



The Chaplains Handbook

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

Information - Prayers – Guidelines

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHAPLAINCY

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

The modern chaplaincy's roots and origin are essentially in the medieval church. The word chaplain dates from this period. A fourth century story tells of the pagan Roman soldier called Martin of Tours. As Martin and his men were returning from the battlefield in the middle of a severe winter, they met a shivering beggar at the city gate of Amiens. Martin had compassion on the beggar. He cut his own cloak in two parts and gave one to the beggar. That night Martin had a vision of Christ wearing the beggar's cloak. As a result, Martin converted to Christianity. Martin's commitment to Christianity enraged Emperor Julian by saying, "*Hitherto I have served you as a soldier; allow me now to become a soldier to God.*" The Emperor later released him from the army. He was baptized and in 371, the people of Tours were so impressed by his holy life and miracles, they made him their Bishop.

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

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

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

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

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

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

moral issues. During that time period, three Army Chaplains were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE AIR FORCE: Before 1939, the Army’s air arm was a fledgling organization. By the end of WW II, the Army Air Force had become a major military organization comprised of many air forces, commands, divisions, wings, groups, and squadrons, plus an assortment of other organizations. The National Security Act of 1947 became law on July 26, 1947. It created the Department of the Air Force, headed by a Secretary of the Air Force. From this beginning grew the Air Force Chaplaincy. At first the Air Force Chaplains received their training at the Army School and eventually established their own school.

THE CHAPLAIN

You were elected to the office of Chaplain and you have an important responsibility.

Whether you have been selected for your religious training, or past VFW experiences, you are expected to provide care and be the spiritual advisor to your organization and its members.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHAPLAIN

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

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

THE WORK OF THE CHAPLAIN

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

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

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

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

Third, the Chaplain honors the dead. Working closely with the immediate family, the Chaplain ensures there is a proper burial and memorial service for the deceased. At each of our Post meetings we have a moment of silence to remember our departed. And each of our Posts has a plaque dedicated to our deceased comrades. In addition, each District is to hold an annual Memorial Service. According to Section 418 of the Manual of Procedure, during the annual District Convention, the District Chaplain shall see that a fitting tribute is paid to our departed

comrades. Memorial Services are also held each year at the State Conventions and at the National Convention.

WHAT THE CHAPLAIN PROVIDES

The Chaplain is there to provide:

- 1. SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE:** The Chaplain is available to help individuals and their families with their spiritual needs.
- 2. ASSISTANCE IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS:** In times of crises such as hospitalization, injury, or death, the Chaplain will help and provide assistance to veterans and their families.
- 3. CONDUCTING/ASSISTING AT FUNERALS:** The Chaplain is available to assist families with funeral arrangements, to officiate at the service, or to assist the family minister. Additionally, the Chaplain can help with organizing an honor guard, having a bugler present at the cemetery, and having a presentation of the flag as a token of service and honor on behalf of the local Post and fellow veterans of military service.
- 4. COUNSELING:** The Chaplain is available to provide pastoral care and counsel, and when necessary, to help veterans and their families find appropriate resources for dealing with such issues as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or other critical incident stress management problems.
- 5. VISITATION:** Visitation with veterans and their families to provide comfort and encouragement is an important function of the Chaplain.
- 6. ATTENDING FUNCTIONS:** The Chaplain may be called upon to represent the Post at official functions or public meetings, and the Chaplain may be asked to give invocations, dedicatory prayers, or benedictions.

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

WHERE TO BEGIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When A Crisis Happens, Remember A-B-C

How should a Post Chaplain, and those in leadership positions, or anyone, respond when an unpredictable crisis sends a shock wave through a Post family?

A simple procedure known as “The A-B-C Method of Responding to a Crisis,” if followed, will guide you in knowing how to appropriately respond the next time a crisis occurs.

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

A. Achieve Contact

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

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

B. Boil down the situation

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

C. Cope Actively

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

Following this A-B-C Method when a crisis happens should help you to respond appropriately to those whose world has been shattered. In the midst of helping, seek Divine assistance and

always remember: “Respond to others as you would have them respond to you when you are hurting.”

