



Module 9: God calls all by name

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

Peter 2:1-10

Personalizing every service is paramount.

As an Animal Chaplain, you will sometimes find yourself walking down familiar paths. Situations will repeat, and recognizable faces may reappear along the way. However, regardless of the *déjà vu* impression, each service you celebrate will be a singular and unique experience for all. Similarities may occur, but the energy, the spirit and the graces obtained will be incomparable to past events.

It is fine to consult a basic outline from a structural point of view. But taking into consideration the different time frame, a set of new circumstances, and diverse individuals with specific needs, each service should be scripted with a fresh new inspiration and theme.

God calls each of us by name, and although we were created in His image and Likeness, He molded us as individuals. No two people are the same. In fact, even identical twins have variations. Consequently, our spirit in celebrations must reflect the distinctiveness of God's creation. It is therefore imperative to follow some guidelines when presiding at a service.

1. When contacted to officiate a celebration, commemoration or service, set aside some private time for prayer and reflection. Make sure you have a certain familiarity with the people and animals involved and are fully in tune with their wishes and expectations.
2. Interview the individuals or family, either in person, or through Skype or Face Time. It is always preferred to have eye contact; however, if not convenient or desired, a telephone interview is fine. (More on this later in the module)
3. Put together a Presider's book. Include your initial outline of the service, any variations, contact information, and most important be certain the animal's name is appropriately placed and prioritized. This is essential as it prohibits any lapses in memory which can be disturbing to family members. Also, it will allow you to pray for this soul, in a personalized manner while you prepare.

The most critical component is the one-on-one interview with the family regardless of how it is conducted. Of course, an in-person encounter is always preferable and should be the goal when possible. If you do not form a bond you risk not obtaining the required information and emotional feeling, to personalize the service to best satisfy the needs and wishes of the family.

Your objective for any event is to assure peace and solace in a compassionate, caring manner to the family at a funeral or memorial tribute, to instill joy and renewal at a blessing service or empower hope and optimism at a welcoming ceremony. More importantly your aim is to inspire and spiritually nourish all the participants.

When preparing to officiate at a blessing or group memorial service it is advisable to obtain as much information as possible from the person who contacted you.

- Number of people in attendance (approximate)
- If animals are present, will you walk around and bless each one? If so, inquire beforehand about their identities, and personalize each

individual blessing. Will anyone else be speaking and if so what is the topic?

- If possible, preview the layout of the location in which the service will be conducted
- Does the family have any requests for special readings—biblical or otherwise
- Will you bring Holy Water?
- If it is a small group, obtain names for all animals and include in your service.

As an active Animal Chaplain, approximately 75% of your requests will be to officiate at a funeral or memorial service. A funeral is different from a memorial as it is celebrated in the presence of the deceased animal's remains.

Following is a list of topics to discuss when meeting with a family for a funeral or memorial service.

1. Name of the animal
2. Names of individuals and or family members
3. Characteristics and personality traits of the animal
4. Some stories and anecdotes about him and his life with you
5. Options for prayers
6. Options for readings
7. Will there be any speakers?
8. Would they welcome little treats for the dogs which could be blessed and given to each one during the blessing.
9. If indoors would any musical selections be appealing to the family

The possibility also exists that family members have not decided on post funeral options. Always have a few suggestions regarding referrals for reputable pet cemeteries and crematories to assist a grieving family.

Module 9 Assignments

Assignment Number 1

My beloved Rommel passed away at eleven years of age from Cushing's disease. He was a rescued Doxie and the oldest of the five dogs in my canine family. Needless to say, I was devastated, as were my wife and children.

Let's assume I contacted you to perform a memorial tribute for Rommel. How would you proceed in order to satisfy my wishes for a dignified commemoration service?

Let's begin with the most important preliminary step.

Conduct a telephone interview with me to obtain the information necessary to perform the service.

Ask me to provide a scripture passage or poem during our phone call.

Assignment Number 2

After the interview, write your sermon/reflection for Rommel's service. Next schedule a time to discuss it with me on the phone.

Congratulations!

You have successfully completed Module 9.

Please take some time to celebrate this accomplishment and refresh yourself before moving on to Module 10.