



Department
of Florida



Post Chaplain's Training Session

Instructor: Barry Roberts

2026 DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

www.floridalegion.org

“FOR GOD AND COUNTRY ...”

- Like our nation’s founding fathers, the veterans who founded The American Legion acknowledged God as the source of all our rights and freedoms.
- Apart from God, our history as a people has no meaning. In this faith our institutions were created, our laws enacted, and our liberties secured. To safeguard our sovereignty and our prosperity, that same belief must direct our political, social and economic paths today.

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

“Service to God and Country”

It’s an American Legion program, yes, but the saying describes just as well our members’ attitude and way of life.

Nondenominational and nonsectarian, the Legion’s support for religion in the public square is basic Americanism. Rather than acting independently of religious groups, the Legion desires to cooperate with and join them in reminding the American people with one voice that God is the author and architect of our beloved “land of the free.”

Without God, there is no Americanism.

- As an American Legion chaplain – at the national, department, district, county or
- post level – you’re following in the footsteps of generations of military chaplains who went before you.
- Your mission is twofold:
 1. Help Legionnaires and others grow in their relationships with God and one another.
 2. Minister to people wherever there is a need.
- Because the Legion embraces all religions, faiths and denominations within its ranks, you as a chaplain are asked to care for everyone – those who have a spiritual affiliation and those who don’t. In some cases, you may be the only minister a veteran will ever know.

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



The American Legion

The chaplaincy has many purposes. One of its major purposes is to help persons grow in their relationship with God and one another. Also, we serve as a reminder of the transcendent and seek to develop an environment within which Legionnaires are encouraged in their personal and collective moral and spiritual growth. We are to remind all Americans that God is the source of all rights and privileges.

The American Legion

Chaplains seek to minister to people wherever there is a need. For many, chaplains are the only ministers they will ever know, as they have no affiliation with church, synagogue, or other religious institution. The role of the chaplain is ever increasing due to the aging of our membership.

Chaplain Job Description

You should be in close confidence with the commander and other officers of your post and should attend all meetings of the post.

You should be ready upon occasion to take your part in the initiation of new members, the dedication of halls, monuments or colors and the funeral services of a comrade.

History and Development

Chaplaincy is associated with the military the chaplaincy has a long and honorable history. For it is as old as the story of military operations.

The term goes back to a legend of the fourth century about Martin of Tours.

It is said that on his way home from battle he met a shivering beggar. He cut his cloak in two parts and gave one to the beggar. That night he had a vision of Christ wearing the part given to the one in need. His part known as a “cappa” was kept in a shrine called “cappella”, becoming an object of veneration. French kings applied the term "chappelains", which meant "keepers of the cloak” to those clergy who ministered to them.

Purpose of Chaplains

- Help people grow in their relationship with God and one another
- Develop an environment within which legionnaires are encouraged in their personal and collective moral and spiritual growth
- God is the source of all rights and privileges
- Seek to administer to people whenever there is a need
- Be alert to the physical and spiritual needs of his/her comrades
- Be notified when there is death, illness, or special concern in the membership
- To have open lines of communication with local clergy, hospital and school officials, funeral directors and other community organizations so they will be informed of what services and programs the post can and will provide when called upon.
- He's the one who has the calming effect and brings harmony to people and organizations

Qualifications of a Chaplain

- The chaplain does not have to be a clergyman.
- Anyone can serve who is willing.
- Persons serving in the office should demonstrate a sense of spiritual maturity and be committed to the chaplaincy and a person of integrity.
- Without this demonstration the chaplain will not provide the spiritual counsel needed by the commanders and members alike.
- Have a positive attitude toward himself/herself, spiritual matters, the unit served, and The American Legion.
- Willing to serve where there is a need. Can't be selective in their service for they have a responsibility to all, neither can they just serve because it is convenient. They should provide support as needed.