Handling Difficult Situations

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

Here are some helpful tips and suggestions:

- First thing to remember is that it is always proper to make contact with the family upon learning of a difficult situation or a death. Don't delay. A simple phone call expressing concern or condolence is always in order.
- It is okay to feel awkward. But, don't let that feeling of awkwardness and uneasiness prevent you from reaching out and ministering to the family and those affected by the situation.
- With a death, the next thing to do following the initial phone call is to show up. But do not show up unannounced!!! Place a second phone call and ask the family if it would be okay for you to drop by the house sometime. If they say it would be okay, ask them when would be a good time. This way they can prepare for your visit and may even invite other family members to be present, so they too can meet you.
- Allow family, friends, and Post members to talk and express their feelings. Because of the social stigma associated with homicides and suicides, people are often reluctant to talk about what happened. If a bereaved person wants to talk, then listen intently and provide a safe and supportive environment.
- Families bereaved by homicides and suicides often feel guilty, shame, anger, alone and isolated. The stigma attached to a homicide and a suicide makes it even harder for them and intensifies these feelings. Again, listen to them and provide an environment where they feel free to express whatever they are feeling or remain quiet and say nothing at all.
- Ministering to families and conducting a funeral for someone who died by homicide or suicide is always difficult – even for the seasoned minister. Please don't hesitate to seek guidance should you ever find yourself needing to deal with a difficult situation.

Public Occasions Put the Chaplain Center Stage

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

The Chaplain, and for that matter the Commander or anyone else, when asked to participate in these settings, is like an actor on stage at a theater, with the audience watching every move that is made and listening intently to every word that is spoken. Every actor knows his or her role in the

production. And, whether the main star or one who makes a cameo appearance, everything an actor does has been well thought-out and rehearsed before the curtain goes up. Even when it appears that the communication or action is spontaneous, it almost always has been planned. It is called “planned spontaneity.” When the person is prepared, and the presentation is done well, the speaker has poise and there is smoothness and a seamless flow that emanates from the person that makes the delivery seem so natural.

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

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

1. Be prepared! Think about why you have been asked to speak and what is expected of you on this occasion. Whether it is to offer a prayer, make an introduction, or some other presentation, write out what you are going to say. Then rewrite and edit what you plan to say. Those who are prepared communicate clearly and concisely and are able to speak within the allotted time frame. Long-winded speakers have not done proper preparation. It is a dead giveaway every time.
2. Look at your audience and focus on communicating and ministering to them - not on being a public speaker!
3. Speak loud enough so people can hear you.
4. Speak with clarity. It is always the responsibility of the speaker to communicate in a way that the audience can understand what is being said.
5. It is normal for a speaker to feel a bit nervous. However, no one else should know it. Never mention it or draw attention to the fact that you feel nervous.
6. Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse. When well-prepared, you should know what you will be saying without having memorized it, and how you are going to say it.

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

THE READING OF THE PRAYERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, remember that when words are spoken, the meaning is not in the words alone, but in the emphasis, the phrasing, and the expression given to those words.

OFFERING PUBLIC PRAYERS

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

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

Here are a few helpful things to keep in mind:

1. Expect to be asked, so don't be surprised. Be ready! What happens if you attend a community Memorial Day service and the local pastor, who was scheduled to give the invocation, is not present for some reason? Those in charge may turn to you and ask if you would provide the invocation. So, anticipate that something unexpected will happen sometime, and be prepared for it.
2. Speak naturally and clearly. Remember, it is your responsibility to be heard and understood.
3. Enunciate. Don't read or speak in a garbled or low-toned voice. Droning or speaking in a monotone voice, sends a signal to the brain of the listener that this is not important or meaningful.
4. Be sincere and speak slower than normal. When a Chaplain reads a prayer or offers a spontaneous prayer publicly, it should not only be his/her personal prayer, but it is a collective prayer offered to God on behalf of everyone present. In essence, it is "our" collective prayer offered by one person, and if done well, everyone will mentally participate in the prayer.
5. Don't preach, try to evangelize, or be intentionally offensive. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of lengthy controversial and offensive prayers offered at State Capitols by "guest chaplains."
6. Be careful about referring to specific deities. Public prayers in a pluralistic society are effective when the person leading the prayer is sensitive to the diversity of his/her audience. Those who lead general community prayers have a responsibility to have a clear understanding about the public nature of the occasion and to be respectful of the makeup of the audience. Be careful about referring to specific deities. This is a difficult adjustment, especially for some conservative protestants, whose faith tradition and culture teaches otherwise. The following article is quite insightful and helpful when offering prayers at civic gatherings:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/praying-in-the-name-of-jesus/>.

