



## The Work of a Chaplain

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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.

Not long ago I sat by the hospital bed of my friend Pete Kolody, a WWII Navy Vet who served aboard the USS Gambier Bay. We reminisced about his childhood, and then he retold the story of 25 October 1944 at 08:10 hours when the ship took a direct hit in the bulkhead from a Japanese bomber. He explained the details of how he dropped seventy feet into the water, and as the ship was sinking, he recalled how he barely escaped being sucked down into the deep waters. We talked about his life following the war and his belief system. He asked me to read the sacred scriptures and told me of things that I should mention at his memorial service.

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.** There are two major concerns of those who are approaching the end of their life: (1) whether or not their life had any lasting value and, (2) whether they will be remembered. Working closely with the immediate family, the Chaplain ensures there is a proper burial and memorial service for the deceased. At each of our post meetings we have a moment of silence to remember our departed. And each of our posts has a

plaque dedicated to our deceased comrades. In addition, each District is to hold an annual Memorial Service. According to Section 418 of the Congressional Charter By-Laws and Manual of Procedure Ritual, during the annual District Convention, the District Chaplain shall see that a fitting tribute is paid to our departed comrades. Memorial Services are also held each year at the National Convention and at the State Convention.

In my role as State Chaplain, I attempt to help each of the District and Post Chaplains carry out their responsibilities in ministering to veterans and their families as they seek to nurture the living, care for the dying, and honor the dead.

At the State Convention (scheduled for June 22-25, 2011 in Gettysburg, PA) I plan to hold another workshop for District and Post Chaplains. Make plans now to attend the Conference and my workshop. Check out my Chaplain's Page <http://www.vfwpahq.org> on the Department Website where you will find several handouts that should help you as you serve those who served.

Blessings as you serve.

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