - -
Another day with us, Let our beloved stay."
We must believe, when falls that blow,
That wisely God has willed it so.

Edgar A. Guest

And so, we turn to the Scriptures to give us comfort and hope.

In **John 11:25** "Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;"

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven.

Isaiah 41:13

[13]For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear I will help you.

Meditation

Dying and death are not beautiful. Death is one of the ugly realities of life, a reality which we must all face. It separates the spirit from the body, a Father from his family, and a friend from friends. We are torn by the loss of the person we loved. Our gathering here this _____ (morning/afternoon) is to honor the life and memory of _____. It is also to find comfort and hope.

When we hear of the death of a friend or loved one, even when it is expected, certain things happen with most of us. First, we have a REACTION. It is natural to have a REACTION. There is the initial shock. And from there the reaction varies. Some weep - some do not.

John 11:17-21 & 30-37 (Difference between Mary and Martha)

17So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.

18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off;

19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.

20Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.

21Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Mary & Martha were both torn by the loss of their brother, a person they deeply loved. And they responded differently. Martha therefore said to Jesus, *"Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died."*

Mary stayed at the house.

30Now Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha met Him.

31Then the Jews who were with her (Mary) in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

32Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

33When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit . . . ."

It is OK to have a reaction – Our Lord understands.

I encourage you to allow it to happen and share your feelings with the Lord.

Second, we begin to REFLECT and REMEMBERYou remember the happy years you spent together, sharing the special occasions and family traditions.

- Read Obituary
- Sharing of some memories

- Interactive reading of "We Remember Them"

Chaplain reads first part and people respond with "We Remember him/her

At the rising of the sun and at its going down – We remember him/her

At the blowing of the wind and the chill of winter - We remember him/her

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring - We remember him/her

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer - We remember him/her

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn - We remember him/her

At the beginning of the year and when it ends - We remember him/her

As long as we live, he too will live on; for _____ is a part of us and we will remember him/her

Memories seem to grow sweeter as the years go by.

Third, we REALIZE

1. We REALIZE how quickly life passes.

   He/She was just here and now he/she is gone

2. We Realize that death is not the end.

   a. When death comes there is a release of the spirit from the body

   b. While the body is either cremated or placed in the ground, the spirit inside of that body at the point of death is released and "We meet our Maker"

God has provided salvation for each of us. Remember **John 3:16:** *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

God provided salvation for all. However, there is a requirement - We must believe and accept it.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the glorious hope and for the great consolation concerning those who have died. May we remember that God has prepared a place for those who have placed their faith in Him, and that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now for the family, for the loved ones and friends we ask that you would comfort and strengthen them in the days ahead. Amen.

TEMPLATE FOR A MEMORIAL/COMMITTAL SERVICE

Memorial/Committal Service for _____

Birth – Date of Death

Age

Purpose: To provide comfort and hope with a sensitive caring attitude. Acknowledge the pain of grief and affirm a life well lived.

Welcome: The family is grateful for your presence here this (morning/afternoon) and the many words of consolation and encouragement they have received since news of _____'s passing spread.

We are members of _____(name of Post) Post _____, (number) Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. We are joined today by _____, and two members of the United States Army/Navy/Marines/Air Force/Space Force/Coast Guard We, along with you, have gathered to pay a lasting tribute to our departed Comrade _____. (Known to the members of the VFW as _____ and to some of you as _____).

When the call of our country was heard, _____ (name of deceased) answered. He enlisted/was drafted in the US _____ in _____(Branch and Date of enlistment). Self was forgotten for the cause of a greater good. As a brave man he/she marched away with a commitment to serve our great country and the cause of freedom. _____ (name of decease) served honorably in the United States _____ (branch of service) in (place of service).

The red of country's flag was made redder by his heroism; the white more stainlessly pure by the motives which impelled him, and the starry field of our nation's glorious banner, the blue, has been glorified by the service he has given to protect our American ideals and preserve the freedoms we enjoy.

Prayer by Chaplain

O God, we extend these final earthly tributes to _____ (name of deceased); a faithful (husband, a father, a grandfather, a grandmother) and a beloved comrade to those of us who served in the United States Armed Forces. Accept our prayers on behalf of his soul. Welcome him to Thy house to rest in peace. Look with mercy upon his loved ones during these early days of separation. Comfort and console them through Thine own tenderness. These things we ask humbly in Thy name. Amen

Read Obituary:
_____ (name of deceased) was a (quiet, gentle, decent, humble), and honorable man/woman.

Let us cherish _____'s (name of deceased) virtues and learn to imitate all the good in him/her. And let us remember the joy of his/her time with us.

Special Tribute and Remembrance

_____ On behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I present this evergreen tribute as a symbol of our undying love for _____ (name of deceased).

