



# THE AMERICAN LEGION



## **CHAPLAIN'S HANDBOOK**

*Service to God and Country*



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*Preamble to the Constitution of*  
**THE AMERICAN LEGION**

For God and Country we associate ourselves together for the following purposes:

To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America;

To maintain law and order;

To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism;

To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the great wars;

To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation;

To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;

To make right the master of might;

To promote peace and good will on earth;

To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy;

To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

## “FOR GOD AND COUNTRY ...”

Like our nation’s founding fathers, the veterans who founded The American Legion acknowledged God as the source of all our rights and freedoms.

Apart from God, our history as a people has no meaning. In this faith our institutions were created, our laws enacted, and our liberties secured. To safeguard our sovereignty and our prosperity, that same belief must direct our political, social and economic paths today.

Conceding the erosion of moral and spiritual values in recent years, and recognizing our dependence upon God, The American Legion reaffirms its commitment to bring all Americans closer to their Creator and remind them of His proper place at the center of the nation’s life.

“Service to God and Country” – it’s an American Legion program, yes, but the saying describes just as well our members’ attitude and way of life. Nondenominational and nonsectarian, the Legion’s support for religion in the public square is basic Americanism. Rather than acting independently of religious groups, the Legion desires to cooperate with and join them in reminding the American people with one voice that God is the author and architect of our beloved “land of the free.” Without God, there is no Americanism.

*“I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth; that God governs in the affairs of men ... We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that ‘except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that built it.’ I firmly believe ... that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel.”*

**Benjamin Franklin,**  
*Constitutional Convention of 1787*

As an American Legion chaplain – at the national, department, district, county or post level – you’re following in the footsteps of generations of military chaplains who went before you. Your mission is twofold: help Legionnaires and others grow in their relationships with God and one another, and minister to people wherever there is a need.

Because the Legion embraces all religions, faiths and denominations within its ranks, you as a chaplain are asked to care for everyone – those who have a spiritual affiliation and those who don’t. In some cases, you may be the only minister a veteran will ever know.

*“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 or colors, and the funeral services of 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.”*

*– Charge from the installation ceremony*

## **THE AMERICAN LEGION CHAPLAIN**

The American Legion’s founders believed that God and country cannot be treated as mutually exclusive if the United States is to survive and prosper. Thus, they created the office of post chaplain, charging it with keeping this association high in the minds of members.

As spiritual leader, the chaplain is an integral part of all American Legion ceremonies, especially the installation

of officers; the initiation of new members; the dedication of halls, monuments or colors; and funeral services and other rituals that are standard throughout the organization. The chaplain’s participation adds to the spiritual growth of the post and its members.

Also, a chaplain’s presence is valuable when members face illness or are “shut in” by disabilities. Visitation that shows a concern for their welfare or tends to their needs will be welcomed and appreciated. Likewise, you can offer assistance and comfort to the family of a deceased comrade.

The post meeting is the backbone of the organization; this is where programs are authorized, developed and improved. The chaplain’s attendance goes beyond offering opening and closing prayers to reporting comrades in distress, directly communicating with the membership, and learning about every aspect of the post’s work. Here, you have the opportunity to promote and advance the “Service to God and Country” program.

As spiritual leaders, post chaplains see that the Legion’s “Service to God and Country” program is carried out at the post level. This includes encouraging regular public worship, daily family prayer and the religious education of children, all in an effort to bring Americans closer to the Creator. In addition, they promote

*A chaplain will need help – lots of it. The post should elect or appoint a Religious Emphasis Committee to assist and advise the post chaplain. This committee should include professional and lay people of faith interested in the moral and spiritual health of the community.*

individual citizenship, service to the community, and our obligation to uphold and defend the Constitution.

In addition to post officers, the chaplain should be in regular contact with local ministers, school and hospital officials, funeral directors and community organizations, so they will know what services and programs the American Legion post offers, including direct assistance to veterans and their families.

## WHO CAN SERVE AS CHAPLAIN?

Department, area, district and post chaplains are elected or appointed in keeping with specific constitutions and by-laws. The national chaplain is appointed.

American Legion chaplains do not have to be clergy; in fact, most are not. Anyone who is willing to serve may serve. However, a chaplain should demonstrate spiritual maturity and be committed to the office. Otherwise, he or she will not be able to provide the spiritual counsel needed by the commander and members alike.

*No one should be appointed or elected chaplain against his or her will. Neither should a person accept the position just to hold office.*

A candidate for chaplain should:

- **Be a caring person with a strong desire to help others.**
- **Have a positive attitude about himself or herself, spiritual matters, the post/district/department served, and The American Legion.** Aware of their influence on others, chaplains should be proud of their office and determined to do a good job.
- **Willing to serve where there's a need.** A chaplain has a responsibility to all and cannot be selective in his or her service. Death, illness, family problems and other concerns seldom occur at the chaplain's convenience. Expect to adjust your schedule accordingly.
- **Value confidentiality.** Never reveal what you've learned or discussed in a private setting while serving as a chaplain and spiritual adviser. To do so risks an immediate loss of integrity.
- **Seek to be neutral when helping settle disputes.**
- **Seek to be a model in moral and ethical matters.** Failure to meet expectations or standards of conduct reflects negatively on The American Legion.

It is helpful but not necessary to be an experienced public speaker. A chaplain may read prayers and other comments relative to the office, or rely on notes.

## WHAT DOES A CHAPLAIN DO?

A chaplain's job is as large and diverse as one is willing to make it. The following outline is not definitive, but as a post, district or department chaplain, you are expected to:

- **Be present at all Legion events.** The chaplain's presence sends a message that each activity or event is significant, whether or not you have a particular role to play.
- **Provide prayer.** Specifically, the chaplain gives the invocation and benediction at meetings, as well as the memorial prayer at Post Everlasting services. Sadly, many think this to be the total work of the chaplain.
- **Promote and participate in Four Chaplains Sunday, Memorial Day and Veterans Day services, Independence Day events, installations, initiations, dedications, and funerals and memorials when requested.**
- **Take part in all rituals and ceremonies of The American Legion.**
- **Provide spiritual leadership through the Legion's "Service to God and Country" program.**
- **Make an annual report outlining the year's achievements.** Write down every time you lead or participate in holiday and memorial services, dedications, installations, initiations and funerals. You may also be required to report visits to ill or hospitalized members. Finally, add up letters and cards sent, telephone calls made, miles traveled, and the money and hours spent on each.
- **Communicate with officers, members and community organizations.**
- **Visit the ill, bereaved, shut-ins, disabled, and prospective members.**
- **Send cards and make telephone calls as needed.**
- **Organize and promote a Religious Emphasis Week sometime during the year.**



## CHAPLAIN RESOURCES

### *The American Legion Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies*

This publication is an essential tool for post officers, district and county commanders, and other American Legion leaders. Each chaplain, too, should have a copy of this guide, which outlines your participation in various Legion ceremonies. [www.legion.org/publications](http://www.legion.org/publications)

### *The Chaplain's Prayer Book*

This booklet is a collection of invocations, benedictions, table graces and prayers for nearly every American Legion event: Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies, Post Everlasting, building dedications, installations, The American Legion's birthday and more. Chaplains need not limit their prayers to those provided by the Legion, but be sensitive to the ecumenical nature of our membership; people of various traditions and those of no tradition are found in each post. Keep this in mind when selecting appropriate prayers. [www.legion.org/publications](http://www.legion.org/publications)

At times, you may need to go beyond the Legion for the resources you need to get the job done, and the following may be of help:

**Funeral directors** Ask them to notify you upon the death of a local veteran, so that you can make yourself available to assist with funerals upon request. Most are happy to comply. Funeral directors also know how to apply for veterans burial benefits, such as a headstone and a U.S. flag to drape the casket.

