



Rev. Peter R. Hook



National Chaplain

Chaplains Workshop
126th VFW National Convention
Columbus, Ohio
August 12, 2025

For your reference, I'll be including this presentation in my next email to chaplains, and it will also be available on our website.

This presentation includes several embedded QR codes. Please have your phone's camera ready so you can scan and save the links when they appear.



National Chaplain

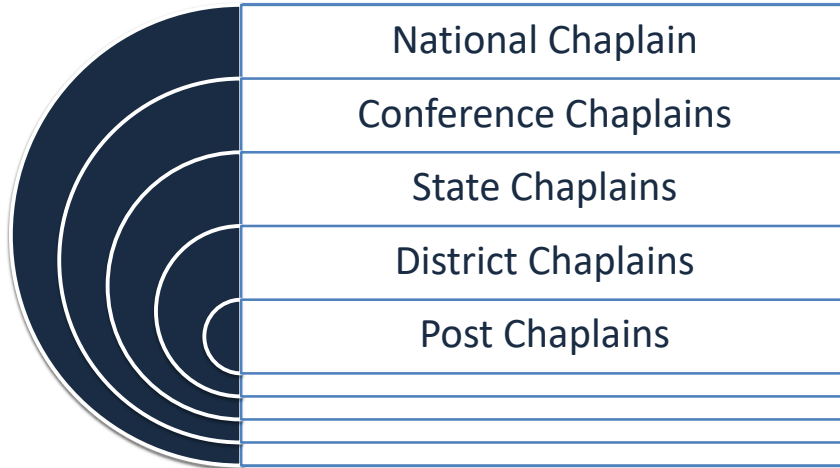
Rev. Peter R. Hook

PeterHook@verizon.net

Cell: 267-229-7722



Organizational Structure





Organizational Structure



**Elected at VFW National
Convention to serve 1 year**



National Chaplain

Conference Chaplains

State Chaplains

District Chaplains

Post Chaplains



Organizational Structure



Must be Nominated by your
Conference

National Chaplain