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

PRAYERS FOR VARIOUS OCCASIONS

INVOCATIONS (Opening)

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

We pause at the beginning of our _____ Meeting and once again acknowledge a being greater than ourselves. From the sacred scriptures we learn that you, O God, are a righteous, just, and loving God who abhors evil. We thank you for our great land and wisdom our founding fathers. We are thankful for those who down through the ages fought the forces of evil and gave their lives to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. We will now have a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives . . . , those missing in action . . . , those held as POW . . . , and our comrades who once attended these meetings and are no longer with us. Help each of us to respect and value each other as we conduct this _____ meeting. Amen.

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

We now have a moment of silence to honor our departed comrades. **Amen.**

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

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

- We are grateful for the gift of Life, and particularly this day, and the various senses in which to enjoy life.
- We are grateful for our Nation and the men and women who served and are serving to preserve the freedoms we enjoy.

As we conduct our meeting, use the collective wisdom of these dedicated leaders, to make the plans and programs for _____. **Amen.**

O, Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, we pause at the beginning of our _____ (Conference) and recognize that you are the Lord of Hosts and a Just and Loving God who offers grace and peace to those who seek to follow your ways. Be with us, O Lord, as we gather for this important _____ (Conference). Thank you for each person in attendance. Bless the fellowship and interaction among our comrades. May Your wisdom and counsel guide us as we seek to educate and carry out the programs to benefit the citizens and especially the veterans of

this great land. We will now have a moment of silence to honor and remember our departed comrades, those held as prisoners of war, and those missing in action. We also at this time have a moment of silence to remember those presently serving around the world, especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan, as they defend freedom and fight evil. **Amen**

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

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

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

Be with us, O Lord, as we gather for this important conference (convention/meeting). May Your wisdom and counsel guide us as we seek to develop and authorize programs to benefit the citizens and especially the veterans of this great land. Help us to think wisely and carefully before we speak, to act with courage and conviction for the good of all rather than simply for vested interests, and to deal charitably with one another that we may all continue to enjoy mutual respect. Thus, may our work both in our public sessions and our committees bring credit to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and be of benefit to those we seek to serve, to Your great honor and glory. **Amen.**

BENEDICTIONS (Closing)

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

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

Almighty God, as we come to the close of this meeting, we thank you that we were able to gather and conduct (Post/District/Department/Conference) business in an orderly and respectful manner. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We pledge to each other our mutual support. As we continue to interact with one another, may each person's life be enriched by the spirit of true comradeship. **Amen**

Almighty God, as we come to the close of this meeting, we thank you that we were able to gather and conduct VFW business in an orderly and respectful manner. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We pledge to each other our mutual support. As we continue to interact with one another, may each person's life be enriched by the spirit of true comradeship. **Amen**

By George Washington 1790: "May the Father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us in all our several vocations useful here, and in His own time and way everlastingly happy.

Let us go forth into the world in peace and dedicated to Your service, O Lord. Let us hold fast to that which is good, render to no person evil for evil, strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the needy and the afflicted, and honor all people. And may your good hand of blessing be upon us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

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

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

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

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

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

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face to shine upon us, and be gracious unto us.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon us,

and give us peace, this day (night) and forever more. **Amen.**

BANQUET PRAYERS

Invocations:

Dear Lord, may this meal that we share be seasoned from above with Your blessings and Your grace—but most of all Your love. **Amen.**

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

Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the Universe: You bring forth food from the earth, and sustain all Your creation with goodness, mercy, and grace. We cherish the memories of the past and with fondness and gratitude we gather with our friends and associates You have blessed us with. We are grateful for all who share our heritage and our patriotism. Bless them and nourish us all with Thy Spirit of love and obedience. Bless the food we will partake to our physical body that our spirits will be lifted in praise to You for these and all Your blessings. **Amen.**

Eternal Father, for the continued blessings of heaven, we give You thanks. As we feed our bodies, so may our minds partake of that which is wholesome and pure. With this physical and mental nourishment, grant that we may also live in a way that brings honor to our families, our nation, our comrades, and our God. May we do Your will at all times in order to be truly called Your children. Bless, now, this food prepared for us, that it may nourish and strengthen us for our duties and responsibilities. **Amen.**

Our Father, how great You are! You have blessed us in so many ways and we thank You—for the opportunity to unite in this moment of prayer, this special privilege we have in America. We ask Your blessing on this food. May our fellowship, as we partake be an added blessing as we strive to keep America—“*one nation under God.*” **Amen.**

