

What Duties a Chaplain Should Perform

In my Unit 1 essay I listed their Work (ritual) and Ceremonial duties. Yet there is more. A Masonic chaplain must first serve himself. That begins with self care including physical and mental health. He is unlikely to help others if he is a wreck. Especially if he is an emotional wreck and plagued with doubt about his faith. We must get our own lives in order with balance or equilibrium. Lack of food, shelter and sleep; inattention to family matters; unfamiliarity with our Sacred Law; and, too little or too much professional work will probably diminish our worth as a chaplain. It is like being a professional athlete or many other things in life. Being in good shape, fit to fight, ready willing and able, are necessary attributes for a chaplain as well. Ever bearing in remembrance that the chaplain represents his Masonic body and even more so, God Almighty.

He should strive to improve the spiritual well being of his lodge, commandery, etc. and that starts with setting a good example himself. He should assess his strengths and weakness for the job. Do the ones that come naturally and work on the those not in concert with his disposition. For example: maybe GIVING, ADMINISTRATION and SERVING are “right up his alley.” Thus, do them and improve on the others trait as best he can. However, he mustn’t act in a haughty or imperious manner. Nor try to convert others to his faith. Just be a good soul in the lodge and without. Be kind, caring and approachable. Being a good listener is a paramount trait of a chaplain. Someone to which the burdened heart can pour out it’s troubles. The chaplain will not always have perfect solutions, but just being with people in their time of need is invaluable.

Specific times for action include when brethren and families are in the hospital, have suffered tragedies like house fires and storm damage, deaths, financial setbacks and more. Yet as much as the chaplain might want to help, he must respect the privacy of others. Barging in where you’re not wanted would be a tremendous mistake. Thus proceed with caution and above all listen to the afflicted. Rushing in half-cocked would likely only make things worse.

Privacy is mandated by Masonic and Civil Law. For example the Grand Lodge of Virginia forbids the discussion of sickness and distress in lodge unless the brother concerned or his caretaker permit it. On the Civil side the chaplain could find himself in legal trouble, should he disclose sensitive information. That means more than just being condemned for betraying a trust. Such things could easily result in lawsuits, fines, etc. However, some data must be reported to the authorities. Specifically child neglect or abuse, sexual exploitation and safeguarding vulnerable people in general. Thus, our chaplains must walk a fine line of counseling and serving plus protecting himself and others.

Fraternally,
Frederick Russell Dixon, Sr., KTCH
Norfolk, VA