Conference Chaplains

State Chaplains

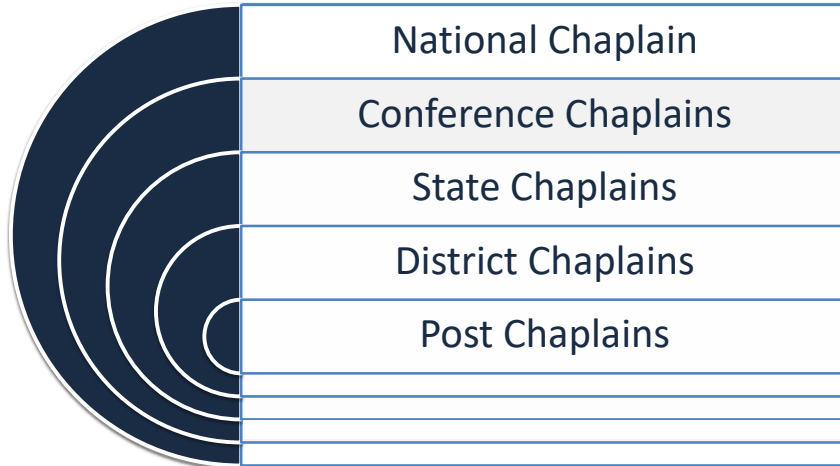
District Chaplains

Post Chaplains





Organizational Structure





Organizational Structure



There are Four Conferences

National Chaplain

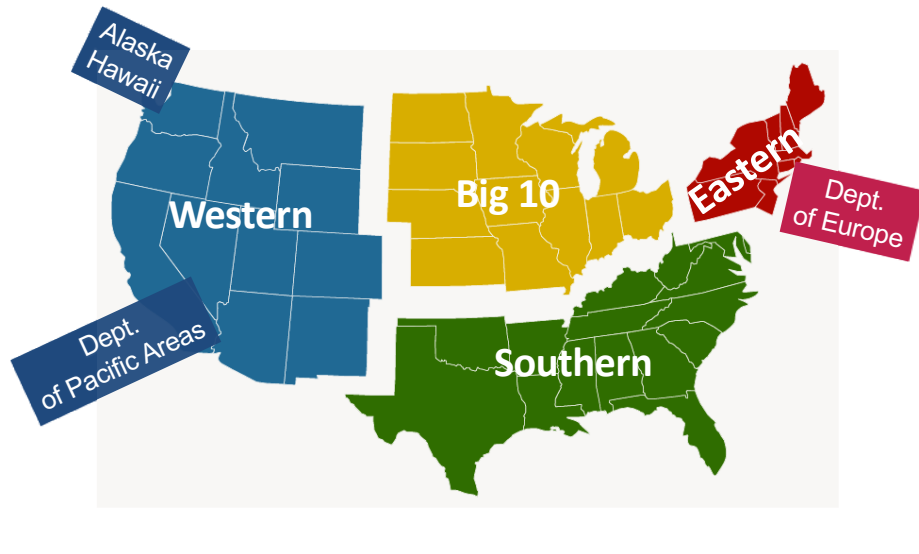
Conference Chaplains

State Chaplains

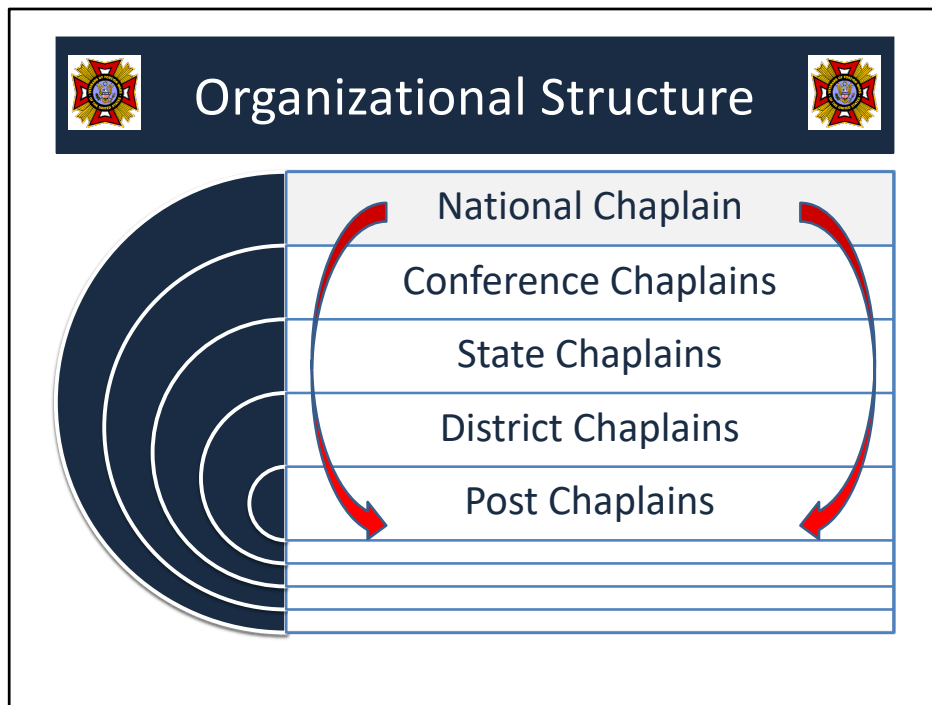
District Chaplains

Post Chaplains

Four Conferences



The rotation is Eastern, Southern, Big 10, and Western

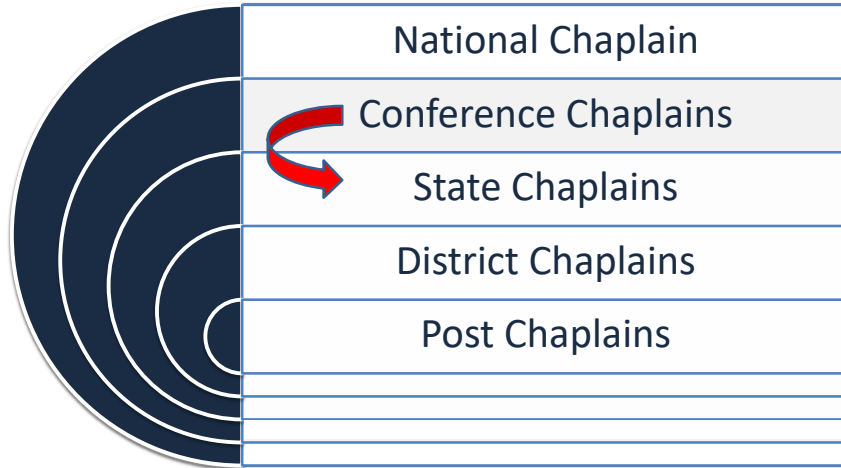


The National Chaplain provides leadership and sets the overarching vision for the VFW Chaplaincy.

Working closely with the four Conference Chaplains, the National Chaplain ensures alignment across all levels—state, district, and post—guiding chaplains in fulfilling their mission of ministering to veterans and their families.