**Hospital administrators** They can identify areas where, as a chaplain, you may assist. When awaiting the transfer of a comrade to a VA medical center, their services come in handy.

**Counseling centers** There are times when counseling or care is needed beyond what you are qualified to provide. Know how to refer veterans to such services.

**Media** Newspapers, radio and TV stations, websites and social media can provide publicity for your efforts as a chaplain. Take every opportunity to talk about what The American Legion is doing for God and country. Build relationships with local media contacts and let them know about upcoming post events and activities.

Order additional copies of Service to God and Country: The American Legion Chaplain's Manual, The Chaplain's Prayer Book and the Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies from Emblem Sales.

1-888-453-4466

[www.emblem.legion.org](http://www.emblem.legion.org)

## CHAPLAIN'S CALENDAR

<b>January</b>	New Year's Day	
	Vietnam War ceasefire	Jan. 27
<b>February</b>	<i>Americanism Month</i>	
	Four Chaplains Sunday	First Sunday
	Presidents Day	Third Monday
<b>March</b>	American Legion Birthday	March 15
<b>April</b>	<i>Children &amp; Youth Month</i>	
	Holy Season	
<b>May</b>	Mother's Day	Second Sunday
	Armed Forces Day	Third Saturday
	Memorial Day	Last Monday
<b>June</b>	D-Day	June 6
	Flag Day	June 14
	Father's Day	Third Sunday
<b>July</b>	Independence Day	July 4
	Korean War Armistice	July 27
<b>August</b>	National Convention	
<b>September</b>	V-J Day	Sept. 2
	Labor Day	First Monday
	Citizenship Day / Constitution Day	Sept. 17
	POW/MIA Day	Sept. 20
<b>October</b>	Department Chaplains Conference	
	Columbus Day	Second Monday
<b>November</b>	Election Day	Tuesday after the first Monday
	Veterans Day	Nov. 11
	American Education Week	
	Family Week	Week of Thanksgiving
	Thanksgiving	Fourth Thursday
<b>December</b>	Pearl Harbor Day	Dec. 7
	Hanukkah	
	Christmas	Dec. 25
	Kwanzaa	Dec. 26-Jan. 1

*Religious Emphasis Week can be scheduled anytime during the calendar year.*

## SERVICE TO GOD AND COUNTRY

Though department chaplains are directly responsible for promoting the “Service to God and Country” program, with the help of district and area chaplains, it is carried out as an activity of local posts. For it to be more than a motto, more than a philosophy, The American Legion urges every post to demonstrate service to God and country among the people of its community.

*In 1951, the national convention authorized the “Back to God” program as a continuing American Legion activity, urging Americans to seek divine guidance in their everyday lives. In 1963, it was designated the “Service to God and Country” program.*

### Service to God

The American Legion’s “Service to God and Country” program has three spiritual objectives:

**Regular public worship** Many Americans believe in God yet reject or neglect public worship. Freedom of religion is not freedom from religion. The American Legion encourages all families to attend and participate in public worship of their God, that they may enjoy closer relationships with Him and each other. Regular worship also provides the spiritual strength necessary to resist the daily temptations of greed, lust, hate, selfishness, anger and conceit.

The American Legion respects the personal relationship between an individual and his or her God. However, the objectives of organized religion in this instance and those of Americanism coincide. The Legion and organized religious groups walk side by side in promoting the public worship of God, the author of all rights and liberties.

**Daily family prayer** It’s often said, “The family that prays together stays together.” Families are the most basic building block of society; in fact, they are the only natural unit of society. Prayer is the foundation of a partnership of faith, hope, tolerance and mutual love, sustaining and keeping the family strong. We should remind parents that nothing spiritually enriches the life of the family like the habit of regular family prayer.

**Religious training of children** Youth who know God and are trained in the tenets of their faith will grow to appreciate, understand and respect more fully such principles as law, government and justice. On the other hand, if they are not taught the truths of the supreme authority, God, they cannot be expected to seek His divine counsel and guidance throughout their lives.

## Service to country

Not only must we prevent national spiritual decay, we must instill in our citizens a spirit of positive Americanism, with respect for law, reverence for authority, and awareness of our God-given rights and freedoms. This, in turn, reaps a spirit of service to community and nation.

**Individual** Legionnaires should strive to be an example of honest, faithful and diligent service to the entire community – not just to our own families, houses of worship or posts, but to all. None of us can do everything, but each one of us can be of service. We can start by strengthening ourselves as individuals morally, spiritually, mentally and physically.

Citizenship alone imposes responsibility. President John F. Kennedy put it well when he said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” As an American citizen, every Legionnaire should provide an example of integrity, self-sacrifice, hard work and a life of faith.

**Community** “Devotion to mutual helpfulness” means service to community. No individual is an island. Each of us is part of the fabric of our community. Every Legionnaire and every post should be eager to make their community a good place to live, and to serve the whole community. Specifically, Legionnaires can be of assistance to the disabled, the mentally ill and other people who public welfare agencies cannot equally help.

Further, preparing young Americans to take up tomorrow’s responsibilities is of vital concern to the Legion. We must help give them direction and provide opportunities to build strong character. To instill “service to country” in the next generation means emphasizing:

- The moral and spiritual values in our nation’s founding documents.
- Renewed interest in U.S. history and the qualities that make our country great.
- Acceptance of the responsibilities and rights of citizenship.
- Self-discipline, self-reliance, thrift and industry, and the ideals of loyalty, honesty and personal responsibility.
- Improving the state of youth physical fitness.
- Cooperation with other agencies to eliminate juvenile delinquency and reduce the number of school dropouts.

**Nation** Service to nation is reflected in the Legion’s vow to uphold and defend the Constitution, and to foster and perpetuate a 100 percent Americanism. Though society is undergoing constant change, we must work within it to create conditions that afford the fullest possible life for each individual.

# HOW TO GET STARTED

## Speakers

- Invite local religious leaders to speak at post meetings throughout the year.
- As post chaplain, request a few minutes at each meeting to emphasize one of the objectives of the “Service to God and Country” program, or suggest activities through which the post can pursue them.
- Seek invitations to speak to public service and civic organizations about the idea of service to God and country.

## Presentation Bibles and Holy Scriptures

Bibles and Holy Scriptures (Catholic, Protestant and Jewish) are available for presentation to families of deceased veterans. Make an effort to obtain a copy of sacred writings for survivors of all faiths.

*Bibles, Holy Scriptures (Catholic, Jewish and Protestant), awards and citations are all available from Emblem Sales. To order or request a catalog, call 1-888-453-4466 toll free or go to [emblem.legion.org](http://emblem.legion.org).*

## Special occasions

Take time at Four Chaplains Sunday, Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Veterans Day ceremonies and events to promote the Legion’s “Service to God and Country” emphasis.

## Children and youth

- Encourage your post to support the community’s youth programs, and spread the word about The American Legion’s youth programs, too.
- Encourage Scouting.
- Promote prayer at athletic events.
- Support worthy school activities.
- Consider hosting a Children’s Night several times during the year, showing suitable movies and serving refreshments.