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

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

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

Benedictions:

Almighty God, we thank You for those who have led us so well in this (dinner/banquet). As we invoke Your blessing upon us, give us a still and quiet heart and mind. We thank You, O God, for this food which reminds us of Your care over us and pray that it will strengthen us for the doing of Your good pleasure and give us power to render better service to You and our fellow veterans. **Amen.**

Almighty God, as we come to the close of wonderful evening, we are thankful for all the individuals that made this evening such a grand experience. We once again realize the value of being a part of this great organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary. We are blessed to have _____ as our _____. And we ask that you continue to bless him/her with good health and strength in his/her endeavors.

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

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

LOYALTY DAY PRAYERS

Invocations

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

We acknowledge that no pursuit of happiness will ever find success apart from an abiding faith and trust in your mercy, grace, and love.

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

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

Benedictions

We have gathered here this morning, O God, to show our loyalty and patriotism for this great Nation. We are a Nation that was founded on religious principles. Our forefathers came to these shores in the hope of finding a land where they were free to worship you in the manner they choose. We cherish all the freedoms we have here in this great Land.

Help us to never forget our religious heritage.

May we be loyal to those who sacrificed so much so we can gather here in the shadow of these government buildings without fear.

We pause to remember our men and women serving in harm's way. Give them the courage and faith and the sense of your presence in the midst of their duties and responsibilities.

We thank you for all your blessings and we praise you forever and ever. Amen

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

MEMORIAL DAY PRAYERS

Invocations

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

O Lord Almighty, remember those who lived and died fighting to protect the dignity and the freedom of mankind. Let our spirits be proud of them. Let our hearts be compassionate, and our minds clear and determined in giving them honor and respect. And let us be dependent on the loving kindness of the Lord our God. As we remember the departed, let us be true soldiers in war and on peace. Let us be courageous protectors and true guardians of freedom. Let us be the true masters of brotherly love. O Lord, guide us in the way of moral responsibility; enlighten us—who are true believers in ethics and justice. Let this day be a day of commemoration and honor to those who sacrificed their lives in order to give us liberty and our Nation security. Remember them, O Lord, in Your mercy, and have compassion on us. Make us a generation of wisdom, discipline, and faith we pray in Your Holy Name. **Amen.**

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

Benedictions

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

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

Eternal and ever-loving God, we thank You for the privilege of meeting on this hallowed day in this free nation to honor our noble dead and to re-dedicate our lives to You and our Country. We thank You that we are permitted to live through days of challenge, for the hours of the testing of our loyalty to our national heritage, and for our devotion to the high ideals for which others have lived and died. Bless, O God, the thousands of disabled veterans in our hospitals today and also the homeless veterans in our land. Relieve pain, ease their suffering, and give them cheer and hope. Help us to respond gladly and generously to their needs of body and spirit. We pray for our men who may still be in prisons in a strange and foreign land. Give to them courage in the face of hopelessness and comfort in the midst of loneliness. On this day of sacred memory, we ask for grace and power to live truer lives, to be better servants of the living God, finer fathers and mothers, nobler sons and daughters, and more loyal citizens of this great Country and of Your world. Lord, grant that we may yet see the day when war and fear of war shall no longer be; the day when peace shall become our common possession; the day when Your will shall be done on earth as it is in Heaven. O Lord, hear our prayer for our sakes. **Amen.**

Gracious God, grant that we may appreciate and treasure the freedom that is our gift and our heritage, and that we may never forget the great price at which it was purchased for us all. We remember this day before You all who serve in the Armed Forces of our nation. Protect and defend them in the day of battle, and in the time of peace. Grant that they may serve with honor and dignity both to Your great glory and to the credit of this Nation. We ask also that You will watch over the veterans of this land, inspiring them to serve You and this Country in ever new

and creative ways. Comfort our ill and wounded comrades who languish in hospitals or homes. Lighten their burdens, relieve their suffering and pain, and restore to them the blessings of health again. We also pray for those who have given their lives in the service of our Country (*moment of silence*), and for those, our fellow veterans who have served this Nation both in time of battle and in time of peace. May light perpetual shine upon them. May the good work which You have begun in them be brought to perfection, that this land may prosper and that there may be lasting peace throughout our world. All this we ask You, Almighty Father, in Your Holy Name. **Amen.**