*(Step forward and lay the evergreen next to the Urn/Casket. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)*_____ In honor of _____ (name of deceased)**,** his/her Military service, and humble and faithful service, I place these white flowers as a symbol of pure, unselfish, faithful service. May each of us seek to emulate such pure unselfish service to our country, our profession, and our loved ones.

(Step forward and lay the white flowers next to the Urn/Casket. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line) _____: On top of the evergreen and beside the white flowers, I present these yellow flowers as a memorial to the bright sunny joyful times we have had together. As we get older, and with the aid of our memory, we can relive and enjoy those happy and special times we had together.

*(Step forward and lay the yellow flowers next to the Urn/Casket. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)*_____ On behalf of our glorious republic, for whose integrity _____ (name of deceased) and his/her fellow comrades willingly served, we place upon _____'s (name of deceased) memorial this small flag of the United States. It is the emblem of our country and symbol of individual and personal liberty. *(Step forward and lay the small flag next to the Urn. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)*

COMMANDER: _____'s (name of deceased) life upon this earth is over. We are reminded of the frailty of human life and the tenure by which we hold our own.

May each of us, when our battles of life and missions are over, find a welcome in that region of the blessed where there are no storm-tossed seas, no scorching battlefield, and no dangerous skies.

Committal

In the light of the promises God has given us in His Word, we now commit _____ (name of deceased) to the Lord and his final earthly resting place. May we find comfort as we remember the scripture that says, "*God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.* Amen

United States _____ will now render Military Honors

Playing of Taps

Folding of Flag and Presentation of Flag: On behalf of a grateful nation, the President of the United States, and the United States _____ (branch of service), this flag is presented in honor of your loved one.

This concludes the Committal service for _____ (name of deceased). You may pay final respects and offer a final tribute by placing a Poppy on the Memorial Table.

COMMITAL SERVICE FOR COMRADES WHO ARE ALSO GOLD STAR MEMBERS

We, the members of _____ Post No._____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, are here assembled to pay a lasting tribute of respect to our departed comrade *and Gold Star mother/father; husband/wife.* When the call of our country was heard Comrade (deceased name) answered; self was forgotten in the cause of the greater good. Bravely they marched away with the abiding faith in their God, their country and their flag.

The red of our country's flag was made redder by their heroism; the white more stainlessly pure by the motives which impelled them; and, in the starry field of our nation's glorious banner, the blue has been glorified by the service they have given for American ideals.

(Name of Comrade) further gave to the defense of our great nation the most precious and painful gift of all, that of their son/daughter; husband/wife, (announce name of the deceased child or spouse), who gave his/her life in the service and defense of the United States.

Parade rest. (Detail responds.) The Chaplain will invoke the divine blessing. (Detail hold caps over heart with right hand.)

Chaplain: (May extemporize or repeat): "O God, Father of us all, we here extend these final earthly tributes to our beloved comrade. Accept our prayers on behalf of the soul of Thy servant departed. Welcome them to Thy house to rest in peace. Look with mercy upon the loved ones bereaved by their passing. Comfort and console them through Thine own tenderness. These things we ask humbly in Thy name. Amen

(All repeat Amen. Replace caps.)

(A choir, quartet or soloist may sing "Sleep, Soldier Boy" or other appropriate song.)

Commander: One by one, as the years roll on, we are called upon to fulfill these sad duties of respect to our departed comrades.

Attention! Officers of _____ Post_____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, you will now perform the last duties of your stations.

Junior Vice-Commander: (Faces the casket, approaches it, stands before the blue field of the casket flag in such position that their back is not toward the assembly. They fold back the blue corner of the flag to leave bare a portion of the casket. Then places the evergreen upon the casket and declares so all will hear):

"On behalf of _____ Post _____ Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I present this evergreen tribute as a symbol of our undying love for our comrade.

(Junior Vice-Commander salutes casket and returns to their place in the line.)

Senior Vice-Commander: (Takes same position at the casket. Laying white flowers upon casket and says): "I place these white flowers as a symbol of purity upon this casket, and may each future generation emulate the unselfish devotion to duty even to the last of our comrades.

(Senior Vice-Commander salutes casket and returns to their place in line.)

Officer of the Day: (Takes same position at the casket. Laying wreath upon casket and says):

"We place this wreath as a last token of affection from their comrades-in-arms upon the casket of our departed comrade and crown their mortal dust with this symbol of victory."

(Officer of the Day salutes casket and returns to their place in line.)

Chaplain: (Placing a gold or yellow flower upon the casket and says): I place this symbol upon you in honor of the glorious sacrifice you made in life; that of your son/daughter; husband/wife in defense of our nation. With all of the admiration and reverence that we possess for your life and for the life of your child/spouse. May this most precious of tokens serve as an emblem of your grace and perseverance.

Commander: (Takes same position at the casket. Placing small Flag of the United States upon casket and says):

"On behalf of our glorious republic, for whose integrity our comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars enlisted and served, we place upon their casket this emblem of our country, a country whose arms are always open to shelter the oppressed."