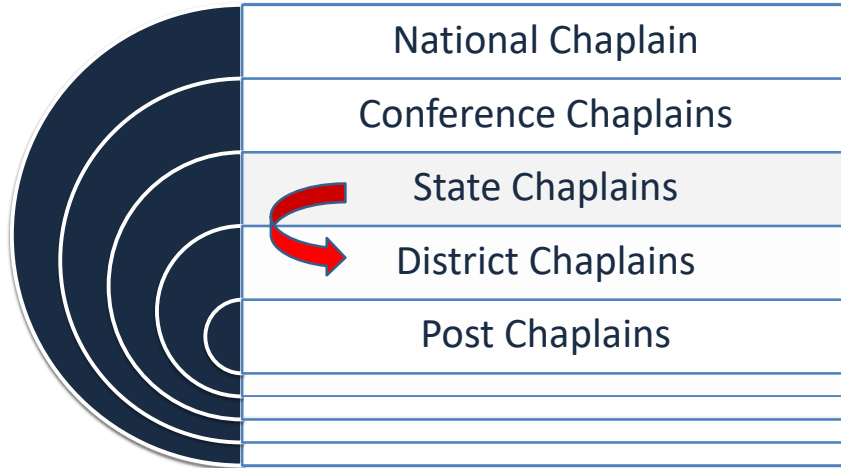


Organizational Structure



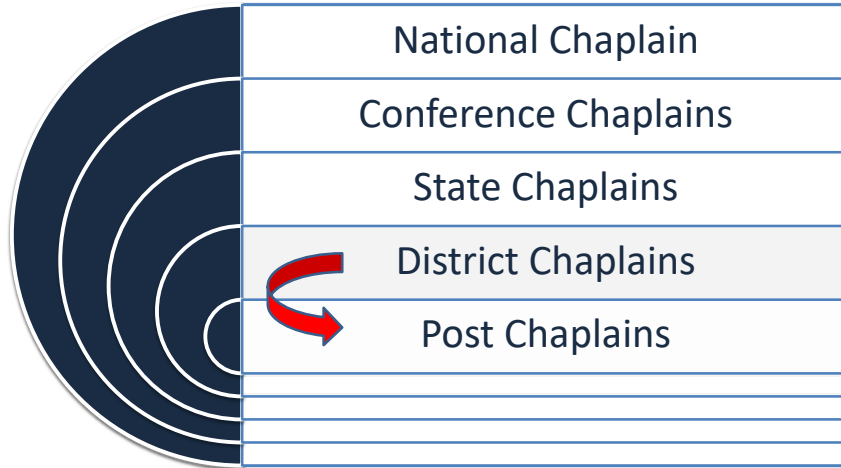


Organizational Structure



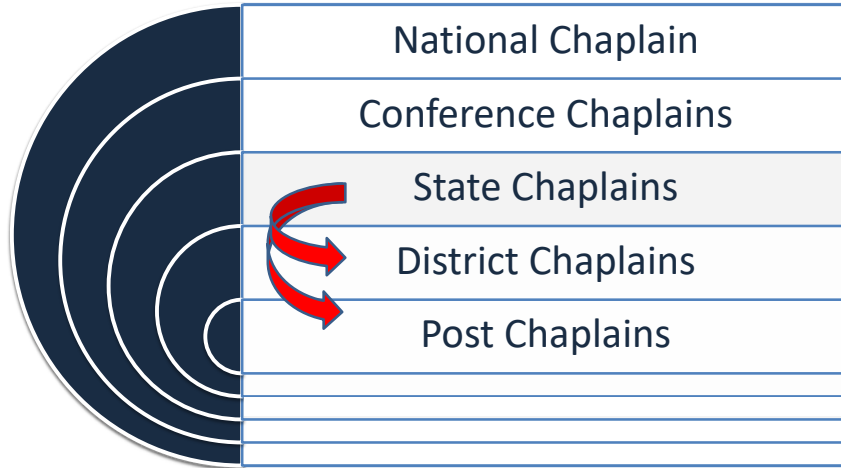


Organizational Structure





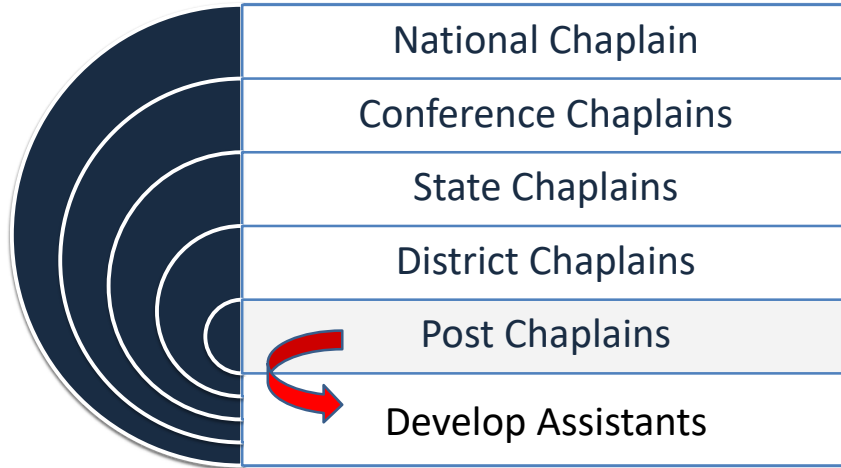
Organizational Structure



Choose to collaborate and work with VFW chaplains who are open and eager to grow in their ability to minister more effectively to veterans and their families.



Organizational Structure





Organizational Structure



Elected for 1 year

National Chaplain

Elected for 1 year

Conference Chaplains

Elected for 1 year

State Chaplains

Appointed for 1 year

District Chaplains

Appointed for 1 year

Post Chaplains

Develop Assistants



Rev. Peter R. Hook



National Chaplain

The Purpose of the Chaplain

The Chaplain exists to minister to veterans and their families.

A strong purpose statement should be **clear, concise, and focused on a single overarching reason for the organization or the position's existence.**

An effective purpose statement should center around one clear and compelling focus. This singular point of purpose serves as the guiding star for all of our actions and decisions

National Chaplain

Congressional Charter

Sec. 618 Officers: Duties and Obligations (h), p.33

- The National 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 Chaplain will be familiar with the Ritual and shall conduct the annual memorial service held in connection with the National Convention.

There are actually four purposes contained in this statement.

Department Chaplain

Manual of Procedure

*Article V – Departments, Sec. 518 Officers: Duties and Obligations (a)
Officers (6) Chaplain, p.92*

- The Department Chaplain shall, during the annual Department Convention, see that a fitting tribute is paid to our departed comrades.
- The Chaplain shall perform such other duties as may be usually incident to the office or as may from time to time be required by the laws and **Second one not Clear** orders from proper authority.

According to this there are two reasons the District Chaplain exists.

District Chaplain

Manual of Procedure

*Article IV – Districts, Sec. 418 Officers: Duties and Obligations (a) Officers
(8) Chaplain, p.84*

- 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 law. **Second one not Clear :** lawful orders from proper authority.

According to this there are two reasons the District Chaplain exists.

Post Chaplain

Manual of Procedure

*Article II – Posts, Sec. 218 Officers and Chairman, Duties and Obligations
(a), Officers (7) Chaplain, p.75*

- The Post Chaplain shall perform such duties as are 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.