## Signs

Place an attractive “Attend your house of faith” sign on the grounds of your post home.

### **Awards and citations**

Consider awarding trophies or citations to individuals with outstanding service in promoting spiritual programs and demonstrating godly virtue and love.

Trophies and citations should be awarded to posts on a department level, starting with a questionnaire sent to posts by the department chaplain to assess their efforts in advancing the “Service to God and Country” program.

### **Letters and cards**

Letters and cards say a lot. Send sympathy notes to the family of a deceased servicemember or veteran, and letters to local youth who achieve some honor or distinction.

### **Other suggestions**

- Contact local religious leaders to acquaint them with The American Legion’s “Service to God and Country” program.
- Furnish local houses of faith with bulletin folders or pamphlets outlining the program.
- Use local media – newspapers, radio and TV stations, websites and social media – to tell people about the Legion’s “Service to God and Country” emphasis.

## FOUR CHAPLAINS SUNDAY

The first Sunday in February is Four Chaplains Sunday. More than 70 years after they made the supreme sacrifice, the story of these heroic chaplains – Methodist, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed – is still being told. The American Legion encourages its post, district and department chaplains to conduct or participate in a nondenominational service to honor the Four Chaplains and ensure their legacy of brotherhood and selfless service is remembered.

### THE FOUR CHAPLAINS



Alexander D.  
Goode



George L. Fox



Clark V. Poling



John P.  
Washington

### The story of the Four Chaplains

On the evening of Feb. 2, 1943, USAT *Dorchester* was crowded to capacity, carrying 902 U.S. troops, merchant seamen and civilian workers.

Once a luxury coastal liner, the 5,649-ton vessel had been converted into an Army transport ship. *Dorchester*, one of three ships in the SG-19 convoy, was moving steadily across the icy waters from Newfoundland toward a U.S. base in Greenland. Coast Guard cutters *Tampa*, *Escanaba* and *Comanche* escorted the convoy.

Hans Danielsen, the ship's captain, was concerned and cautious. Earlier, *Tampa* had detected a submarine with its sonar. Danielsen knew he was in dangerous waters even before he got the report. German U-boats were constantly prowling these vital sea lanes, and several ships had already been sunk.

*Dorchester* was now only 150 miles from its destination, but the captain ordered the men to sleep in their clothing and keep life jackets on. Many soldiers sleeping deep in the ship's hold disregarded the order because of the engine's heat. Others ignored it because the life jackets were uncomfortable.

On Feb. 3, at 12:55 a.m., a periscope broke the chilly Atlantic waters. Through the cross hairs, an officer aboard *U-223* spotted *Dorchester*. After identifying and targeting the ship, he gave orders to fire a fan of three torpedoes. The one that hit was decisive and deadly, striking the starboard side, amidship, far below the water line.

Alerted that *Dorchester* was sinking rapidly, Danielsen gave the order to abandon ship. In fewer than 20 minutes, *Dorchester* would slip beneath the Atlantic's icy waters.

Tragically, the hit had knocked out power and radio contact with the three escort ships. Tampa, however, saw the flash of the explosion. It responded and rescued 97 survivors. *Escanaba* circled *Dorchester*, rescuing an additional 133 survivors (one died later). *Comanche* continued on, escorting the remaining two ships.

Aboard *Dorchester*, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men, and many more were seriously wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion, were groping in darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside, where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then the knowledge that death awaited.

Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, overcrowding them to the point of capsizing, according to eyewitnesses. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get into them.

In the midst of the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness: Lt. George L. Fox, a Methodist minister; Lt. Alexander D. Goode, a Jewish rabbi; Lt. John P. Washington, a Roman Catholic priest; and Lt. Clark V. Poling, a Dutch Reformed minister.

Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. They tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded, and guide the disoriented toward safety.

"Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live," said Wyatt Fox, son of Reverend Fox.

One witness, Pvt. William Bednar, found himself floating in oil-smeared water surrounded by dead bodies and debris. "I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," Bednar recalled. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

A sailor, Petty Officer John Mahoney, tried to re-enter his cabin but was stopped by Rabbi Goode. Concerned about the cold Arctic air, Mahoney explained that he'd forgotten his gloves.



“Never mind,” Goode responded. “I have two pairs.”

The rabbi then gave the petty officer his own gloves. Later, Mahoney realized that Goode hadn’t been carrying two pairs of gloves, and that the chaplain had decided not to leave *Dorchester*.

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. It was then that engineer Grady Clark witnessed an astonishing sight. When there were no more life jackets to hand out, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men. Rabbi Goode did not call out for a Jew, and Father Washington did not call out for a Catholic. Nor did Rev. Fox and Rev. Poling call out for a Protestant. They simply gave their life jackets to those next in line.

“It was the finest thing I have ever seen or hope to see this side of heaven,” said John Ladd, another survivor who saw the chaplains’ selfless act.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains, braced against the slanting deck, arm in arm. They were heard praying and singing hymns.

Of the 902 men aboard *Dorchester*, 672 died. When the news reached the United States, the nation was stunned by the magnitude of the tragedy and the heroic conduct of the four chaplains.

“Valor is a gift,” Carl Sandburg once said. “Those having it never know for sure whether they have it until the test comes.”

That night, Rev. Fox, Rabbi Goode, Rev. Poling and Father Washington passed life’s ultimate test. In doing so, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage and selflessness.

In 1944, the Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart were awarded posthumously to the chaplains’ next of kin, and in 1961, President Eisenhower awarded a special Medal for Heroism, a one-time award authorized by Congress and intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

## Suggestions for a Four Chaplains service

These community services became a tradition in the late 1940s, usually conducted on or near Feb. 3 to honor the Four Chaplains and the hundreds who went down with *Dorchester*. Because of the interfaith nature of the chaplains' sacrifice, such services are an opportunity to bring together people of all races, faiths and creeds in an observance of our shared humanity.

**Music** Appropriate selections include the "The Star-Spangled Banner," "America The Beautiful," "How Great Thou Art," "God of Our Fathers," "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," "God Bless America" and "Let There Be Peace On Earth." The sheet music for the Four Chaplains Anthem is available upon request ([chapel@fourchaplains.org](mailto:chapel@fourchaplains.org)). In a gathering of Jews and Christians, it is preferable to have music acceptable to all, or to counter one selection with the other.

**Offering** Many posts, groups and organizations collect an offering during their service for the work of the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia.

**Special guests** To have family members of the *Dorchester* victims and the Four Chaplains is an honor. Notify the Chapel of Four Chaplains of the date, time and location of your service, and it will invite them on your behalf.

**Location** A Four Chaplains service can be conducted at your post, a fraternal hall, auditorium, church, synagogue or chapel. Representatives of different faith groups should be invited to participate. Clergy representing the faiths of the Four Chaplains is especially fitting.

**Proclamation** Invite your mayor or governor to issue a proclamation designating the first Sunday of February "Four Chaplains Sunday" in your town, city or state.

**Color and honor guards** If your post has one or both, include them in the service. If not, invite other veterans, civic or fraternal organizations to participate with their color and honor guards.

**Focal points** Create a focal point for the service: four lit candles, four red roses, a life jacket, or four empty seats near the altar or podium. For a breakfast or banquet service, consider an empty table set for four.