(Commander then replaces folded corner of the casket flag, laying it over the evergreen, flowers, wreath, and flag symbols. Commander salutes casket and returns to their place in lin.)

Chaplain: (Delivers brief address extemporaneously or repeats the following):

We come today to honor the memory of one who offered their life as a service to our nation's cause and to our God. Proudly we remember their service. Because of men and women like our comrade, we live in a land freedom, peace and justice. May our ceremonies of today deepen our reverence for our honored comrade and friend.

We believe that our comrade is now in the hands of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Commander and Judge of all. We lay our comrade's body (ashes) to rest. Let us cherish their virtues and learn to imitate them. Let each of us be loyal and faithful to our remaining missions in life that we too will be able to join in that grand fraternity which is on earth and in heaven, and remains unbroken.

We realize how futile mere words are to express our deep and abiding sympathy in our loss. May we be comforted by the assurance that our comrade, friend and loved one is at rest in God's eternal peace, and abides in a place where all burdens are lifted and there is no more sickness and pain.

Comrades, let us now pledge ourselves anew to provide support and protection for those left behind; to pick up the banner laid down by our comrade, and continue their march to face the challenges that confronts us in this life, and may our God always be our companion and guide.

Commander: This concludes our service

DRAPING OF THE CHARTER UPON THE DEATH OF A COMRADE

At the 62nd VFW National Convention held in 1961, Resolution 183 was passed. This resolution mandates that "charters should be draped for 30 days for all deceased comrades."

On pages 112-113 of the 2023 edition of the Congressional Charter, By-Laws, Manual of Procedure, and Ritual, you will find a "Ceremony for Draping Charter" and on page 113, the statement regarding Resolution 183.



To the left is a picture of the VFW Memorial Charter Drape which can be purchased from the VFW Store at: https://www.vfwstore.org/products/31265. Product code is 02532.

Ceremony for Draping Charter (Pages 112-113)

Chaplain Hook's Observation and Suggestion: I have done the Draping Ceremony as written, which involves three people. It is much easier to do the ceremony if the chaplain takes the commander's part, after the commander requests the ceremony.

After motion from floor, or Commander requests ceremony:

Commander: Officer of the Day, you will obtain drape in preparation for draping charter.

(Officer of Day obtains drape, proceeds to the altar, and salutes Commander.)

Commander: (Raps gavel twice) Members rise and face charter at attention.

Commander: Officer of the Day, you will now drape our charter in memory of our beloved Comrade _ who has passed on.

(Officer of Day proceeds to charter and drapes charter.)

Commander: (While Officer of Day is draping charter) By so doing, we as members of (name of Post) VFW Post # _ offer solemn tribute to our departed comrade.

(Officer of Day returns to the altar. Salutes Commander, retires to station.)

Commander: Comrades, Salute - Two. (Comrades, parade rest.)

Commander: Comrade Chaplain

Chaplain: (Proceeds to altar. Gives this prayer): Eternal God, let Your grace and mercy rest upon us as we, with grateful affection, remember Comrade_____, who has departed this life. We thank You for his/her days upon earth and the joy that he/she brought. May our remembrance of (name of deceased) live long among us and be to us a source of guidance and strength. Give to those who miss him/her deeply, wells of consolation from which to draw comfort, and enable us to be Your ministers of grace and mercy to them in their time of need. **Amen.**

(Commander raps gavel once to seat members)

Chaplain Hook's Observation and Suggestion: At my Post, when a comrade dies, we hold a short memorial service at the first post meeting following the death. This takes place at the end of the meeting, following the "good of the order" and prior to the "closing ceremonies."

The Commander says, "Chaplain, lead us in a memorial service for (name of deceased)."

Chaplain renders appropriate salute to Commander, and proceeds to read the obituary and provide some information on the deceased comrade's military background and his/her service to the VFW and the Post. This is followed by a short prayer.

(Following the prayer is an appropriate place to do the "Draping of the Charter" Ceremony).

Following the Draping of the Charter, the Commander or Chaplain gives the command for the bugler to play Taps. At the conclusion of Taps, the Chaplain says, "Commander, that concludes our memorial service and the draping of the Charter," followed by the rendering of appropriate salute.

The Commander then proceeds to conduct closing ceremonies.

Ceremony for Undraping Charter

(Page 113)

VFW 62nd National Convention, Resolution 183, mandate provides that – "charters should be draped for 30 days for all deceased comrades." After the 30 days an "Undraping of the Charter" ceremony may be performed.

After motion from floor, or Commander requests ceremony:

Commander: Officer of the Day, you will prepare to undrape the charter.

(Officer of Day proceeds to the altar and salutes Commander.)

Commander: (Raps gavel twice) Members rise and face charter at attention.

Commander: Officer of the Day, you will now undrape our charter which was draped last month for Comrade _____.

(Officer of Day proceeds to undrape charter.)