But not Clear

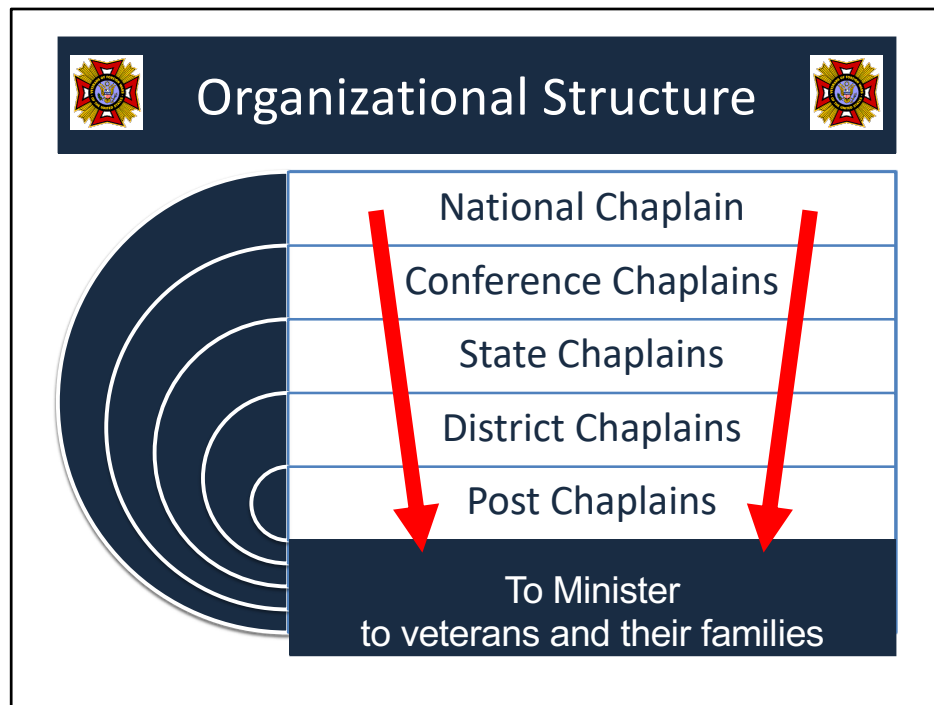


National Chaplain

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The Purpose of the Chaplain

The Chaplain exists to minister to
veterans and their families.



While the VFW Chaplaincy is structured with a clear hierarchy—from the National Chaplain to Conference, State, District, and Post Chaplains—the heart of our ministry lies at the Post level.

It is there, in direct contact with veterans and their families, that our purpose is most personally and powerfully fulfilled.

Though we operate within an organized framework, all levels work in concert to train, support, encourage,, and uplift those we serve, with Post Chaplains serving as the frontline of connection and ministry to veterans and their families.



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The Work of the Chaplain

1. Nurture the Living
2. Care for the Dying
3. Honor the Dead



Rev. Peter R. Hook



National Chaplain

The Work of the Chaplain

Advisor to the Commander

Throughout military history, chaplains have served not only as spiritual leaders and cared for the troops, but also as trusted moral and ethical advisors to commanders—helping to guide decisions regarding the morale and care of the troops.

As VFW Chaplains, your ability to serve as an advisor to the commander will largely depend on the commander's openness and leadership style.



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Relating to Everyone is
Key



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National Chaplain

Resources are Available



Debb Halter
Past National Chaplain
Big 10 Conf. Chaplain



Debb Halter

Monthly Email to Chaplains

Just send an email
PeterHook@verizon.net



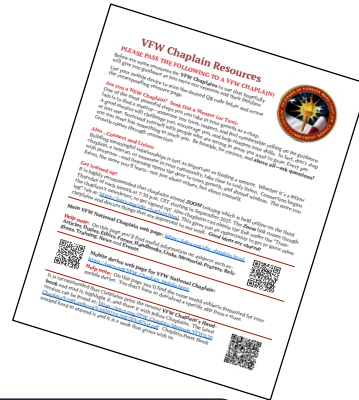
Debb Halter

Monthly Zoom Training

Just send an email
PeterHook@verizon.net



Debb Halter



Check Resource
Handout



Debb Halter

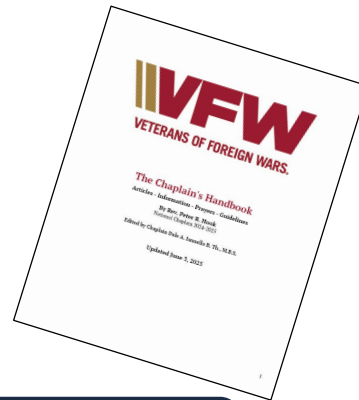


Check Resource Site

https://www.lotcs.org/vfw_chaplain.html



Debb Halter



Chaplain's Handbook

https://www.lotcs.org/vfw_chaplain.html

Chaplain's Handbook



The Chaplain's Handbook

Articles - Information - Prayers - Guidelines

By Rev. Peter R. Hook
National Chaplain 2004-2025

Edited by Chaplain Dale A. Iannello B. Th., M.B.S.

Updated June 5, 2025



Debb Halter

Check Your Department

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. California | 3. Missouri |
| 2. Colorado | 4. Washington |



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The Chaplain Does More than
Read the Ritual Prayers



National Chaplain

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Reading of the Ritual Prayers

Jim Jenkins
Past National Chaplain



Three
Standard
Ritual
Prayers

- Opening Prayer
- National Home Prayer
- Closing Prayer

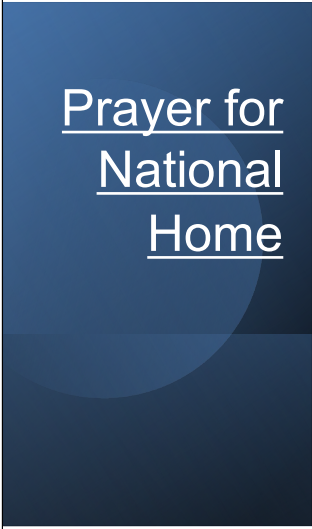


Opening Prayer

- It can be taken from the ***Manual of Procedure***, pp. 15-16 or, you can write your own prayer.