**Programs** Printed programs add to the dignity and importance of the service. Send a copy of your program to the Chapel of Four Chaplains for its archives.

**Publicity** Spread the word about your Four Chaplains service through local newspapers, radio and TV stations, and social media. Encourage reporters to write about the upcoming service or to do a follow-up story. Again, send copies to the Chapel of Four Chaplains for its archives.

**Rehearsal** A rehearsal prior to the event always makes for a smooth service.

## SAMPLE PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, February 3, 20\_\_\_\_, will mark the \_\_\_\_ anniversary of the sinking of the troopship USAT *Dorchester*, which carried to their deaths four U.S. Army chaplains of three faiths who stood united in prayer as the ship went down; and

WHEREAS, these four chaplains, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Protestant, gave their own life jackets to four soldiers and thus sacrificed their own lives to save the lives of others; and

WHEREAS, the heroic deeds of Chaplains Lt. George L. Fox, Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Lt. Johnny P. Washington and Lt. Clark V. Poling, and their combined act of supreme devotion and sacrifice for American liberty and human freedom, are an inspiring and ever shining example of real brotherhood for all time to the people of the world; and

WHEREAS, we must all see to it that their supreme sacrifice to the common cause of human freedom and justice for all shall not have been in vain;

NOW THEREFORE, I, \_\_\_\_\_ (title) of (city/county/state) of \_\_\_\_\_, do hereby designate Sunday, February \_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, (the first Sunday in February) to be observed as Four Chaplains Sunday, and call upon all our citizens to commemorate the day with appropriate observances in public places and by prayers in their homes and houses of worship.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of \_\_\_\_\_

This \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_

20\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (title)

## **Suggested formats for a Four Chaplains service**

### ***Breakfast or banquet program***

Posting of the colors

Pledge of Allegiance

“America the Beautiful” (assembly or solo)

Welcome

Invocation

Meal

Introduction of guests

Message (focused on the Four Chaplains and sacrificial service)

Tributes to the Four Chaplains (wreath laying or candle lighting by four clergy, one of each faith)

“Let There Be Peace on Earth” (assembly)

Benediction

Retirement of colors

### ***Short program***

Pledge of Allegiance

“America the Beautiful” (assembly or solo)

Invocation

Welcome

Introduction of guests

The collect (read aloud by assembly)

Message (focused on the Four Chaplains and sacrificial service)

Benediction

## ***Major program***

Posting of the colors

Pledge of Allegiance

National anthem

Welcome

Invocation

Introduction of guests

The collect (read aloud by assembly)

Musical selection (choral or band)

Message (focused on the Four Chaplains and sacrificial service)

Tributes to the Four Chaplains (wreath laying or candle lighting by four clergy, one of each faith)

“Let There Be Peace on Earth” (assembly)

Benediction

Moment of silence

Taps

Retirement of colors

## **Suggested introductory remarks**

On Feb. 3, 1943, the troopship USAT *Dorchester* was hit by an enemy torpedo and sank to the bottom of the North Atlantic. Of the 902 young men on board, only 230 survived, and they owed their lives to the courage and leadership exhibited by the heroic Four Chaplains, who, in sacrificing their lives, left a unique legacy of brotherhood.

This service is a tribute to those courageous chaplains and the 672 brave young men who lost their lives on the fateful night. Further, this ceremony honors all those who have served, and whose courage and faith have sustained our country.

We have a responsibility to teach our children and youth about these great events and great sacrifices, for they are our future. They must know and understand what selfless service on behalf of others can accomplish.

## **The Collect**

*This prayer is interfaith in nature and may be read aloud by those in attendance.*

God of our fathers and our God, we thank you for the unity that the *Dorchester* chaplains, these four men of God, demonstrated in life and in death.

Unity that is not uniformity.

Unity that strengthens within each of us every worthy loyalty of faith and practice.

Unity that transcends all our differences and makes us one in loyalty to our country and our fellowmen, and to You, our God.

Grant us now Your abiding presence, and may we remain faithful to the spirit of our Four Chaplains who, having learned to live and serve together, in death were not divided.

## **The candlelighting ceremony**

At 12:30 a.m. on Feb. 3, 1943, the bell on USAT *Dorchester* rang twice and never was sounded again. The troopship was torpedoed by an enemy submarine, and 672 young men died as it sank to the bottom. Among them were four men of God: a rabbi, a Roman Catholic priest, a Methodist minister, and a Dutch Reformed minister. All were Army chaplains.

These four chaplains gave their life jackets to save four soldiers and, in so doing, gave up their only means of survival. They were last seen on the deck of the *Dorchester* with their arms linked and their heads bowed in prayer as they went to their watery graves in the North Atlantic. Each chaplain received the Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross posthumously, and in 1960, a special Medal for Heroism was presented to their next of kin – an award intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

At this time, a candle will be lit for each of the Four Chaplains.

### **“I light this candle in memory of Chaplain George L. Fox ...”**

George Fox was the oldest of the Four Chaplains. In Vermont, he was called “the little minister,” because he was 5’7”. Lying about his age in 1917, he enlisted in the Army as a medical corps assistant. He received the Silver Star for rescuing a wounded soldier from a battlefield filled with poison gas, although he wore no gas mask himself, and the Croix de Guerre for outstanding bravery in an artillery barrage that left him with a broken spine. After the war, he became a successful accountant. He was happily married with two children when he heard God’s call to the ministry. Fox went back to school and later was ordained as a Methodist minister. When war came, he once again enlisted, telling his wife, “I’ve got to go. I know from experience what our boys are about to face. They need me.” Before he boarded *Dorchester*, he wrote a letter to his daughter. “I want you to know,” he wrote, “how proud I am that your marks in school are so high – but always remember that kindness and charity and courtesy are much more important.”

### **“I light this candle in memory of Chaplain Alexander D. Goode ...”**

Growing up in Washington, D.C., Alexander Goode was an outstanding athlete and scholar. Following in his father’s footsteps, this young man – known for his laughter and love of life – became a rabbi. Even as he pursued his studies, he found time to serve in the National Guard. The return of the body of the Unknown Soldier to Arlington National Cemetery had a profound effect on Goode. He attended the ceremonies, choosing to walk the 15 miles there and 15 miles back rather than take a car or a bus because he thought it showed more respect. Goode married his childhood sweetheart and they had a daughter. He was serving a synagogue in York, Pa., when World War II broke out. One day, Mrs. Goode received a telegram from her husband that read, “Having a wonderful experience,” and she knew that her husband had found companions with whom he could share his faith and good humor.

### **“I light this candle in memory of Chaplain Clark V. Poling ...”**

Clark Poling was the youngest of the Four Chaplains and the seventh generation in an unbroken line of ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church. When World War II broke out, he was anxious to go, but not as a chaplain. “I’m not going to hide behind the church in some safe office out of the firing line,” he told his father. The elder Poling replied, “Don’t you know that chaplains have the highest mortality rate of all? As a chaplain you’ll have the best chance in the world to be killed. You just can’t carry a gun to kill anyone yourself.” So the young man left his pastorate in Schenectady, N.Y., and became an Army chaplain. Just before he sailed, Poling asked his father to pray for him – “not for my safe return. That wouldn’t be fair. Just pray that I shall do my duty ... and have the strength, courage, and understanding of men. Just pray that I shall be adequate.” Indeed, he taught his men to not harbor personal hatred for the Germans and the Japanese. Hate the system that made your brother evil, he said. It is the system we must destroy.