Commander: Comrades, Salute - Two.

(Officer of Day returns to his/her station.)

Commander: This concludes our undraping ceremony. (Raps gavel once to seat members).

Draping of the Charter for a Past Department Commander or Chaplain

Although not specifically required by regulation, a Post may drape its charter upon the death of a Past Department Commander or Past Department Chaplain as a respectful tribute to the individual's service and leadership.

VFW POPPY PRESENTATION SERVICE

A Respectful Tribute Honoring a Deceased VFW or Auxiliary Member
(Traditionally conducted during the viewing or visitation)

Opening Words

Comrades, family, and friends, on behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary, we gather to honor and remember a life of service. Death is one of life's hardest realities—it separates the spirit from the body, a loved one from those who cherished them. We feel the deep ache of loss, yet we also come together to celebrate the courage and devotion of _____.

For a veteran: When the call of our country was heard, _____ answered. Self was set aside for the greater good. With steadfast commitment, this veteran served in the United States _____, upholding the ideals of freedom and justice. _____ was a true patriot—a model of honor and sacrifice for all of us.

For an auxiliary member: When the call to serve those who served was heard, _____ answered. With unwavering dedication, this VFW Auxiliary member championed the mission of honoring veterans and supporting the VFW, upholding the ideals of loyalty, service, and compassion. _____ was a true patriot—a model of devotion and sacrifice for all of us.

Presentation of Certificate of Remembrance

At this time a framed Certificate of Remembrance can be read and presented to the family or placed at the memorial table, urn, or casket, or laid beside the flag.

The Meaning of the Poppy

The red poppy stands as a symbol of remembrance for those who served and sacrificed. It speaks of fields where courage bloomed, of blood freely given, and of peace purchased at great cost. Though small, the poppy carries profound meaning. It reminds us that freedom is never free. Each poppy is a promise—that we will remember.

Presentation of the Poppies

On behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, its Auxiliary, and a grateful nation, we present a poppy in honor of a life lived in service—a comrade, a loved one, a hero. As each poppy is laid, it stands as a tribute: this veteran's service mattered, their sacrifice is remembered, and their legacy endures.

(The poppy may be placed at the memorial table, urn, or casket, or laid beside the flag.)

Explanation of Procedure (The explanation is for the participants and explained to them prior to the service)

After the chime sounds, two individuals will approach the casket or urn and gently lay their poppy. They will then render a slow hand salute before returning quietly to their seats.

The chime will sound again, and the next individuals will proceed. This continues until all have had the opportunity to lay a poppy. Please proceed promptly when the chime sounds so that all may participate without delay.

Between each poppy presentation there is a reading of a verse or two of In Flanders Fields. Do not try to recite the entire poem at once. It shouldn't be forced. Other poems and narrations can also be used for the ceremony. The objective is to keep the flow of people moving. Here is a picture of a chime that works well with this service.

Poems and Narrations

In Flanders Fields by John McCrea

In Flanders Fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,



Woodstock Wind Chimes Zenergy Solo Hand Chime, Silver (7")

That mark our place. While in the Sky
The larks still bravely singing, fly
Unheard, amid the guns below.
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawns, saw sunsets glow;
Loved and were loved – but now we lie
In Flanders Field

Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch, Be yours to bear it high!
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep tho' poppies blow
In Flanders Field.

The Answer – is one of many poems written in response to *In Flanders Fields*

In Flanders Field the cannon boom
And fitful flashes light the gloom.
While up above, like Eagles, fly
The fierce destroyers of the sky.
With stains the earth wherein, you lie
Is redder than the poppy bloom
In Flanders Field.

Sleep on ye brave! The shrieking shell,
The quaking trench, the startling yell,
The fury of the battle hell
Shall wake you not; for all is well.
Sleep peacefully, for all is well.
Your flaming torch aloft we bear,
With burning heart an oath we swear
To keep the faith to fight it through
To crush the foe, or sleep with you
In Flanders Field

In New York in November 1918 an American woman called Moina Michael came across the poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae. She was so moved that she made a personal pledge to "keep the faith". She felt compelled to make a note of this pledge and hastily scribbled down a response entitled "We Shall Keep the Faith" on the back of a used envelope. From that day she vowed to wear a red poppy of Flanders Fields as a sign of remembrance.

We Shall Keep the Faith by Moina Michael, November 1918

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet - to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died.
We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.
And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honor of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields.

She Is Gone (He Is Gone) by David Harkins, 1981

You can shed tears that she is gone
Or you can smile because she has lived

You can close your eyes and pray that she will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that she has left

Your heart can be empty because you can't see her
Or you can be full of the love that you shared

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday

You can remember her and only that she is gone
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what she would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Legacy of a Veteran, Author Unknown

You marched with courage, heart, and pride,
Through distant lands, so far and wide.
You stood for peace, your duty true,
A silent hero, brave and true.