INDEPENDENCE DAY

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

VETERANS DAY PRAYERS

Invocations

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

We thank you for our great land, for life, for liberty, and the freedom to pursue happiness that constitute the legacy of our forebears and the ongoing ideals of our Republic. Continue Your blessings upon us as we conduct this ceremony. **Amen**

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

Benedictions

As we conclude this ceremony, we remember again all those who served and are serving in our Armed Forces. Today and every day, may we honor our veterans. May we continue to highly esteem those worthy men and women who gave their best when they were called upon to serve

and protect their country. And now Lord, be gracious & merciful to us, and let Your good favor and blessing be with each of us. Help us as we seek to live as good citizens and carry out our responsibilities to always honor you. **Amen**

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

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

PEARL HARBOR DAY

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

MEMORIAL PRAYER FOR DEPARTED COMRADE

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

MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

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

O God Almighty, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, we ask that You strengthen and protect the members of the armed forces of the United States of America. In the day of battle, may they be courageous and strong, resourceful and capable, resolute and victorious. In the time of peace, may they serve with dignity and honor, as effective emissaries of good will for this Nation. May

their devotion and loyalty to You and to their homeland inspire them in moments of challenge, and comfort them in tribulation and long separation from loved ones. And finally, we ask that they may return safely to serve You and our Country in the days and years to come. **Amen.**

MEDAL OF HONOR

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

KOREAN WAR REMEMBERED

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

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

VIETNAM WAR REMEMBERED

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

HOSPITAL PRAYERS

Upon Entering a Hospital

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

For the Sick, Wounded, and Dying

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

(Protestant) **Almighty** and most Merciful God and Savior, extend to Your servant comfort of Your gracious care. Help *him/her* to see this sickness as a time for strengthening both *his/her*

spiritual and physical well-being. If it be Your will to restore *him/her* to health, assist *him/her* by Your Holy Spirit to lead the rest of *his/her* life in godly respect and for Your glory. **Amen.**

(Jewish) O Lord, my God and God of my fathers, my destiny is in Your hands. If it be Your will, grant me speedy healing of my wounds (ill) But if not, then grant me complete trust in Your wisdom and love, that I may accept whatever may be in store for me. Give me the power to understand that only with You is perfect knowledge and only through You can one find boundless happiness and eternal peace. Most sincerely and humbly I acknowledge my faith and trust in you: Sh'mah Yis-ro-al, Ah-doh-noi e-loh-hay-noo Ah-doh-noh-noi e-chod. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!

(Orthodox) O Master and Almighty Lord, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have told us You desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, and that You desire not the death of sinner but that *he/she* turn and live. We therefore implore You to absolve Your servant from all sins from *his/her* youth until now. You alone can loose the bonds and restore the contrite. You alone are the hope of the despairing and can remit the sins of everyone who trusts in You. Receive now in peace the soul of Your servant and give it rest in that place where all Your saints dwell; through the grace of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with whom You are blest, and Your all-holy and life-creating Spirit; now and forever and unto ages of ages. **Amen.**

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK

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

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

FUNERALS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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

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

Q: What is the purpose of a Funeral Service?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FUNERAL PLANNING

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

HELPFUL INFORMATION

- Military Funeral Honors: Upon the family's request, the law requires that every eligible veteran receive a military funeral honors ceremony, which includes the folding and presentation of the United States flag, and the playing of "Taps." The Department of Defense is responsible for providing military funeral honors, and the request should be made by the family through the funeral director. Military Funeral Honors and burial flags are provided at no cost to the family.
- Burial in a Private Cemetery: The VA suggests that if burial will be in a private cemetery and a government headstone or marker will be requested for the veteran's grave, that the family apply for one in advance so that the application can be placed with the veteran's military discharge papers for use at the time of need. The VA furnishes, upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world.
- Burial at a National Cemetery: Gravesites in Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) national cemeteries cannot be reserved in advance. Families are encouraged to prepare in advance by discussing cemetery options and collecting the veteran's military information, including discharge papers (DD 214). The following is very important to pass on to comrades and families who desire to have their loved one buried in a National Cemetery with Military Honors.
 1. During the meeting with the funeral director, the deceased veteran's family must tell the funeral director that the deceased was a veteran, who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, and present the director with a copy of the DD 214.
 2. If one wishes to be interred in a Veteran's cemetery with Military Honors, the family must make that known to the funeral director. Military Honors are not provided by the national cemeteries. Honors must be arranged in advance by the family and the funeral director.
 3. The funeral director will then contact the Veteran's Administration and make arrangements for burial in a national cemetery. If the funeral director is not sure of the procedure, detailed information can be found on the National Funeral Directors Association website.