## “I light this candle in memory of Chaplain John P. Washington ...”

John Washington grew up in the toughest section of Newark, N.J., poor, scrappy and determined. One of nine children born to an Irish immigrant family, he was blessed with a sunny disposition and a love for music. He also loved a good fight, and was a member of the South 12th Street gang when he was called to the priesthood. He played ball with the boys of the parish, organized sports teams and, when the war broke out, went with his “boys” into the Army. Raised in song and prayer to comfort those around him, Washington’s beautiful voice could be heard above the cries of the dying in his final moments on Feb. 3, 1943.

## The Chapel of Four Chaplains

The Chapel of the Four Chaplains promotes the cause of “unity without uniformity” by encouraging goodwill and cooperation among all people. For 60 years, it has been a monument to the principles of selfless service to humanity without regard to race, creed, ethnicity or religious beliefs.

Dedicating the chapel on Feb. 3, 1951, President Harry Truman said, “This interfaith shrine ... will stand through long generations to teach Americans that as men can die heroically as brothers, so should they live together in mutual faith and goodwill.”

The Chapel of Four Chaplains is an interfaith memorial and a sanctuary for brotherhood. It does not champion a theology or a doctrine, but is a symbol. People of all backgrounds are welcome visitors and members, and all are free to participate in its activities.

Friends of the Chapel of Four Chaplains (called the Four Chaplains) is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization made up of community leaders, corporate contributors and others supportive of its mission of promoting cultural harmony and religious tolerance. Donations are tax-deductible under IRS laws.

The Four Chaplains encourages and supports annual memorial services in communities across the United States on or near the anniversary of *Dorchester’s* sinking. It also advises in developing and constructing public interfaith memorials and chapels nationwide, and provides detailed information and visual materials about the Four Chaplains’ story and legacy.

### *The Chapel of Four Chaplains*

*Philadelphia Navy Yard  
Building 649  
1201 Constitution Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19112*

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## The chapel's programs

### Regionalization

The Chapel of Four Chaplains has a network of volunteers who are members and represent the organization in all 50 states. Their duties include building awareness of the Four Chaplains' legacy, promoting chapel membership, seeking youth applicants for chapel scholarships, recommending trustees, nominating Legion of Honor candidates and fundraising.

These volunteers are designated regional directors or state chaplains. A regional director is the primary contact person in one of 10 U.S. regions. State and associate chaplains are men and women who represent a diversity of religious traditions and serve as community spokespersons. They participate in religious or patriotic ceremonies, speak at memorial services and assist in youth outreach. A chaplain may be clergy, a certified lay speaker, or a lay person who serves as a chaplain in a veterans or fraternal organization.

Candidates must be members of the Four Chaplains to be considered for regional director, state chaplain or associate chaplain. Nominations are open to any applicant who wishes to serve and agrees to promote the organization's mission.

### Legion of Honor

The Legion of Honor award program recognizes outstanding members of society whose lives model the giving spirit and unconditional service to community, nation and humanity exemplified so dramatically by the Four Chaplains.

- The *Legion of Honor Gold Medallion* is the Four Chaplains' highest and most prestigious award. It is given to a person whose leadership has brought his actions to worldwide attention, and whose very life epitomizes the spirit of the sacrifice of the Four Chaplains.
- The *Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion* is the second highest award and is given for extraordinary contributions to the well-being of others at the national or world level, to world peace, or to interfaith and interethnic understanding.
- The *Junior Legion of Honor Award* is given to young people who have contributed to improving interethnic and interfaith harmony in their communities, in a way that exemplifies the Four Chaplains' selfless service.
- The *Legion of Honor Humanitarian Award* is given in recognition of a lifetime commitment to selfless service that has demonstrably affected the quality of life in the community, state or nation, without regard to faith or race. The selection process for this award is rigorous.
- The *Lifesaving Medallion* is rarely awarded and is given to a person who has saved the life of another at grave personal risk.

Distinguished recipients of the Legion of Honor awards have included presidents Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan; luminaries Bob Hope, John Glenn, Mickey Rooney, Martha Raye, James Michener, Tommy Lasorda and Shirley Chisholm; and deserving military personnel, veterans, and civilians from all walks of life.

Nominations for any of these awards are accepted from past recipients, church and government leaders, and leaders of civic, fraternal and veterans organization only. All awards are publicly presented at a Legion of Honor service or as part of an appropriate ceremony that includes the story of the Four Chaplains.

### **Emergency Chaplains Corps**

The Chapel of Four Chaplains established the Emergency Chaplains Corps after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. There was an immediate need to provide organized spiritual and emotional support for first responders (police, firefighters, EMTs, and search-and-recovery workers) at the disaster site. Volunteer response teams were trained in all facets of disaster service, including triage, first aid, CPR, bereavement counseling and crisis intervention.

On Sept. 11, 2001, the Four Chaplains organized a massive chaplaincy effort at Ground Zero, recruiting, screening and training a cadre of high-qualified chaplains from all religious faiths. The team consisted of 46 chaplains, 19 volunteer drivers, 10 social workers/counselors and 64 lay volunteers. And in response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in September 2005, the Four Chaplains dispatched a volunteer team to work with victims in New Orleans using the “spiritual triage” model employed at Ground Zero.

### **Youth scholarships**

The Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation sponsors three college scholarship contests for graduating seniors in public and private high schools: the national art, essay and Project Lifesaver scholarship contests. Each contest challenges young people to understand and practice the values of inclusion, cooperation and unity shown by the Four Chaplains.

Winners are selected by the Youth Committee of the foundation’s board of directors and are announced in May.

Email [chapel@fourchaplains.org](mailto:chapel@fourchaplains.org) for more information on the chapel’s programs.

## VISITATION

Visitation ministry is an important part of the chaplain's responsibility to veterans and their families. You do not take the place of a patient's regular pastor, who visits to encourage the patient's spiritual life, offer the comfort of faith and express the concern of the congregation.

While you may also do these things, depending upon your relationship with the patient, you are an extension of The American Legion.

One does not need to have formal ministerial training to be an effective visitor of patients. A caring personality is the greatest qualification. Spiritual preparation is the basic and best preparation for the chaplain because spirituality is the unique gift you have to offer. Unlike the medical doctor, the chaplain has no pills. The chaplain does not fulfill the divine call by lending money like a banker. The heart of ministry is spirituality. Chaplains who do not prepare spiritually have nothing to give that can't be given by a social service agency.

The beginning point of spiritual preparation is the individual's own experience with God. This is the spring that feeds the streams of spirituality and waters the fields of one's life and ministry. What grace did Paul have to share before his Damascus road experience? The source of spirituality is the transcendent. Scripture and prayer are doors into the spiritual. Private devotion and meditation are essential to spiritual preparation.

There are other paths to spiritual preparation, too. Reading devotional literature, listening to spiritual music, and seeking out a spiritual director who can offer insights and ask questions can move one toward spiritual sensitivity. A good chaplain will never stop preparing for the task and opportunity that come from God's call upon his or her life.

### Guidelines for visitation

**Learn the culture of health-care facilities.** Familiarize yourself with the protocol and regulations of the places you visit. This means more than just finding out the visiting hours. Most hospitals have a system for registering chaplains who desire access to patients. Ask for information to guide you in your regular visitation. You will also want to meet the in-house chaplain.