Through battles fought, through night and day,
You paved for us a safer way.
The flag you served now rests with grace,
In hearts you touched, you hold a place.

Now sleep dear soldier, rest in light,
Your spirit shines through stars so bright.
Forever honored, brave and strong,
In grateful hears, you will live on.

Words of Commitment

As comrades, we do not forget.
As a nation, we remain grateful.
As stewards of memory, we carry forward the values for which this veteran served—duty, honor, and devotion to others.

- Consider making this a responsive reading or a unison affirmation for added engagement:
  Leader: As comrades, we do not forget.
  All: As a nation, we remain grateful.
  Leader: As stewards of memory, we carry forward the values for which this veteran served.
  All: Duty, honor, and devotion to others.

Benediction

Let us pray.
Almighty God, we give thanks for the life we honor today.
We are grateful for service rendered, for sacrifices made, and for love shared.
Grant comfort to those who mourn, strength to those who carry on, and peace to all who rest from their labors. May we live lives worthy of the freedom entrusted to us. Amen.

Military Honors

At this time, there will be a three-volley rifle salute followed by the playing of **Taps**. Please stand and prepare for the rifle salute.

Conclusion

This brings our Poppy Presentation Service to a close. On behalf of everyone here, I extend my heartfelt condolences to the family during this difficult time. Thank you for joining us as we honored and celebrated the life of _____.

VFW POPPY PRESENTATION SERVICE AT COMMITTAL

The Meaning of the Poppy

The red poppy stands as a symbol of remembrance for those who served and sacrificed. It speaks of fields where courage bloomed, of blood freely given, and of peace purchased at great cost. Though small, the poppy carries profound meaning. It reminds us that freedom is never free. Each poppy is a promise—that we will remember.

As each poppy is laid, it stands as a tribute: this veteran's service mattered, their sacrifice is remembered, and their legacy endures.

(The poppy may be placed at the memorial table, urn, or casket, or laid beside the flag.)

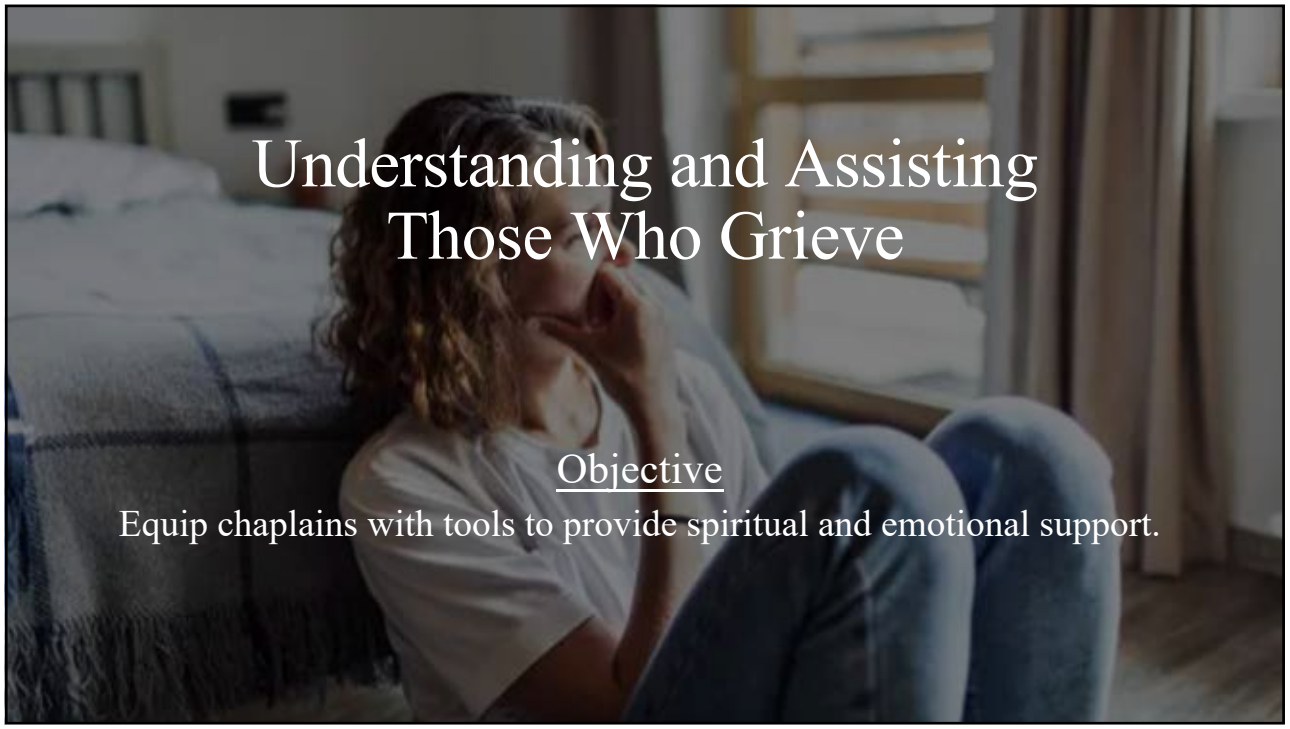
Please line up, take a poppy and lay it on the casket/urn

To be read while poppies are being placed

In Flanders Fields by John McCrea

In Flanders Fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place. While in the Sky
The larks still bravely singing, fly
Unheard, amid the guns below.
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawns, saw sunsets glow;
Loved and were loved – but now we lie
In Flanders Field

Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch, Be yours to bear it high!
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep tho' poppies blow
In Flanders Field.