Almighty God,

*We ask for Your guidance in our meeting.
Grant us the wisdom to make decisions that
honor our comrades,
promote justice and preserve peace.
Bless our nation, and may our actions reflect
Your will.
Amen.*



Prayer for National Home

- It can be taken from the ***Manual of Procedure***, p. 19 or, you can write your own prayer.

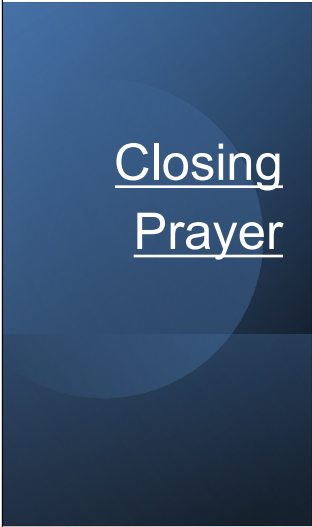
Almighty God,

We lift-up our VFW National Home and the families it shelters.

Watch over them with Your grace; grant them comfort, peace, and hope.

*May we remain faithful in our duty to support and uphold them,
and may they always find gratitude in the care and kindness shown to them.*

Amen.



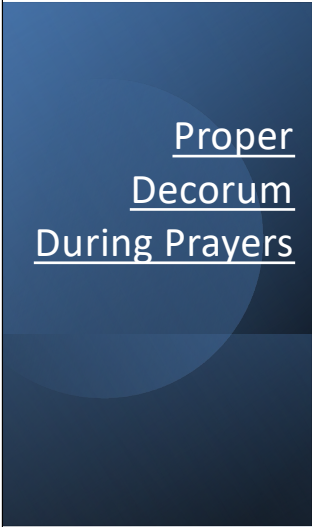
Closing Prayer

- It can be taken from the ***Manual of Procedure***, p. 21 or, you can write your own prayer.

Almighty God,

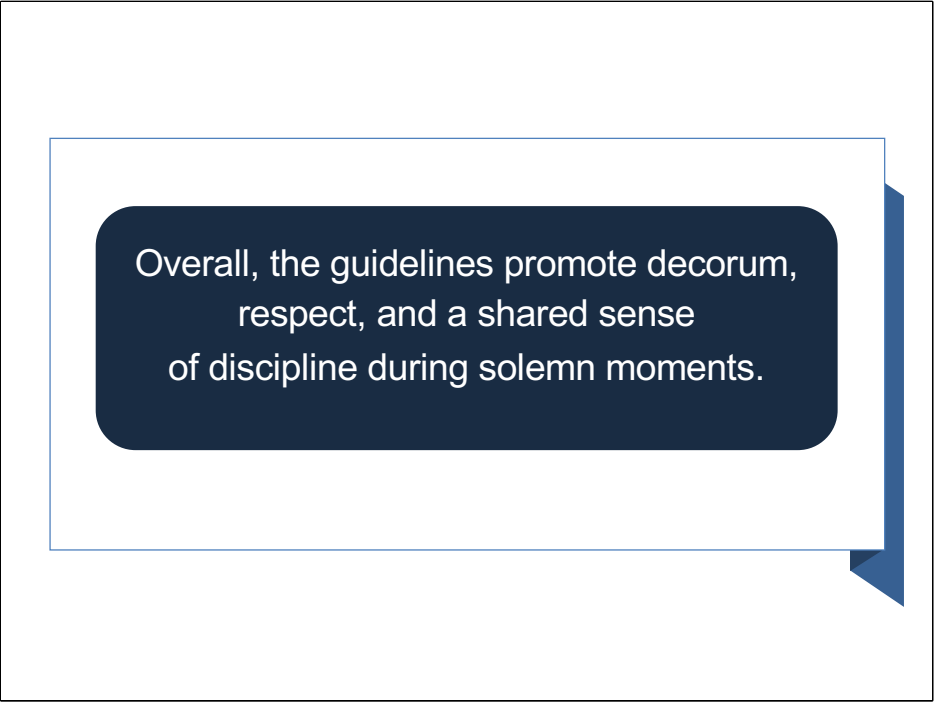
*As we close this meeting, we thank You
for the opportunity
to serve our comrades and community.
Keep us ever mindful of the needs of others.
Grant us safe passage until we meet again.*

Amen.



Proper Decorum During Prayers

- **Participation** – Members who are physically able should stand during prayers, demonstrating respect and unity.
- **Uniformity** – Members follow the action of the Chaplain or presiding officer relative to removal of covers during prayers, promoting order and consistency.
- **Symbolism and Respect** – When uncovering, the hat shall be placed on the extended fingers of the right hand in such a way that the Cross of Malta is exposed and held over the heart. This highlights reverence and symbolic honor.



Overall, the guidelines promote decorum,
respect, and a shared sense
of discipline during solemn moments.



Be Prepared

1. Be Prepared to Lead in Prayer:

As the VFW chaplain, you may be asked to offer a prayer at any event you attend—whether it's a meeting, memorial, or public ceremony. Be ready to fulfill this role at a moment's notice.

2. Embrace Your Role as a Spiritual Guide:

People will naturally turn to you in times of reflection or need. Your presence offers comfort and strength—especially when words of faith and encouragement are called for.

3. Have Prayers Ready in Advance:

Keep a few thoughtfully prepared prayers on hand—written on index cards or stored in your phone. This ensures you can speak with clarity and confidence, no matter the occasion.