**Make contact with key hospital workers.** Introduce yourself to staff physicians and nursing directors. Along with floor nurses and other workers, these are the people with whom you want to be on good terms as a regular visitor.

**Respect patient and family wishes regarding visits.** Many hospitals and nursing homes have a confidential "pastors list" that includes room numbers, patients' religious preference, and a notation as to whether or not they welcome visits by a pastor or priest. If in doubt, consult a family member. You may need to use a personal ID to access the list.

**Respect privacy and nursing needs before entering a room.** Always check with a floor nurse or clerk before visiting on a floor to ensure that you are not interrupting a procedure. Knock before entering and give the patient time to respond before going in. You are not calling on the patient to entertain him or occupy time, so make your visit short and to the point. Listen more than you talk. Take your cues from the patient as to what he or she wishes to discuss. Also, be sensitive in your physical approach to the patient; don't remain standing unless invited to take a seat. If the patient is asleep or medicated, don't wake him or her; leave your card with a note that you called.

**Gently inquire about prayer.** Many patients will appreciate your offer to pray at the end of your visit. Do not assume that everyone wants prayer; always ask before offering. If prayer is not desired, simply say "I am praying for you" as you leave the room. Prayer is a delicate issue unless you know the patient well, so be guided by empathy and divine guidance in this area.

**Make follow-up visits or calls.** Some people will welcome daily visits when hospitalized. Others like only one or two visits. After the initial visit, always ask if you may call again. If practical, make a follow-up visit after the patient goes home. In any event, make a phone call after he or she are home, or send a card. Your continued concern is a mark of your ministry. Always be discrete in discussing patients with others in your post, church or community.

## **Veterans and hospice care**

The purpose of hospice is to provide support and care for veterans in the final phase of a terminal disease, so that they can live fully and comfortably as possible. Regarding dying as a normal process, hospice neither hastens nor postpones death. Through VA or local hospice services, veterans can make the necessary preparations for death in a way that is satisfactory to them. Veterans have the right to be informed of their disease, treatments, prognosis and alternatives available to them. They also have the right to accept or refuse treatments.

Hospice provides supportive help to families who may have to make adjustments concerning their loved one's illness and death. In short, hospice is dedicated to the relief of symptoms and the promotion of care.

VA policy is that all veterans should be provided access to a hospice program, either within VA or through referral to a community hospice agency. Currently, all VA facilities have hospice consult teams that involve nursing, medicine, social work and chaplain services. American Legion chaplains should visit their local VA medical center and get to know its hospice team.

*Who do I contact with questions about VA?*

Each VA has a designated palliative care coordinator who is able to answer questions.

*If an enrolled veteran does not have Medicare, will VA pay for the hospice care?*

Yes. Hospice and palliative Care is part of VA's medical benefits package for enrolled veterans.

*How does a veteran qualify for VA-paid hospice care?*

Under VA's medical benefits package, an enrolled veteran must be diagnosed with a life-limiting illness, decide that the focus of care is on comfort rather than cure, have life expectancy deemed by a VA physician to be of six months or fewer if the disease runs its normal course, and accepts hospice care.

*What is VA's responsibility in terms of offering hospice and palliative care?*

Veterans who choose Medicare retain their eligibility for VA care and benefits.

*Does a veteran need to have a service-connected condition for VA to provide hospice?*

No.

*Will VA pay for room and board of a veteran in need of community in-patient hospice care?*

If VA places the veteran in a community nursing home for the purpose of hospice care, the cost is covered by the VA hospice benefit. This includes home hospice care. Veterans who choose Medicare retain their eligibility for VA care and benefits.

*What is the cost of end-of-life care provided to the veteran at a VA medical center?*

Inpatient hospice at VA is of no cost to the veteran or the veteran's family.

## **THOUGHTFUL CARE FOR THE DYING**

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die." Ecclesiastes 3:1*

We all have crises in our lives. Dying is a final crisis. How we handle the crisis can be life-changing. In fact, "crisis" in its original Greek context means a decision that involves evaluation, judgment and choice. A crisis can become a highly significant turning point in one's life, as one evaluates, judges and makes choices to change or not to change. Can we allow the dying crisis to be a part of living and bring a positive change in one's death experience?

Bill has just been told he has a serious disease of the lungs. He's a 52-year-old truck driver and is now hospitalized. He belongs to The American Legion, and you are his chaplain. He tells you, "When I came in here, I didn't believe I might die. I thought death is only an illusion. When I was told what I have, when I realized that I would die because of it, I felt like I had been hit by a truck! I couldn't believe it. I couldn't talk about it. I wanted to, but I just couldn't find the right words. I didn't even know the right questions to ask. I guess I've lived as though things would always be the same."

Bill began his crisis with a struggle: what did dying mean to him? His reaction was really the same as anyone else. He was shocked. He wasn't ready to make any decisions or get close to thinking clearly about his death. He felt betrayed. As he struggled to make sense of his suffering, his expectations for life and death changed. The occasion of Bill's suffering became the experience through which he resolved his conflict. As his friend, you begin to help Bill by giving him thoughtful care in his dying experience.

What does "dying" mean to you? The definitions can be very broad depending on one's culture, religion and historical setting. Generally, what we expect life to be and the meaning we attach to the ending of life defines what dying means to us.

Glen Davidson, author of "Living With Dying," points out four ways of looking at life and death:

*If I expect life to be unending, dying seems to be an illusion.* We hear Bill saying, "I'll be fine in no time." Friends tell him, "Keep the faith, Bill. You'll get through this!" But if it goes bad, Bill thinks he has no real faith.

*If I live life as a vocation (job), dying is an intrusion.* Bill was the best driver on the road, but now that he's dying, Bill's stopped in his tracks. He's feels worthless now.

*If life is a threat, dying is an escape.* "Thank goodness my life is ending. All of these painful experiences ... nobody has to be concerned with me anymore." No longer does Bill have to think about survival. Death is an escape.

*If I accept life as a gift, dying is part of the given.* Bill realized that life itself is precious and that dying, too, can be a precious event or process. He sees his life and dying as a giving of life – a gift for those around him. So he allows himself to be touched with love as he touches others with his love.

A successful surgeon, Robert Mack, wrote about what he felt when he was told he had lung cancer. There was a time when he was devastated, bewildered and very frightened. Later, he said, "I am happier than I have ever been. These are truly among the best days of my life. It became clear to me that was a time of real choice. I could sit back and let my disease and my treatment take their course, or I could

pause and look at my life and ask, ‘What are my priorities? How do I want to spend the time that is left?’”

One of the ironies of the human experience is that many of us have to face pain or injury or even the possibility of death to learn the real purpose of being and how best to live a rewarding life. Robert Mack made the choice to change in his dying experience.

If that were only the reaction of all dying persons, but we know that’s not the case. The person and his family members are often torn by anguish – not so much outward as it is inward agony, depression and despair.

## Our response to dying

Consider Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ theory on the five emotional stages of dying:

- Stage 1 – Denial and isolation (“No, not me”)
- Stage 2 – Anger (“Why me?”)
- Stage 3 – Bargaining (“God, I’ll go to church if you’ll make me well”)
- Stage 4 – Depression (“I don’t want anyone around me”)
- Stage 5 – Acceptance (“What can I do while I have time left?”)