Understanding Grief

- **Grief is Normal**: It is the normal response to a major loss
- **Grief is Personal**: Everyone grieves differently
  - There is no "right" way to grieve
- **Types of Grief**:
  - Normal Grief: Emotional adjustment.
  - Complicated Grief: Prolonged or intense grief.
  - Anticipatory Grief: Grieving before a death occurs.



Definition of Grief

- Deep sorrow, especially that caused by a major loss



Grief is . . .

- The emotional, physical, and psychological response to loss.
- It is not a single feeling but a range of emotions, such as sadness, anger, guilt, disbelief, or even relief, depending on the nature of the loss.



Grief is . . .

- Typically associated with death, but it can also arise from other types of loss, such as:
  - Loss of a relationship (e.g., divorce, separation, or estrangement)
  - Loss of health (e.g., a chronic illness or injury)
  - Loss of identity or purpose (e.g., losing a job or facing retirement)
  - Loss of a pet or other cherished companion






Grief . . .

- Can also be triggered by less tangible losses, like a lost dream, a change in lifestyle, or a missed opportunity.
- The process of grieving is often seen as a journey rather than a singular event, and it unfolds over time.
- The process of grieving is normal, natural, and necessary.



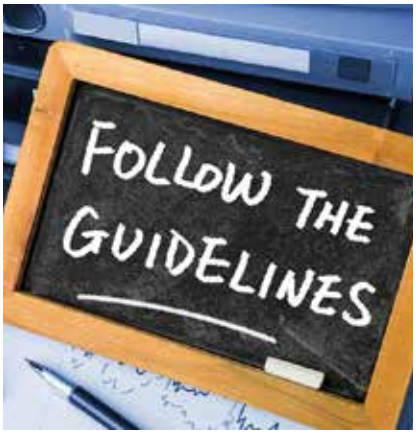
Supporting Someone who is Grieving

- Supporting someone who is grieving can be difficult, as grief is a deeply personal experience, and each person processes it in their own way.
- However, there are general guidelines you can follow to provide comfort and compassion.



General Guidelines to Follow





1. Listen More Than You Speak

- **Offer a listening ear**: Sometimes, grieving people just need someone to hear them. Give them space to express their emotions without trying to fix or solve anything.
- **Avoid offering solutions**: Grief isn't something that can be "fixed." Rather than trying to give advice, just listen and validate their feelings. Let them speak at their own pace.



2. Acknowledge Their Loss

- **Use the person's name**: When appropriate, mention the person who has passed. Acknowledging the loss helps the grieving person feel seen.
- **Validate their grief**: Everyone grieves differently, and there's no "right" way to feel. Don't minimize their pain or tell them how they "should" feel. A simple "I'm so sorry for your loss" or "I can't imagine what you're going through, but I'm here for you" can be enough.



3. Offer Practical Help

- **Offer specific support**: Grieving people might have trouble asking for help, so it's important to offer specific things you can do. For example, "I can bring over a meal" or "I can help with errands" are more helpful than just saying, "Let me know if you need anything."
- **Follow through**: Sometimes people may offer help and not follow through, but it's especially important in grieving situations to keep your promises. If you said you'd help with something, do it without waiting for them to reach out.



4. Respect Their Need for Space and Time

- **Be patient**: Some people who are grieving might withdraw or not be able to engage. This doesn't mean they don't appreciate your support, but they might need space and time to process on their own.
- **Don't take it personally**: If someone is distant, it's not a reflection of you. Grief can make people feel overwhelmed, and they might need to retreat for a while. Give them space and let them know you're there whenever they're ready.



5. Be Mindful of Their Emotions

- **Be understanding of fluctuating emotions**: Grief can come with a range of emotions, from sadness to anger to numbness. Don't be alarmed by their emotional shifts and try not to judge their feelings.
- **Avoid trite expressions:** Avoid saying "everything happens for a reason" or similar phrases: While well-intentioned, phrases like this can feel dismissive or invalidating. Instead, simply offer your sympathy and let them know you're there.



6. Follow Their Lead

- **Let them set the tone**: If they're open to talking, be there to listen. If they want to talk about other topics to distract themselves, follow their lead. Grief doesn't have to be the only thing in the conversation.





