

CHAPLAIN



Introduction

Greetings from the Department Chaplain

- ✓ Introduction of class members
- ✓ Purpose of class
- ✓ Scripture & Prayer

As a *priest* (Deuteronomy 20:1-4) he/she prays for the people representing them and asking for God's blessings and presence in all things.

As a *prophet* (Ezekiel 2:3-5) he/she may have to challenge something that may be morally wrong and he will have to speak the truth.

As a *tentmaker* (Acts 18:1-4) he/she gets involved with people by visiting the sick saying words of comfort in time of death and plan services that honor the veteran or family member.

When George Washington appointed the first Chaplain in the Continental Army, the chaplain's role was always to simply bring God to men and to bring men to God, and women and children, too. The Chaplain represented God in all situations. Today, we have all kinds of chaplains— military, hospitals, prisons, universities, police, and last but not least, veterans. A chaplain is someone who works and lives with people, sometimes wearing the same kind of uniform or hat. He or she may be identified with a Cross or a Star of David. He hears the concerns and special needs of people. He is a friend and encourager and sometimes an informal counselor. He brings harmony to people and organizations. The function and position is to be treated with respect and the person who holds the office must be a person of integrity, a spiritual refresher for the good of all people, so that whoever is appointed or elected to the office, the Chaplain's position will always be one that is desired and appreciated by all.

"To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to become, in a special way, the servant of the others."

Pope John Paul II

The Chaplain In The American Legion

The charge from the Installation ceremony states: *"To you is given the spiritual leadership of this Post. You will I know, lend dignity and respect to your office. You should be in close confidence with the commander and the other officers of this Post, and should attend all meetings of the Post. You should be ready upon occasion to take your part in the initiation of new members, the dedication of halls, monuments of colors, and the funeral services for a comrade. All such ceremonies are made more commemorative by the use of our ritual. Into your keeping we place the spirit of comradeship of this Post. May harmony and unity prevail."* (Source: *Post Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies*)

The Post *Officer's Guide and Manual* of Ceremonies also mentions, "...that the Chaplain need not be a clergyman, but he must be capable of moral and intellectual leadership and one who gives dignity and respect to the office. He should be in close touch with the Commander and the other officers of the Post and should attend all meetings of the Post and Executive Committee. The leadership in many of the Post's activities belongs of right to the chaplain; and when his office is filled by the right kind of person, the usefulness of the Post to the community will be greatly increased." The Chaplain's responsibilities involve his/her role in memorials, funerals, and dedication services. The chaplain works with the Post Historian in his grave registration work and those graves are appropriately marked on Memorial Day.

The Chaplain works with the VA hospital and local hospitals in visiting veterans in the hospital and home for spiritual encouragement and prayer. The Chaplain keeps members informed of the sick and those experiencing difficulties.

Discussion: Suggested topics

- ✓ “Why not take the chaplain’s position, it’s the easiest in the post?”
- ✓ “Staying in touch with the commander and officers means your now part of the clique?”
- ✓ “We should elect a chaplain who really doesn’t have the time for chaplain duties or the time to come to training programs?”

“For God And Country”

The first four words of the Preamble are “For God and Country.” Our country has spiritual foundations. If our spiritual foundations crumble in our nation so goes the nation. The American Legion recognizes that if our nation is to remain great and permanent, God must be an essential part of Americanism. God is the source of all fundamental interests. “The highest role a nation can play is to reflect God’s righteousness in national policy and to promote God’s purposes in all of life’s relationships. The greatest and most significant heritage of our country has been its spiritual heritage. Apart from faith in God, American history has no meaning. In this faith, our institutions were created, our laws enacted, and our liberties secured. Our aim must be the same as that of our Country’s Founders, ‘that religion must permeate every phase of living.’” The American Legion is continuing a nationwide effort to bring all Americans closer to the Creator, who so bountifully blessed this Country.

Handout: “Religion and The American Legion” by Dr. Thomas C. Faircloth

What Does A Chaplain Do?

- ✓ Gives respect to the office. Treat your responsibilities with seriousness and reverence.
- ✓ Work closely with the Commander and other Officers of the Post and recommend action on spiritual activities.
- ✓ Inform membership of upcoming events and coordinate your responsibilities ahead of time.
- ✓ Attend all meetings and be knowledgeable of all activities and key chaplain responsibilities.

Pray and work on public prayers. Don’t read from the manual. Write them out and memorize them. Keep them in a personal prayer book, or if on a card, don’t throw it away, but put them in a file for future use. Never say the same prayer. Always make your prayers personal. Keep the Chaplain’s Handbook nearby. Also, be a student of prayer. Read books that talk about prayer. Buy books that have special prayers. Know the power that prayer can do for an individual. Be enthused when you pray. Pray loud enough so people can hear. Bring God’s presence into the room as you pray. Don’t be afraid to use conviction when you pray. We are all sinners, but we have an awesome God who understands us and wants to become involved in our lives.