*To love is to affirm the worth of the dying person. To love is to enjoy the dying person. To love the person is let him be responsible as well. We are to help the person complete whatever is unfinished in his life when he asks us, and make ourselves available to him.*

You could add a sixth stage: “God will bring me through this. Maybe God will bring about a new cure for this illness.” The dying person begins to connect with the significant others in his life. Hope may be in all of these stages. We say he is “going through the valley of the shadow of death.” The time spent in each stage varies, and one can go back and forth.

Our role as chaplain is to listen, clarify, honor, accept and be fully present, as a fellow human being, communicating our trust in this person. It’s important that we do not impose our strong feelings about death or dying on the one in the dying process. We are to “let the person be” in their own way of dying as they choose. It means we can accept their feelings of sadness, anger, resentment, guilt, depression, sorrow and envy. It means we can let him share these feelings with another human being. Since most of us are uncomfortable with these feelings during our lifetime, it makes it doubly difficult to accept these feelings when a person is dying. If we cannot accept them, the dying person “dies alone.”

Sometimes the behavior chosen by the dying person is not what we would choose. Can we accept it? Or will we be with him so that we can tell him what he must do

to die? The ideas and beliefs of the dying person may not be our beliefs. Can we accept that? When we accept whatever he shares with us, he is free to explore his own unique way of dying, and he continues to move through the stages with his own timing. As he goes through the stages, we may find ourselves going through them as well. We are not there to protect our own thoughts on dying, but to love the person when he needs our love and friendship the most.

How far can a dying person go into the valley of the shadow of death? Someone said he is willing to go as far as he can go, if we are free to go with him. The most positive outlook for a dying person is that he wants to be loved and accepted and responsible in communion with significant others in his life. He wants to share his death with us as he has shared his life with us. He is ready, but are we?

### **Triumphant dying**

A 66-year-old teacher, with two daughters married with families, was confined to the hospital in the final four weeks of her life. She sensed the approach of the end of her life. Friends came to see her, and she told them what each of them meant to her. She had written instructions to her daughters about her belongings and the way she wanted to be buried. When friends were uneasy in her presence or tried to ignore about the reality of the situation, she calmly yet strongly assured them, “We don’t have to be afraid. Parting is difficult, so let’s cry together for a little while. Then we can talk.” And that’s what they did.

Several days before the woman died, she called together each daughter and her family and celebrated their reunion. Her business done, she asked an old and dear friend to be with her until the end. As she grew weaker, there were fewer conversations, but words were not necessary. She died in the manner for which she prepared: at peace.

### **Patients’ needs in the religious and spiritual realms**

Patients bring all of their life experiences with them when they come to the hospital. If we are unfamiliar with their personal faith and practice, they are often eager to teach us – if we’re willing to learn. We cannot make adequate judgments in relation to their health care on the basis of their religion. We take them as they come. As professionals, we do make judgments of how what they believe and do is intertwined with their hospital care. We can make helpful observations that can help us care for them on the basis of their spiritual health or need.



## **Signs of spiritual health**

### **Need for meaning and purpose in life**

- Expresses that he or she has lived in accordance with his or her value system
- Expresses desire to participate in religious rituals
- Lives in accordance with his or her value system at present
- Expresses hope in life after death (or peaceful acceptance death as end of life)
- Expresses hope in the future

### **Need to receive love**

- Expresses hope in life after death
- Expresses confidence in the health-care team
- Expresses feelings of being loved by others and God
- Expresses feelings of forgiveness by others and God
- Expresses desire to perform religious rituals believing they'll result in a good ending
- Trusts others and God with the outcome of a situation in which he or she has no control

### **Need to give love**

- Expresses love for others through actions
- Seeks the good of others

### **Need for hope and creativity**

- Asks for information about his or her condition realistically
- Sets realistic personal health goals
- Uses time during illness constructively
- Values inner self more than physical self

## **Signs of spiritual problems**

### **Need for meaning and purpose in life**

- Expresses that he or she has no reason to live
- Questions the meaning in suffering and death
- Expresses despair
- Exhibits emotional detachment from self and peers
- Inappropriately jokes about life after death

### **Need to receive love**

- Worries about how family members will manage after his or her death
- Expresses feelings of a loss of faith in God
- Expresses fear of dependence
- Does not discuss feelings about dying with those who care
- Does not call on others for help when needed
- Expresses fear of tests and diagnosis
- Expresses feeling a lack of support by others
- Behaves as he or she “should” as a “good” person or patient
- Refuses to cooperate with plan as agreed
- Expresses guilt feelings and fear of God’s anger
- Confesses thoughts and feelings about which he or she is ashamed
- Expresses anger with self and/or others
- Expresses ambivalent feelings toward God
- Expresses despondency during illness
- Expresses resentment toward God
- Expresses loss of value due to decreased abilities

### **Need to give love**

- Worries about the financial status of family and separation from family
- Worries about separation from others through death

### **Need for hope and creativity**

- Expresses fear of loss of control
- Unable to do creative pursuits due to illness
- Expresses boredom
- Exhibits overly dependent behaviors
- Expresses fear of therapy
- Denies reality of his or her condition
- Expresses anxiety about future of marriage, parenting, career

## THE MEDITATION

American Legion chaplains often come in contact with people of other faiths or no faith when called upon to conduct a memorial or funeral service. What we say at these times must be worthy of those we honor as well as those who attend our services. Our words must reflect truth, sincerity and compassion. Developing skill and confidence in writing the meditation – the heart of the service – will serve you well in your ministry to veterans and their families.

### Purpose of memorials and funerals

- They are for the living.
- They are about the deceased.
- They are intended to glorify God.

The human soul hungers for the divine at a funeral or memorial service. The message should center on God's reassurance amid the mystery of death.

### Preparation

- Gather basic information about the deceased.
- Select a meditation theme and appropriate Scripture.
- Observe and record life's daily experiences as a resource for meditation ideas.

### Writing

- Opening statement, Scripture, story
- Content, using a theme throughout
- Closing

### Delivery

- Strength of voice
- Personal and physical setting
- Style, mood, tempo

### Remember that a funeral or memorial service ...

Provides a framework of supportive relationships for mourners.

- Reinforces the reality of death.
- Provides a fitting conclusion to the life of the deceased.
- Encourages the expression of grief.

## **SO YOU'VE BEEN ASKED TO DO A FUNERAL ...**

### **Why you were asked**

- You're a close friend.
- The family likes and respects you.
- You are seen as a person of faith.
- They have seen your performance as a chaplain at other functions.
- You represent The American Legion.
- The deceased did not have a connection to a local house of faith.
- The family does not know a local clergy person.

God moves in mysterious ways. Pray for divine guidance, and remember that it's an honor and privilege to serve.

### **Act normal**

- Begin to shape the service according to your beliefs, unless the family specifically requests otherwise.
- Learn from others, but don't imitate them. If they wanted someone else, they would have asked that person.
- Don't compromise your personal beliefs or ethics. You have a right to say no.

### **Make contact with the family**

- It's common to have the first call come from the funeral director. It may even be second or third, handed through the post.
- If you knew the deceased, you're off and running. However, it's likely that you had, at best, a casual acquaintance with the deceased and his family.