ChatGPT
App

ChatGPT



VFW chaplains are encouraged to become familiar with and use the ChatGPT app. It's a helpful tool for crafting prayers and providing inspiration quickly for any occasion where words matter.





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National Chaplain

Public Occasions Put the Chaplain Center Stage

Public occasions place the VFW chaplain in a highly visible role. As such, chaplains should always present themselves with dignity and professionalism—both in appearance and conduct—as they represent not only their Post, but also their District, Department, and the entire Veterans of Foreign Wars organization.



Rev. Peter R. Hook



National Chaplain

Dress and Act Appropriately



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Interacting with our Comrades on
a Regular Basis



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Observe and Listen Attentively



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Observe Mental Health

Overarching Focus is Mental Health

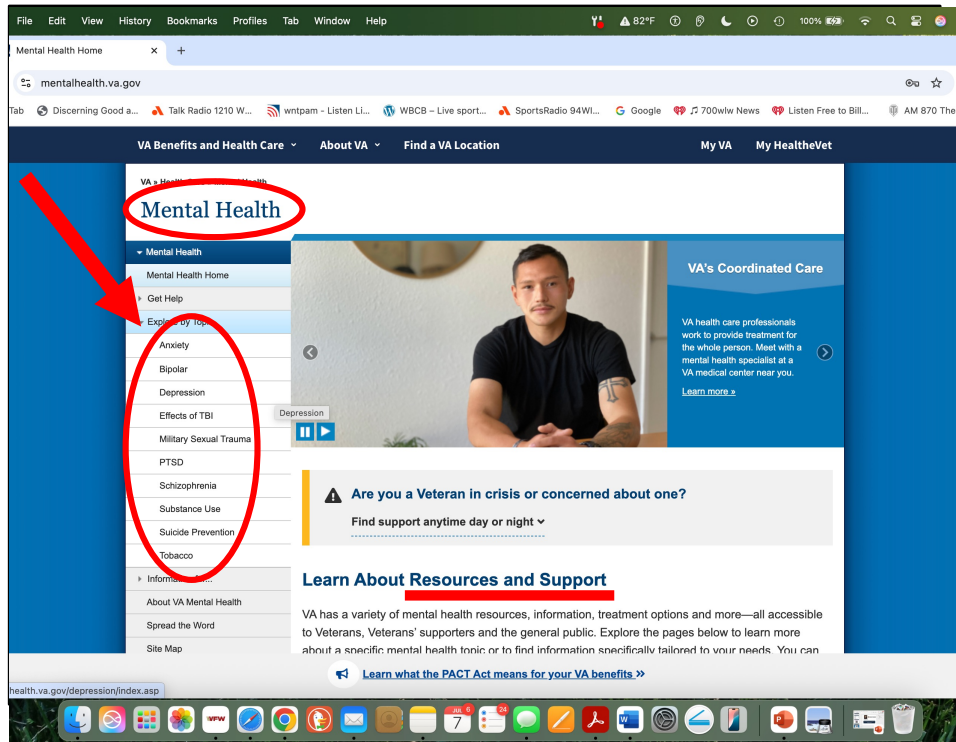
Some Mental Health Issues

- Depression
- PTSD, Moral Injury, Survivor Guilt, TBI, MST
- Personality Disorder
- Anxiety Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Psychosis
- Substance Abuse, Alcohol Abuse
- Eating Disorders
- Suicidal Ideation

VA Mental Health Resources

- <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>





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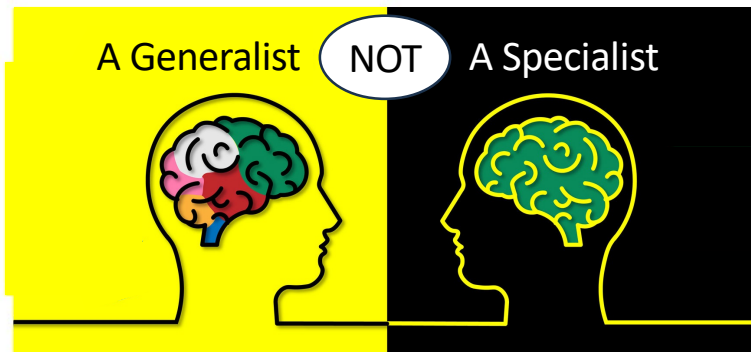
As VFW Chaplains, we serve as generalists.

We encounter a broad spectrum of mental health challenges among our comrades. While some issues—such as suicidal ideation—rightly receive focused attention, we must guard against limiting our awareness to only one concern. Mental health is complex and multifaceted.

Our role is not to diagnose or treat but to remain **attentive, informed, and responsive**. We strive to maintain a general understanding of mental health issues and be prepared to assist when a comrade is in crisis.

When we face something unfamiliar, we take time to research it, expand our understanding, and identify practical ways to support the individual—including knowing when and where to refer them for professional help.

With Mental Health Issues,
the VFW Chaplain is. . .