(1) Discussion

“What kind of prayers blessed you or when were you appreciated for the prayers that you said for another? What ideas do you have that will make our prayers in The American Legion effective?”

Reaching out to the sick and those who grieve. Know who they are and keep the Post and District informed so that others may participate in visiting or showing a caring attitude. Two is better than one. Talk to the family or friends and learn of their concerns. Take someone with you to visit. Have several cards on hand. Get many to sign. Past pictures are nice to include in the cards.

(2) Discussion

“What are the Post’s strength and weaknesses when it comes to remembering the sick and those who have lost a loved one?”

The funeral service. The complete service can be found in the Manual of Ceremonies. Remember, talk to the family about the kind of service they desire, about an American Legion service at the funeral home or their wishes about the main funeral service. What about the burial service? Do they have a minister? Do they know about the flag and its ceremony? Were there any requests that the deceased may have given to you that the family is not aware of? Introduce the family member to the Post Service officer as soon as possible. Make your visits brief and to the point. What about meals for the family and what about a meal after the funeral service? Send a letter or card a week or two after the service. It’s OK to reminisce of the past good times with family members. Remember, you are God’s representative in bringing comfort to that family.

(3) Discussion

Handout “Fold With Care” by Rev. George Schwanenberg.

Write articles for the Post newsletter. These can be difficult at times, but if your heart is attuned to spiritual things in your life, you will become spiritual conscious and articles will become easier to write. Hopefully your column will become the first item that Legionaries will read. It sets the tone to all members that our American Legion is truly for “God and Country.”

Memorial Services. At each General meeting, the chaplain can hold a brief memorial or a “Post Everlasting Service” for the passing of a comrade. If not each month, perhaps every three months and most assuredly, once a year, particularly in May a Memorial Service should be held. Invite a clergyman to speak. Perhaps there is a military chaplain in the area; Active Duty, Reserves, or National Guard. They are potential members. Send them materials, magazines and newsletters. Work closely with other American Legion and Auxiliary Chaplains. Work together. Family Night. Organize it and take pictures. Make double prints for posting on the bulletin board and a copy sent to the families. Make prayer concerns a highlight of the event. Hand out helpful literature on Americanism and Children and Youth activities.

Flag activities. Visit churches to see if they have flags displayed. Find opportunities to have the Post put together an excellent flag program. Churches are more receptive to activities that do not necessarily interfere with the Sunday Morning Service.

Assist comrades concerning veteran’s benefits and wills. Work closely with the Post Service Officer. Obtain the *Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents Booklet* from the VA. Benefits may include: pension to the widow and children; partial reimbursement of funeral expenses; burial in a National Cemetery; burial flag and grave marker. Documentation that may be required: copy of death certificate, discharge papers (DD 214), funeral receipt, marriage certificate, and birth certificates of minor children.

Set aside a special time for the chaplain to say a few words other than the opening and closing of a Post meeting. It may be a time of inspiration.

Certificate of appreciation given to the chaplain, or to people who have done some wonderful things both inside the post or district for community involvement.

Conduct a Four Chaplains' Service in your post. Four Chaplains' Sunday is the first Sunday in February. Contribution may be send to the Chapel of Four Chaplains at 1201 Constitution Avenue, Philadelphia Naval Business Center, Building 649, Philadelphia, PA 19112 phone (215) 218-1943 fax (215) 218-1949. Internet website www.fourchaplains.org and e-mail chapel@fourchaplains.org.

Award or citation for an outstanding youth or youth group or organization for their accomplishments or achievements to be given at the Post.

Your ideas for what's a Chaplain to do?

Ask yourself; what are the strengths and weaknesses within the Post?

Discuss them with your Commander.

As a leader what can you do to make your Post better?

Remember, the Post is counting on your leadership.

Leadership from the Chaplain is expected by the members of the Post. Of course you can't do it alone; you'll need everyone to help.

Establish some immediate priorities and long range priorities.

Set realistic goals. Use a calendar. Tell people of your goals.

How much will it cost?

Write a report and a proposal to the officers and to the proper committees asking for their help. Request an adoption of the plan.

Put your plan into action. Select others to help and delegate.

Continue to monitor the progress and report to the Commander and in the monthly meetings or newsletters.

Always evaluate as you go along, but don't ever give up.

Make changes if necessary.

You might have to start over with a new approach and new people. But don't give up!

Closing

How can we help each other as Chaplains? How can you help me to be a better Chaplain for the good of the Department? How can I serve you better? May every Chaplain know that he or she holds a very important office. May all of your duties be done with reverence and high regard. May you know that there can be no greater honor than to be asked to serve as a Chaplain. May you bring to this office not some social distinction and someone who only offer good invocations. May you lift the office into a solemn and holy privilege. To transmit God is a high prerogative and a holy task of The American Legion Chaplain.