Qualifications of a Chaplain

- Ability to keep things confidential which is an absolute necessity
- Should never be political while serving as a chaplain
- Should not be appointed against his/her will
- Should not accept the position just to hold an office
- Should not be elected or appointed just to fill a spot on a roster
- Should seek to be a model in matters related to the ethical and moral

Qualifications of a Chaplain

- Should be groomed, cleaned and dressed appropriately. Look like a chaplain, act like a chaplain and be a chaplain.
- Should be cheerful, confident, and bring hope (not all the hurt of those in our care can be healed but they can be soothed) (being cheerful improves their health and gives them hope).
- When there is a conflict between two legionnaires, the chaplain cannot take sides.
- The National Chaplain is appointed.
- Department, Area, District, and Post Chaplains are either elected or appointed.

Work of a Chaplain

- Chaplains teach no other lesson but that of courtesy (Rom 16:1-15)
- The chaplain must never forget that he/she is the one who serves
- There is a source of strength and power upon which you must call the power of God.

Call upon him before all major decisions

- A chaplain has to be a good listener in order to interact with other people

Eight barriers to listening:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. No desire for details | 5. Selfishness |
| 2. Conflicting agendas | 6. A need to “fix it” |
| 3. Control issues | 7. In a hurry |
| 4. Distractions | 8. Fatigue |

Prayers

- Prayer is talking with God
- Prayer is not a speech or mindless rambling, but sincere, enjoyable conversation with God
- The aspects of prayer are praise, thanks, and ask.

A general pattern for prayer is:

- Praise and Thank God
- Ask him for your spiritual needs (you need to clear your own soul first, to pray well for others)
- Ask him for the needs of other
- Ask him for your physical needs
- Praise and thank him again
- Pray to feel Gods love so we can love one another
- Give prayers such as the invocation and benediction at meetings

- Give memorial prayers at memorials and post everlasting ceremonies
- Can use your own providing they are appropriate for the occasion
- Prayer ought to be audible to all. Scripture reading should be selected and studied beforehand:
 - Write them out and memorize them
 - Keep them in a personal prayer book
 - Never say the same prayer
 - Always make your prayers personal
 - Read books about prayers
 - Know the power that prayers can do for an individual
 - Be enthused and pray loud
 - Bring Gods presence into the room as you pray

Chaplains should participate in

- Four Chaplains days and Religious Emphasis Week
- Independence and patriotic day events
- Veterans Day Memorials
- Installations and Post Everlasting
- Initiations
- Funeral and memorials when requested
- Visit the sick, bereaved, shut-ins, and the disabled
 - Never ask a patient what his/her sickness is
- Ask the patient if you can say a prayer or pray with them
 - All sick room prayers should be short
- A good time to visit a patient is in the evening before an operation or major procedure

- Send cards and make telephone calls as needed
- Take part in all rituals and ceremonies of The American Legion
- Mingle with the people. Make it possible for the members to easily contact you with their concerns and problems. Look sharp and be sharp. Properly wear a clean cap, wear it with pride because it is our uniform. The cap tells people who you are.
- Communicate with officers, members, and community organizations
- Provide spiritual leadership through the Legions "Service to God and Country"

Chaplain's Calendar

January

- New Year's Day
- Viet Nam cease fire - Jan 27, 1973

February

- Americanism Month
- first Sunday - Four Chaplains
- Religious Emphasis week

March

- The American Legion birthday

April

- Holy Seasons
- Children and Youth month

May

- Mother's Day
- Armed Forces Day
- Poppy Day
- Memorial Day

June

- D-day - June 6, 1944
- Flag Day
- Father's Day

July

- Independence Day
- Korean War ended - July 27, 1953

August

- American Legion National Convention

September

- V-J Day - September 2, 1945
- Labor Day
- Citizenship Day
- Patriot Day

October

- Columbus Day

November

- Election Day
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving
- Family Week

December

- Pearl Harbor Day - Dec 7, 1941
- Festival of Hanukkah and Christmas

Memorial Day - History

American Revolution (1775-1783) 4,435

On April 19, 1775, the first engagement of the war between the colonies and Britain erupted in Massachusetts, long a hotbed of rebellion, with the battles of Lexington and Concord. Two months later, the Second Continental Congress representing the 13 colonies tasked George Washington to be commander of the Continental Army. In 1789 he became the first president of the United States.

