



Public Occasions Put the Chaplain Center Stage

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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. No actor ever adlibs! 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, the Department of Pennsylvania, 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.

At the State Convention (scheduled for June 23-16, 2012 in Erie, PA) I plan to hold a workshop for District and Post Chaplains. This workshop is actually open to anyone who would like to learn how to serve others more effectively. I will also be focusing on how to communicate more effectively when called upon to speak publicly. 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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