“Be aware of the Whole City”
The Full Spectrum of Mental Health Issues

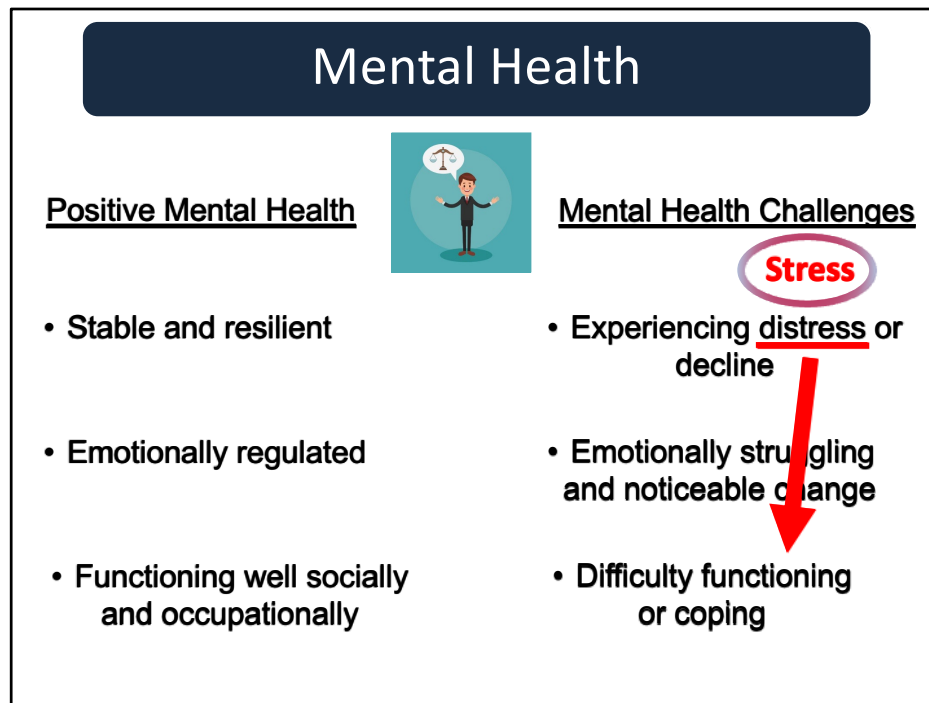


More Than One Building

Mental Health

- Stable and healthy mental state
- Emotional or psychological decline





As stress levels rise, they can significantly impair an individual's ability to function effectively. In times of crisis—such as the loss of employment and the resulting financial hardship—the pressure of providing for one's family can become overwhelming.

In such situations, immediate support is not just helpful, but essential. A VFW Chaplain and Post can play a vital role in alleviating this burden by offering financial assistance, helping to cover essential bills, and providing food. These acts of compassion and service can quickly reduce stress and restore a sense of stability and hope.

The medical term for this is often called **crisis stabilization** or **short-term stabilization**.

A short-term, intensive intervention is aimed at:

- **Providing some immediate mental health relief from the crisis**
- **Buying time** to get the person help to treat the underlying cause more thoroughly



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Observe Good Mental Health

See Handout: Good Mental Health



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Warning Signs of Declining Mental Health

See Handout: Warning Signs

Train Yourself to Notice

- Recognizing the early signs of declining mental health — in yourself and in your comrades — is a vital skill for every VFW chaplain.
- Like any skill, it can be learned, and it improves with awareness, practice, and reflection.
- The sooner we notice and acknowledge changes in mood, behavior, cognitive ability, physical appearance, or outlook, the sooner we can offer meaningful support, and help connect one another to the resources one needs.
- Paying attention to these signs is an act of care, compassion, comradeship, and leadership.

Observe and Listen for Signs of Change

- Look for significant changes in how a person thinks, feels, or behaves.
- Pay attention to whether these changes affect the person's ability to function in daily life or maintain relationships.
- Early recognition leads to early help.