War of 1812 (1812-1815)

2,260

The causes were complex, but at its core, the war was about Britain preventing the United States from trading with foreign countries. Also, Britain did not want the young United States to move into western territories, so it provided weapons to Native Americans on the British side. On June 18, 1812, President James Madison signed the declaration of war for the conflict now best remembered for the sacking of Washington, D.C., and for inspiring Francis Scott Key to write “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Indian Wars (approximately 1817-1898) 1,000

European settlers and Native Americans had battled each other long before the United States was founded, but those conflicts took on new urgency as the country expanded westward in the 1800s. The native populations were massacred, driven from their lands and compelled to give up their language and culture. The total dead is an estimate by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mexican-American War (1846-1848) 1,733

The war was the first U.S. conflict fought primarily on foreign soil and carried out the expansionist vision of President James K. Polk. In the end, Mexico lost large portions of its territory, which today include all or parts of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah. The war also served as a training ground for many soldiers — including Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant — who would fight against each other in the Civil War.

Civil War (1861-1865)

140,414 (Union)

74,524 (Confederate)

The tally of battlefield deaths, awful as it is, offers only a glimpse of the suffering and sacrifice during the war that put down the rebellion of 11 Confederate states and ended slavery. Thousands of soldiers, from both North and South, died from disease or other causes. Among Union forces, there were 224,097 deaths in theater but not in battle. For the Confederacy, the total was 59,297.

During this time period the PTSD diagnosis was referred to as Nostalgia or Soldier's Heart

Prior to U.S. military efforts, Austrian physician Josef Leopold (1761) wrote about "nostalgia" among soldiers. Among those who were exposed to military trauma, some reported missing home, feeling sad, sleep problems, and anxiety. This description of PTSD-like symptoms was a model of psychological injury that existed into the Civil War.

A second model of this condition suggested a physical injury as the cause of symptoms. "Soldier's heart" or "irritable heart" was marked by a rapid pulse, anxiety, and trouble breathing. U.S. doctor Jacob Mendez Da Costa studied Civil War soldiers with these "cardiac" symptoms and described it as overstimulation of the heart's nervous system, or "Da Costa's Syndrome." Soldiers were often returned to battle after receiving drugs to control symptoms.

Spanish-American War (1898) 385

The war resulted from conflicts between Spain and the United States and, eventually, ended colonial rule by Spaniards in the Americas. The war also extended the United States' global reach with the acquisition of territories in Latin America and the Pacific. The war would long be remembered for the cry, "Remember the Maine!" — after a U.S. naval ship that exploded in Havana Harbor — and for the attack on San Juan Hill in Cuba.

World War I (1917-1918) 53,402

After remaining neutral in the war for almost three years, the United States entered on April 6, 1917. At the time, many Americans shared the view of President Woodrow Wilson and were reluctant to enter the war. But, citing increasing German aggression, Wilson asked Congress to approve a declaration of war to enter “the war to end all wars.”

Shell Shock

At that time World War I ended. Symptoms of present-day PTSD were known as "shell shock" because they were seen as a reaction to the explosion of artillery shells. Symptoms included panic and sleep problems, among others. Shell shock was first thought to be the result of hidden damage to the brain caused by the impact of the big guns. Thinking changed when more soldiers who had not been near explosions had similar symptoms. "War neuroses" was also a name given to the condition during this time.

During World War I, treatment was varied. Soldiers often received only a few days' rest before returning to the war zone. For those with severe or chronic symptoms, treatments focused on daily activity to increase functioning, in hopes of returning them to productive civilian lives. In European hospitals, "hydrotherapy" (water) or "electrotherapy" (shock) were used along with hypnosis.

World War II (1941 –1945) 291,557

For two years, the United States remained neutral in the war until Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Within days the U.S. was at war as well with the other powers, Germany and Italy. It would become America's bloodiest war. A total of 670,846 service members suffered nonmortal wounds.

In World War II, the shell shock diagnosis was replaced by Combat Stress Reaction (CSR), also known as "battle fatigue." With long surges common in World War II, soldiers became battle weary and exhausted.

Up to half of World War II military discharges were said to be the result of combat exhaustion. CSR was treated using "PIE" (Proximity, Immediacy, Expectancy) principles.

PIE required treating casualties without delay and making sure sufferers expected complete recovery so that they could return to combat after rest. The benefits of military unit relationships and support became a focus of both preventing stress and promoting recovery.

