



Have you checked up on your Chaplain lately?

(In memory of Past VFW National Chaplain Thomas Darling 2007-2008)

By Chaplain Dale A. Iannello B.Th., M.B.S.

It seems like only yesterday that I was checking up on Past VFW National Chaplain Tom Darling. During one of our past conversations, I was surprised when he told me that I was the only one who ever called to check up on him. That's pretty disturbing, eh? But I can relate to his statement. Chaplain *buddy checks* have been very, very infrequent for me throughout the years.

The VFW chaplaincy is unique and demanding. It requires immense emotional and spiritual resilience. Chaplains are often on the front lines, offering support to individuals facing significant life challenges, such as grief, trauma, and other crises. While their role is to provide comfort and guidance to others, it's crucial to remember that chaplains themselves may also need support and care. Also remember that most chaplains don't have a theology degree. Many were appointed to the position of chaplain. It's quite a misnomer that all chaplains do is read prayers at a meeting. Here are several reasons why it is very important to check up on your chaplain:

Emotional Toll of Their Role

Chaplains regularly encounter intense emotional situations, such as consoling families after a loss, supporting individuals through terminal illnesses, and addressing the spiritual needs of those in crisis. The cumulative effect of these experiences can be emotionally draining. Checking up on your chaplain can help ensure they have the emotional support they need to cope with the demands of their position.

Processing Grief and Trauma

Just like anyone else, chaplains experience personal grief and trauma. We're not robots after all. However, due to the nature of their work, they may find it difficult to prioritize their own emotional healing while constantly attending to the needs of others. Regular *buddy checks* can help them process their own grief and trauma by letting them know that you support them.

Suicide Prevention

Chaplains sometimes engage with individuals struggling with suicidal thoughts, as they provide crucial support and resources. However, the weight of these interactions can be significant, and chaplains themselves are not immune to feelings of hopelessness or despair. Ensuring that chaplains have access to mental health resources and the support of their comrade brothers and sisters is vital in preventing burnout and addressing any personal struggles they may face.

Maintaining Spiritual Well-being

Chaplains are expected to be pillars of spiritual strength for others, but this can sometimes come at the expense of their own spiritual well-being. Regular *buddy checks* can provide an opportunity for chaplains to share what is going on with them and receive an “*atta boy*” now and then, thereby providing emotional encouragement.

In summary, while VFW chaplains play a vital role in supporting others through difficult times, it is essential to remember that they, too, need care and support. Regular *buddy checks* can help chaplains process their own grief, prevent burnout, and maintain their emotional and spiritual well-being. By placing a simple phone call, like I did to my fellow chaplain, you can boost their spirit and help to ensure that they are valued as they provide compassionate and beneficial care to our veterans and their families in need.