### **What to ask the funeral director**

- Date, time and place of the funeral
- Place of burial
- Whether you will ride in the hearse, with the procession, or in your own vehicle
- Date, time and place of visitation
- Key family contact (spouse, son or daughter, sibling)
- Family record (children and grandchildren, church and organization ties)

## What to ask the family

- Are there any specific requests for the service?
- Are there particular Scripture passages, poems or writings they would like you to read?
- Will anyone from the family be giving a eulogy? (If not, you'll be doing it.)
- "What would you like me to mention about your \_\_\_\_\_?" This will provide a lot of personal tidbits to weave into the message.

## Difficulties

- **The family wants a short service.** Always ask for a specific amount of time. What is short for you may be too short or too long for the family.
- **The family tells me they want me to take care of it.** Go to the obituary, talk to post members, and give the best generic service that you can.
- **The deceased was a jerk.** Don't lie. It's not your job to preach someone into heaven. If you make a person seem better than he or she was known to be, you will lose the sincerity of the occasion and do it an injustice.
- **Suicide.** Don't tell everything you know. It's not your job to condemn the person to hell. For a troubled life, it is appropriate to make reference to it, but leave the mystery unsolved or with possible hope. At times, silence is golden.
- **Extended illness before death.** Mention the struggle, but remember to share the victory. This is where faith comes in.
- **The deceased was a "heathen."** Don't promise eternal salvation where it is questionable. Don't promise damnation where it is questionable. Commit the person into the righteous, loving arms of his Creator.

## Remember the family and friends

- The service will not do the deceased any good. Your job is to help the family pass through this point in their grieving process and to have hope.
- Point the family in the direction of sustaining faith. Pray for God's presence with them.

## Planning the service

- Try to be at the visitation. This will give you face-to-face contact with the family and the funeral director. Ask about an open or closed casket. Closed is the most appropriate.
- The family usually goes to the visitation a half hour before the general public. This is a good time for you to be there, to offer comfort and a visible presence of God. Offer to pray with the family when it seems appropriate.

- Religious bookstores have minister's or funeral manuals that can be useful. Also, your own pastor will have resources.
- If you are not clergy, you will probably not be in a house of worship. If you are in a house of worship, you are subject to its rules and rituals. Clear what you intend to do with the presiding clergy. If clergy is participating, you should be subordinate to them, unless the family has designated you as principal speaker.

## The service

### Opening (words from Scripture)

"The Bible says," "The psalmist declares," or "Jesus said." Examples: "Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die' (John 11:25-26, NIV); "I am the Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1:8); "I am the First and the Last (Revelation 1:17); "I died, and behold I am alive forever, and I hold the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:17c); "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19b). Omit reading the book chapter and verse.

### Greeting

"Friends, we are gathered here today to pay our final respects to (name of deceased). May we be unified in the Spirit of our Lord as He searches our hearts, so that in our pain we can be consoled, in our mourning we may hope, and in the presence of death we can be assured of resurrection."

### Prayer (extemporaneous or written)

### Affirmation of the deceased's faith (optional)

### Reading of Scripture

Five passages averaging 15 to 20 verses each, from a modern translation, works well. Psalm 23 is usually fitting unless otherwise requested.

### Suggested passages

- Old Testament: Psalms 6, 103, 112, 130, 145; Proverbs 31:10-31 (wife); Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Isaiah 40:28-31, 43-44 (excerpts), 55:1-3, 6-13
- Gospels: Matthew 10:27-33; Luke 6:36-38; John 3:14-16, 11:25-26, 14:1-10a
- Epistles: Romans 8:28-39; I Corinthians 13, 15:35-44, 51-58; II Corinthians 1:3-7; Philippians 4:4-9; I Timothy 1:15-17; Revelation 21:1-7

### Message (reflections on Scripture)

### Naming

- Make sure you have the deceased's name right. Add warmth by knowing his or her nickname to the eulogy or words of remembrance.
- Keep in mind that some people do not go by their first given name.

## **Closing prayer and benediction**

- If the family is led to the casket for a final look or final remembrance, stand by the casket in a prayerful manner.
- Do not interfere with the family's mourning. If they need you, they will come to you or make a gesture.
- You will lead the precession to the hearse. (For more on this procedure, see the *Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies*.)

## **Committal service at the grave site**

If there was no service at the funeral home or another location, you will want to extend the committal, possibly with additional Scripture and a mini-eulogy.

You will lead the procession from the hearse to the grave. Stand at the head of the grave and preferably at the left by the blue field of the U.S. flag, if the casket is draped. Depending on the grave's location, crowd size, the tent and weather conditions, you will have to be flexible.

### **The committal**

- Reading of Scripture
- Prayer
- Prayer of committal: "Almighty God, into Your hands we commend your child (name of deceased) in hope for resurrection unto life eternal. This body we commit to the ground – earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them'" (Revelation 14:13, NIV).
- The Lord's Prayer (This is acceptable for Protestants and Catholics alike. However, Catholics omit the doxology. Encourage those assembled to participate.)
- Benediction or blessing
- Turn the service over to the firing squad commander.
- After the presentation of the U.S. flag and Taps, you may express your personal condolences to the family and offer any further assistance you believe appropriate.



## THE MEANING OF THE FLAG-FOLDING CEREMONY

In the U.S. military, at the ceremony of retreat, the flag is lowered, folded and kept under watch throughout the night as a tribute to our nation's honored dead. The next morning it is run aloft as a symbol of our belief in the bodies resurrection.

- The first fold of our flag is a symbol of life.
- The second fold is a symbol of our belief in eternal life.
- The third fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks and who gave a portion of life for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.
- The fourth fold represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in times of war for His divine guidance.
- The fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right, but it is still our country, right or wrong."
- The sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stand, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.



- The seventh fold is a tribute to our armed forces, for it is through the armed forces that we protect our country and our flag against all enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.
- The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor our mothers, for whom it flies on Mother’s Day.
- The ninth fold is a tribute to women, for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great has been molded.
- The tenth fold is a tribute to fathers, for they, too, have given their sons and daughters for the defense of our country since they were first born.
- The eleventh fold, in the eyes of Hebrew citizens, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies, in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- The twelfth fold, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, the Trinity – God the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost.

When the flag is completely folded, it resembles a cocked hat, reminding us of the soldiers who served under Gen. George Washington and the sailors and Marines who served under Capt. John Paul Jones, who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the nation’s armed forces, preserving for us the rights, privileges and freedoms we enjoy today.

*With the flag on your arm, approach the family and say quietly, “The government of the United States of America presents to you, through The American Legion, the flag under which our late comrade served.”*

## SAMPLE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

The American Legion Department of

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WHEREAS, It has pleased Almighty God, the Great Commander, to summon to his immortal Legions our beloved Comrade, \_\_\_\_\_, member of \_\_\_\_\_ Post No. \_\_\_\_\_, Department of \_\_\_\_\_, and

WHEREAS, We humbly bow to the will of Divine Providence, while ever cherishing in our hearts the memory of (his/her) distinguished service to our country and (his/her) outstanding contributions to American Legion comradeship, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That The American Legion, Department of \_\_\_\_\_, does mourn the passing of our comrade, and we commend to all men (his/her) works, and to God (his/her) spirit, and be it further

RESOLVED, That in token of our common grief, a copy of this resolution be presented to (his/her) family this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_\_.

Attest:

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Department Commander

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Department Adjutant

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Post Commander

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Post Adjutant





## THE AMERICAN LEGION

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