Frank Correa
Dept. of CA Chaplain
Western Conf. Chaplain

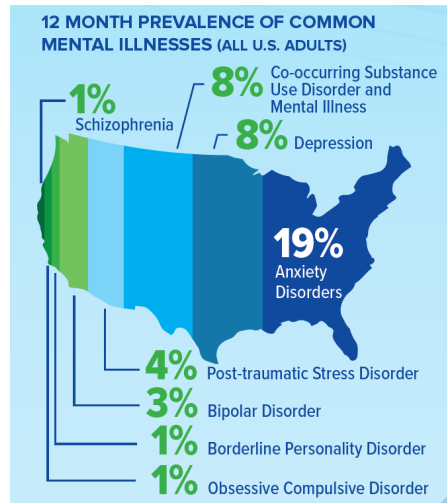
Mental Illness Briefing for Chaplains

some basics





NAMI website for epidemiology



Statistics Among Veterans



22%
of veterans suffer from
post-traumatic stress disorder
or major depression



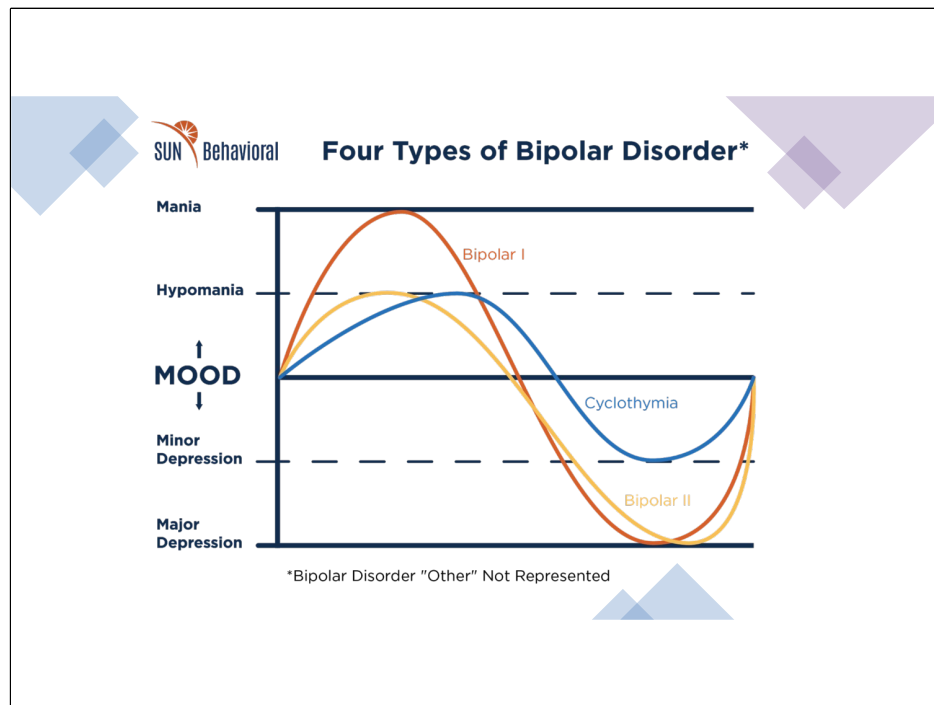
34%
suffer from other
mental concerns



1 out of 3
of these people seek help

Signs of Schizophrenia





In bipolar I the phases can last typically one to two weeks. Bipolar II no true manic phases; alternates between a relative normal and depression. Cyclothymia has its ups and down but not as extreme and can cycle faster. These mood swings can last for days, weeks, or even months,

What can Chaplains Do?

Assess

Intervene and assist in getting help

Activate 911 or 988 for crisis situations

Learn about mental illness

You can also contact a fellow chaplain or clergy for guidance if unsure

The Differences Between 911 and 988 for Mental Health



Emergency

- Active suicide threat.
- Threatening harm to self or others.
- Self-injury that needs medical attention.
- Severe intoxication.
- Inability to care for oneself.
- Apparent drug overdose.

911



Crisis

- Thinking about suicide or planning to harm oneself.
- Talking about harm to self or others.
- Non-life-threatening self-injury
- Overuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Depression, anxiety, or other mental illness symptoms.

988

Training opportunities



See Handout: 5 Actions Steps

Probably the most important and first training to get is for suicide intervention. It's a key concern in the military community.

✓ 5 Action Steps



5 Action Steps to Help Someone Having Thoughts of Suicide

We can all take steps to help prevent suicide. Knowing the warning signs for suicide and how to get help can save lives.

Here are 5 steps you can take to #BeTheTo help someone who is having thoughts of suicide:



1. ASK:

"Are you thinking about suicide?" It's not an easy question to ask, but it can help start a conversation. Studies show that asking people if they are suicidal does not increase suicidal behavior or thoughts.



2. BE THERE:

Listening without judgment is key to learning what the person is thinking and feeling. Research suggests acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce suicidal thoughts.



3. HELP KEEP THEM SAFE:

Reducing access to highly lethal items or places can help prevent suicide. Asking the person if they have a plan and making lethal means less available or less deadly can help the person stay safe when suicidal thoughts arise.



4. HELP THEM CONNECT:

Connecting the person with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988) and other community resources can give them a safety net when they need it. You can also help them reach out to a trusted family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.



5. FOLLOW UP:

Staying in touch with the person after they have experienced a crisis or been discharged from care can make a difference. Studies show that supportive, ongoing contact can play an important role in suicide prevention.

For more information on suicide prevention:
www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention
www.bethe.to





Trusted Referral Resources

- **Veterans Crisis Line:** 988, Press 1 — veteranscrisisline.net
- **VA Mental Health:** mentalhealth.va.gov
- **Vet Centers:** vetcenter.va.gov
- **Give an Hour:** giveanhour.org
- **VFW National Veterans Service**
- **VA Chaplain Services**
- **Military Chaplains Association**

Remember



Mental health exists on a continuum —
ranging from states of high well-being
and resilience
to periods of distress, dysfunction,
or diagnosable illness.



Everyone experiences fluctuations
in mental health over time.



Be mindful of any meaningful changes
in how someone feels, acts,
or manages daily responsibilities.

Everyone experiences changes in their mental health at times. What matters most is noticing when these changes begin to affect how someone functions in their daily life.



Rev. Peter R. Hook



National Chaplain

Strategies to Promote Good Mental Health

See Handout: Strategies



National Chaplain

Rev. Peter R. Hook

Responses and Questions

Thank You

- Commitment
- Engagement
- Participation
- Dedication
- Making a difference





National Chaplain of the Year 2024-2025



Donald M. Spano
VFW Post 7829 in Monument, Colorado

Donald M. Spano, of VFW Post 7829 in Monument, Colorado, has been named the **VFW National Chaplain of the Year for 2024–2025**. Nominated by Colorado State Chaplain Kevin Reinhold, Don receives this distinguished honor in recognition of his **exceptional service, unwavering dedication, and deep commitment** to veterans, their families, and the broader community.

Through his tireless efforts and compassionate leadership, Don has exemplified the highest traditions of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. His work brings great pride to **Post 7829** and the **Department of Colorado**.

We are proud to celebrate this well-earned achievement with you, Don — and we thank you for your remarkable service!



National Chaplain 2025-2026



Darren Atkins
Department of KY

It is my honor to introduce a servant leader who brings both heart and humility to the sacred role of VFW National Chaplain. Representing the Department of Kentucky and the Southern Conference, please join me in welcoming our VFW National Chaplain for 2025–2026, Darren Atkins.

His steadfast faith, compassionate presence, and commitment to our shared values will serve as a spiritual compass for us all in the year ahead.



National Chaplain

Rev. Peter R. Hook

Blessings as You Serve



Closing Prayer / Reflection



- *O Sovereign God, as we close this time of learning and reflection, we give thanks for the opportunity to strengthen our ability to care for those we serve — and for ourselves. May we go forth renewed in spirit, watchful in compassion, and steadfast in hope. O God, grant us wisdom to discern the needs around us, courage to offer support, and grace to carry this vital work forward. Amen.*