



What to do When Someone Leaves Your Post

Rev. Peter R. Hook, State Chaplain

About six months after I joined the VFW, I became the Post Chaplain. One of the first things I did was to review the membership list to familiarize myself with who was a member of my Post. I remember coming across several names of comrades I had never met or had not heard their names mentioned.

I remember asking about one or two individuals and was told, "They were once actively involved at the Post, but no longer attend." I tried to find out more about the persons but never got a clear answer as to why they stopped coming. When I inquired if anyone had contacted them to see how they were doing, the answer was, "no."

As Post Chaplains, we should be concerned for all the members of our Post. So, I began to systematically contact these individuals. Some I called. Some I sent a note. In each case, I introduced myself as the new Post Chaplain. I gave a little background information about myself and explained I just wanted to reach out. I explained some of the things that were taking place at the post, reviewed the meeting times, and said that I would love to meet them some time. Not everyone returned, but amazing things began to happen. So, this article will help you know what to do when someone leaves your Post.

One of the most difficult issues to deal with as a Post Chaplain is handling those who leave your Post. I'm not talking about those who leave because of a job transfer, retirement and move to a different state, or a move to be closer to family members. I'm talking about those who for years have been active and involved, and suddenly and silently stop showing up at the Post and Post meetings.

It usually takes a few months to realize an active member has been absent. When it finally dawns on us, there is nothing in our Ritual and Manual of Procedure that tells us what to do. And, most of us are unsure how to respond. In most instances, we freeze and do nothing. That is not good!

As a Pastor of a Church and as a Post Chaplain, it bothers me every time someone drifts away or decides to leave. And it should concern you as well. Mature and good people usually leave quietly. When it happens, it is time to evaluate and do a deep gut check.

Some things to do when it happens

1. Resist the urge to rationalize. We may come up with multiple explanations to explain why a comrade is no longer actively involved. This does nothing to help the situation.
2. Realize the person most likely has experienced some hurt and/or offense. If this is the case, we should seek to understand what happened. Even if there is no hurt or offense, how many times have comrades left our post, for any number of reasons, and no one reached out to them?
3. Reach out to them and try to understand why they have drifted away. The objective is not to change their mind, but to understand what caused them to disengage. Really try to hear what they say. Don't make excuses.
4. Respond to them well. As a Chaplain you are called to care for and shepherd your comrades and their families. Try to understand what they are going through and why this has happened. Resist the urge to focus on trying to convince them to return. The goal at this point is not to change their mind, but to understand the dynamics that went into their decision. When you talk to them, listen carefully. Try to understand what the root issue is. In most instances, it will be that the person does not feel valued. Keep the door open and don't burn bridges.

As a VFW we have put a high priority on membership and bringing members into our organization. But, what about those who are slipping out the side door or going out the back door -- those who were once actively involved in the Post who suddenly stopped showing up? Some of you who are reading this article fall into this category. I would love to hear your story, but this article is directed to the Post leadership and especially Chaplains.

Blessings as you serve,

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