7. Respect Their Ways of Coping

- **Don't impose your own way of grieving**: Everyone processes grief differently. Some may want to talk about their loved one constantly, while others may prefer to keep memories to themselves. Respect how they choose to cope, even if it differs from how, you would handle things.
- **Encourage healthy outlets**: If it seems appropriate, gently encourage self-care and healthy ways to cope with grief. However, don't push them into doing things they're not ready for.



8. Don't Rush Their Healing

- **Give them time**: Grief takes time, and the process is different for everyone. Don't rush them to "move on" or feel better. Let them process and heal at their own pace.

- **Offer ongoing support**: Even if they seem to be doing better, be sure to stay in touch. Grieving can come in waves, and they may need your support even months or years after their loss.



9. The Value of a Support Group

- A support group such as "Grief Share" is a safe, welcoming place where people understand the difficult emotions of grief.



9. The Value of a Support Group

- Through this 13-week support group, individuals discover what to expect in the days ahead and what's "normal" in grief.
- Since there are no neat, orderly stages of grief, they learn helpful ways of coping with grief, in all its unpredictability—and gain solid support each step of the way.



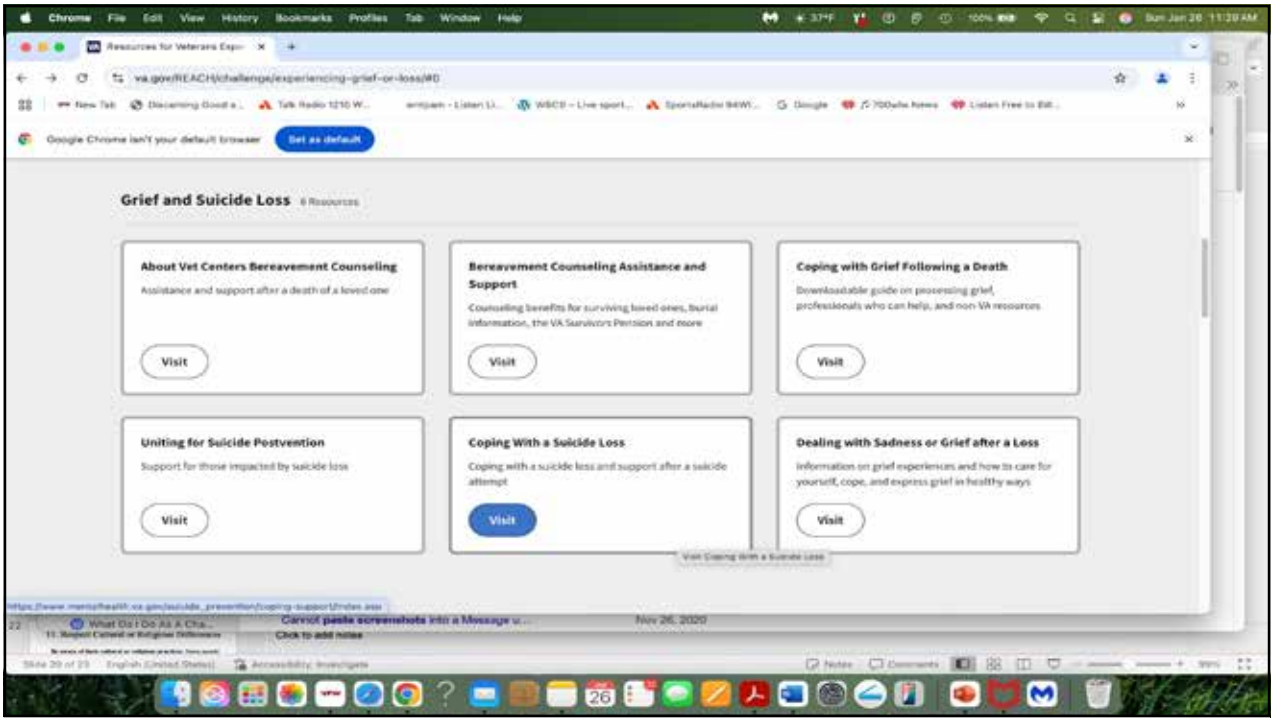
9. VA Support Groups



- https://www.va.gov/REACH/challenge/experiencing-grief-or-loss/

- Vet Centers Bereavement Counseling
- Bereavement Counseling Assistance and Support
- Coping with Grief following a Death
- Uniting for Suicide Postvention
- Coping with a Suicide Loss
- Dealing with Sadness and Grief after a Loss





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10. Offer Long-Term Support

- **Check in regularly**: Grief doesn't have a set timeline, and the pain can persist long after the funeral or memorial services. Stay connected after the immediate aftermath to show that you do care and that you're still there for them.
- **Be understanding during milestones**: Holidays, anniversaries, or special occasions may trigger intense grief. Acknowledge these moments with a simple message like, "I'm thinking of you today. If you want to talk or need anything, I'm here."