4. The funeral director must indicate to the Veteran’s Administration that the family has requested Military Honors.
5. The Veteran’s Administration will make all the arrangements for internment, and together with the funeral director, schedule a date and time for the internment.
6. It is suggested, but not necessary, that when the family is notified of the schedule, they contact the cemetery administration to ensure that Military Honors have been scheduled.

CONDUCTING A FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE

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

1. If the Funeral Director did not contact you regarding the funeral, you should contact the Funeral Home as soon as possible. You will need the following information:
 - Date, time, and place of visitation.
 - Date, time, and place of funeral.
 - Place of burial or interment.
 - Key family contact person (spouse, child, etc.)
2. Contact key family person and ask:
 - Are there any specific requests for the service?
 - Are there any special scripture passages, poems, or writings they would like?
 - Will any family members want to read or say something at the service?
 - Any information you can get about the individual will help you to plan a meaningful service.
3. Things to Remember:
 - The Service is for the living.
 - The Service is about the deceased.
 - Affirm of the great spiritual truths of life.

TEMPLATES FOR FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE

1. Template #1

Funeral / Memorial Service

Name

Age

Opening Sentences

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

lives.

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

A Brief Obituary

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

Sharing Remembrances

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

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

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

- Interactive reading of “We Remember Them”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Memories seem to grow sweeter as the years go by.

Prayer

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

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

2. Template #2

Funeral / Memorial Service

Name

Age

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

Welcome

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

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

Poem and Verses of Comfort

Poem

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

Edgar A. Guest

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

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

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven.

Isaiah 41:13

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

Meditation

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

When we hear of the death of a friend or loved one, even when it is expected, certain things happen with most of us.

First, we have a REACTION. It is natural to have a REACTION.

There is the initial shock. And from there the reaction varies. Some weep - some do not.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mary stayed at the house.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Second, we begin to REFLECT and REMEMBER

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

- Read Obituary
- Sharing of some memories
- Interactive reading of “We Remember Them”

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

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

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

Memories seem to grow sweeter as the years go by.

Third, we REALIZE

1. We REALIZE how quickly life passes.

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

2. We Realize that death is not the end.

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

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

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

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

Prayer

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

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

TEMPLATE FOR A MEMORIAL/COMMITTAL SERVICE

Memorial/Committal Service for _____

Date of Birth – Date of Death

Age

Purpose: To provide comfort and hope with a sensitive caring attitude.

Acknowledge the pain of grief and affirm a life well lived.

Welcome

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

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

When the call of our country was heard, _____ (name of deceased) answered. He enlisted/was drafted in the US _____ (Date of enlistment). Self was forgotten for the cause of a greater good. As a brave man he marched away with a commitment to serve our great

country and the cause of freedom. _____ (name of decease) served honorably in the United States _____ (branch of service) in _____ (place of service).

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

Prayer by Chaplain

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

Read Obituary:

_____ (name of deceased) was a quiet, gentle, decent, humble, and honorable man.

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

Special Tribute and Remembrance

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

(Step forward and lay the evergreen next to the Urn/Casket. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)

_____ In honor of _____ (name of deceased), his Military service, and humble and faithful service, I place these white flowers as a symbol of pure, unselfish, faithful service. May each of us seek to emulate such pure unselfish service to our country, our profession, and our loved ones.

(Step forward and lay the white flowers next to the Urn/Casket. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)

_____ : On top of the evergreen and beside the white flowers, I present these yellow flowers as a memorial to the bright sunny joyful times we have had together. As we get older, and with the aid of our memory, we can relive and enjoy those happy and special times we had together.

(Step forward and lay the yellow flowers next to the Urn/Casket. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)

_____ On behalf of our glorious republic, for whose integrity _____ (name of deceased) and his fellow comrades willingly served, we place upon _____'s (name of deceased) memorial this small flag of the United States. It is the emblem of our country and symbol of individual and personal liberty.

(Step forward and lay the small flag next to the Urn. Salute [slowly] - - and return to your place in line)

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

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

Committal

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

United States _____ will now render Military Honors

Playing of Taps

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

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