Korean War (1950-1953) 33,739

In June 1950, communist North Korea initiated a surprise attack on South Korea. The United States and other nations came to the South's aid in what President Harry S. Truman called a "police action." The war was seen as key to preventing the spread of communism. Though an armistice was signed to halt hostilities, a peace treaty to formally end the war never was.

In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) produced the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I), which included "gross stress reaction." This diagnosis was proposed for people who were relatively normal but had symptoms from traumatic events such as disaster or combat. A problem was that this diagnosis assumed that reactions to trauma would resolve relatively quickly. If symptoms were still present after six months, another diagnosis had to be made.

Despite growing evidence that trauma exposure was associated with psychiatric problems, this diagnosis was eliminated in the second edition of DSM (1968).

Vietnam War (1964-1975) 47,434

In an effort to prevent communist North Vietnam from taking over South Vietnam, the United States deployed nearly 3.4 million troops to Southeast Asia. The war, America's longest up to that time, forever changed American politics and culture as public opinion turned against the conflict. In addition to those killed in battle, there were 10,786 deaths in theater.

In 1980, APA added PTSD to DSM-III, which stemmed from research involving returning Vietnam War Veterans, Holocaust survivors, sexual trauma victims, and others. Links between the trauma of war and post-military civilian life were established.

Persian Gulf War (Desert Shield/Desert Storm) (1990-1991)

148

On Jan. 16, 1991, President George H.W. Bush announced the operation intended to oust occupying Iraqi forces from Kuwait, which Iraq had invaded and annexed months earlier. Iraqi forces were quickly overwhelmed by American firepower.

Global War on Terrorism (2001 to present) 6,915

Shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush launched what has become known as the “war on terror.” This led to military action in Afghanistan and the second invasion of Iraq, which ultimately toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. To this day, American troops are fighting against extremist groups in Iraq and Afghanistan. The cumulative death total figures are according to icasualties.org, a website dedicated to keeping detailed documents of fallen service members fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The War on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Estimated over 30,030

In 2014 the Veterans Administration posted statistical data citing an estimated 22 military or veterans committing suicide per day. At the time, to date, the total number was estimated at 7,400

So, in 2015 $22 \times 365 = 8030$

In 2016 the Veterans Administration used data from 20 states and determined 20 military, or veterans were committing suicide daily.

So, in:

- 2016: $20 \times 365 = \mathbf{7,300}$
- 2017: $20 \times 365 = \mathbf{7,300}$

PTS (post traumatic stress) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault.

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not appear until months or years later. They also may come and go over many years. If the symptoms last longer than four weeks, cause you great distress, or interfere with your work or home life, you might have PTSD.

Chaplains seek to minister to people wherever there is a need, but by design of how the American Legion was created and its purpose it makes us a ministry organization. That makes you a missionary for veterans and their families.



Myself and many others are currently working together for a revival and movement for suicide prevention. Please join us in this outreach!

Program Overview

The program will initially consist of 5 areas of emphasis and will be charged with taking a proactive approach to help eliminate veteran's suicide, while bringing together the various community, government, non-profit veteran charities and religious organizations into a referral system for veterans.

Area of Emphasis 1:

Local Posts to host community outreach events such as ruck sack marches, parades, walks, runs, carnivals, sporting events, and/or other fun events to help raise awareness to the tragedy of the post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide epidemic. These should be the type of events that, when advertised, it inspires the public to get involved.

We will advertise and enlist help with the events by connecting with the local governments, chamber of commerce, civic groups, newspapers, media, and churches/religious organizations.

While the American Legion is the hosting of the event, we have the microphone. In addition to educating the public about the seriousness and dramatic impact of suicide to those who have served and their families, we will be able to share the love of God, the love of Country and the history and mission of the American Legion and all the good works we do each year.

We also announce our proactive approach in support of preventing suicide and supporting our veterans through training and awareness hosting seminars. We have keynote speakers that will share topics like the signs, signals and behavior of someone in that state of depression that may be at risk.

Most importantly, we will have local community, veteran charity, government, and veteran support organizations in attendance to allow them to promote the support services available to the veteran right there in their own community.