11. Respect Cultural or Religious Differences

- **Be aware of their cultural or religious practices**: Some people may have specific rituals or customs surrounding grief and mourning. Show respect for their practices and beliefs and offer support in a way that aligns with them.



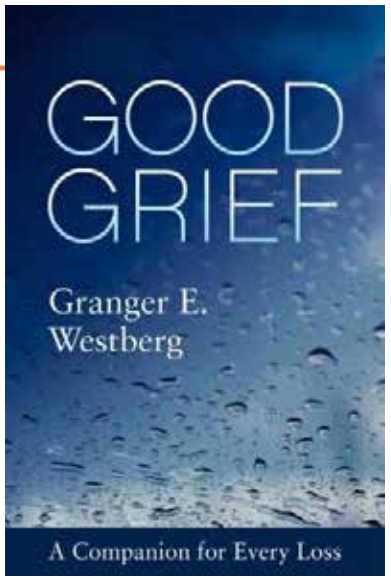
Final Thought

- The most important thing is to show empathy and be present. Your actions and words don't need to be perfect. What matters is that you are there to support them through this difficult time.



Helpful Resource

- With more than three million copies in print, *Good Grief* offers timeless wisdom for all who grieve.
- This classic text identifies ten stages of grief -- shock, emotion, depression, physical distress, panic, guilt, anger, resistance, hope, and acceptance -- but the author recognizes that grief is complex and deeply personal and explains there is no "right" way to grieve.
- It is a proven steady companion and a great gift to give to someone experiencing deep sorrow and sadness caused by a major loss. Cost: $5.00



DEVELOPING A CARING CULTURE

by Rev. Peter R. Hook, VFW National Chaplain 2024-2025

People join organizations for various reasons, but they stay and remain involved over a long period of time because of the mutually satisfying relationships they form and the care they receive. This is true for churches, synagogues, civic, and service organizations such as the VFW.

When an organization embraces and cares about its members, it seems to thrive, and retention remains high. Individuals involved in such organizations feel valued and respected. They build up one another, and each member becomes a better person as a result of being a member of such an organization. It is mutually beneficial and satisfying. Unfortunately, many organizations and workplaces are not like this. They just take from their members. They "use" people. And, when the person being used becomes exhausted and has nothing more to give, he/she becomes expendable. As a result, people who were once dedicated, vibrant members begin to fade into the background, and before long they drop out altogether. When this happens, and a pattern begins to develop, it is time for the leaders of such organizations to stop and analyze not only "what" is taking place, but to ask "why" this is happening. Why is it that our once-thriving organization is disintegrating and decaying? Why has it become so difficult to get people to participate and help? They should take an honest look at the organization and ask themselves, *"Who in their right mind would want to join such an organization, and over time, be "used up" and become physically and emotionally exhausted?* Most people have enough problems to contend with; they do not need more.

It is time for each Post, if they have not done so, to create a community-wide caring culture. Posts should seek to develop a culture where every person is respected and valued because of who they are, not only because of what they can contribute. A culture needs to be established where its members are valued and where the leaders and the people reach out and care for one another spontaneously. In time, the members of such an organization feel appreciated. And they feel they are receiving much more as a result of being a part of the organization than they give to it.

Here are some steps to begin to develop a caring culture:

1. **It starts with the mindset of the leaders**. A caring culture begins at the top. When leadership demonstrates a welcoming, respectful, and caring attitude, valuing every individual in the organization, it is noticed. Over time, this positive attitude becomes contagious and shapes the entire organization

2. **Do not tolerate gossip or speech that tears down others.** Speak well of others. Address issues directly and with grace. Don't let toxic speech take root. When problems arise, deal with them promptly—and be quick to forgive.

3. **Encourage Spontaneous Kindness.** Unleash people and encourage every member to take the initiative and respond when they hear of situations. When a member receives several phone calls congratulating them upon the birth of a child or grandchild, or if they receive a note in the mail expressing grief upon hearing of the loss of a loved one, it is always appreciated.

4. **Meet Practical Needs.** Small gestures matter. A grocery gift card offered quietly to someone going through a rough patch. A handshake from a Post Commander with a card discreetly passed along. These actions speak volumes.

5. **Mark Milestones and Memories.** Keep track of significant joys and sorrows that members have encountered. Call them or send "Thinking of You" notes. Not long ago I said to one of our members, *"Monday, it will be two years since you dad passed."* He looked at me a bit startled and then, with tears forming in his eyes said, *"You remembered."* Remembering these moments demonstrates that the community truly cares about its members.

6. **Form a Caring Committee.** Consider forming a small caring committee that the leadership can call on to respond thoughtfully in times of need. A few dedicated individuals can ensure no one falls through the cracks.

Remember, the things that are not seen (but felt), are the most important things to the members of any organization.