We can also invite the general public and all veterans and their families to participate in free seminars or workshops to learn more about this epidemic and how to help or be involved in further outreach.

Area of Emphasis 2:

We will create close relationships and set up a referral system with Veteran charities and support organizations like the Camaraderie Foundation, Florida 4 Warriors, Battle Buddies, Mission 22, Active Hero, Real Warriors, Project 65, Shane Johnson, EHome Counseling, K9Line, Wounded Warrior Project, FDVA, FAVOB, et al, who are each uniquely set up to help veterans with PTSD/Suicide, where the veteran can be provided information on the wide-ranging resources available to them.

The Department team, along with the local and district chairman, will work together to start consolidating lists of these outside organizations, so that there is a central resource for what organizations are out there to help and the manner in which they can assist the veteran.

We can then set up meetings with these organizations to create and develop relationships and while determining how these organizations can best serve veteran in need and how the American Legion can best refer veterans to them for help.

Area of Emphasis 3:

We bring the volunteers within the community to have a workshop about suicide and PTSD awareness. We share the signs, signals and behavior of someone in that state of depression that may be at risk of suicide and how to reach out in support of getting them help and a plan to recovery.

We also share the history of PTSD dating back to the civil war. There will be training in how to recognize signs, behaviors and characteristics of someone who might be struggling with PTSD.

We explain triggers and knowledge to help them identify if someone they know might be struggling. We also explain references to people that suffered or struggled with PTSD and share the faith-based options, support workshops and natural things that help in calming and relaxation like essential oils.

During the workshops some of the various topics that can be discussed include:

- What is PTSD? (Understanding how whatever exposure to crisis or trauma changed you)
- What happened to me? (Understanding the Physical and Psychological context of your trauma)
- How did I change? (Remembering what happened)
- How do I move forward? (Processing loss and grief to move beyond)
- Who am I now? (Rebuilding your identity)
- How do I get back to normal? (Defining your new mission)
- Many more topics of restoring and recovering can be added along with spiritual and social integrations skills (These are just some of the many examples).

Area of Emphasis 4:

Create relationships with our local churches, synagogues, mosaics, temples, shrines, et al, to enlist the help of these religious organizations in serving struggling veterans.

Most of these groups have veterans who are members of their organizations, but they need help understanding how to best reach out to the veteran when they are in times of need.

Our veterans have died or were injured fighting to maintain our Constitutional First Amendment right to Freedom of Religion. As a result, these organization many times want to give back, but don't know exactly how to do so.

The Veterans' H.O.P.E. Program will develop a template for reaching out and partnering with these organizations while connecting and integrating their extensive network and resources with the local community, veteran charity, government, and veteran support organizations, including The American Legion, to maximize the impact and support of the local veteran who is struggling with hope.

Area of Emphasis 5:

This will be established to help raise funds and manpower to support this Program on a Department-wide (and ultimately on a nation-wide) basis. Funds will also be generated from The Veterans' H.O.P.E. community outreach events, from local churches/religious organizations, from corporate and personal donations, from Government Grants, from Go Fund Me or Spare Change type campaigns, etc. and will be used to support many areas of need:

- Veterans' suicide awareness and PTSD seminars, workshops, located throughout the Legion
- Media advertisements, PSA development, etc
- Marketing materials and promotional program
- Travel and training
- Admin staff to help administer the Program
- Mentor Leadership programs
- PTSD family fun days and retreats
- PTSD service dogs
- Possibly other program venues that are still be determined to help with veterans' homelessness and drug addiction

Organization

The organization will be similar to the membership program and fall under a Department Veteran's H.O.P.E Program Chair, who will work closely with the Department Chaplain.

Ideally, we would prefer to have a Zone or Area Chair, assigned to work directly with each Zone or Area Commander.

A Chair at each District within the Department would also be created. Their responsibility would be to work with the individual Posts to identify a local chairman and determine how to best implement the program at the local level and within their District.

Please join this outreach program.
Together, let's join our communities and serve our veterans in need.

Reach out to me anytime.....

For God and Country,

Chaplain Barry Roberts

Barrythechaplain@outlook.com

863-661-9999

Questions?



Please leave feedback.