

Ceremony of Restoration

Words of Welcome

Chaplain

Some of you may have come in here today feeling uneasy about what you were walking into. You may be asking why you would want to participate in a ceremony such as this. As all of you know, returning from a combat zone and trying to once more fit into your community is difficult. This observance today recognizes that trouble. In the American Indian tradition, many tribes provide ceremonies for troops who are deploying to and returning from war. War brings with it a sense of being disconnected and out of balance. The Hopi Indians have a word to describe this feeling of life being out of balance. That word is Koyaanisqatsi, which means a state of life that calls for another way of living. These ritual acts are designed to cleanse the warriors from the horrors of war and to welcome them back to the community. Warriors are respected as important people of wisdom in the tribe. They are held up as models because they have done their duty and protected their tribe. You have developed certain types of wisdom in your military experience that can benefit all of us. We are here today to honor you for your service and to provide a way for you to put some of the experiences of war into a perspective of healing and peace.

Gathering

Reader

We gather today to name our sorrows and share new visions.

We gather to heal our pain and rekindle our hope.

We gather because the journey is long.

We gather because we long for a new day.

May this gathering serve to strengthen, encourage, and renew us.

Purpose

Chaplain

[You were handed a patch from your service branch when you entered the room. Military insignias represent more than simply a unit to which a service member is assigned. A service insignia symbolizes the investment a warrior made in defense of this nation in time of war or peace. What from your military service keeps you from living your life as you would like to live? Choose whatever that may be for you and let this military insignia represent it – whether one thing or many.]

Naming Our Pain

Reader

Save me, O God! The water is up to my neck;

I am sinking in deep mud, and there is no solid ground;

I am out in deep water, and the waves are about to drown me.

I am worn out from calling for help, and my throat is aching.

I have strained my eyes, looking for your help.

I am like a stranger to my relatives, like a foreigner to my family.

Answer me, God, in the goodness of your constant love;

In your great compassion turn to me!
Don't hide yourself from your servant;
I am in great trouble – answer me now!
I wish I had wings like a dove.
I would fly away and find rest.
But I am in pain and despair;
Lift me up, O God, and save me!

(All): TAKE ME TO A SAFE REFUGE, FOR YOU ARE MY PROTECTOR.

[Psalm 69:1-3, 8, 16-17, 29; Psalm 61:2b-3a; Psalm 55:6 (GNT)]

Releasing the Past

Chaplain

[The combat helmet on the left of the table signifies the military. When you are ready, you are invited to place the insignia representing your service in the combat helmet. As you do so, you are placing your self, what or who your insignia represents, into the container. Once you have placed your insignia in the helmet, please return to your seat.]

A prayer from India says, in part:

**All: Like an ant on a stick both ends of which are burning,
I go to and fro without knowing what to do,
Like the inescapable shadow that follows,
The weight of war can haunt me.**

Lighting of the Memorial Candle

[The book lying in the middle of the table lists the names of all the troops who have died in the Global War on Terror. The names are listed in chronological order according to the date each person died. We light this candle in their memory and in appreciation for their sacrifice.]

Counting our Losses

Reader

Remembrance is a sacred moment when we raise up and hold up to the light of eternity, those who have given life itself.

In the rising of the sun and in its going down,
We remember them.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,
We remember them.
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring,
We remember them.
In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer,
We remember them.
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn,
We remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength,

We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart,

We remember them.

When we have joys we yearn to share,

We remember them.

So long as we live, they too shall live,

All: For they now are part of us, as we remember them.

Mourners Kaddish (Jewish Tradition)

An Act of Restoration

Chaplain

[You have placed into the combat helmet an insignia representing the weight of war or other experiences during your time of service, that haunt you. The fountain on the right end of the table symbolizes forgiveness, peace and restoration. Many Jewish people observe a custom on the first afternoon of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, where they walk to flowing water, such as a creek or river, and empty their pockets into the water, symbolically casting off their sins. The flowing water from the fountain and the river rocks which continue from there, stand for a stream which takes away the emotional and spiritual wounds of war. When you are ready, you are invited to come forward again and take your insignia from the combat helmet and, leaving the weight of war on that side, move your insignia to the rocks flowing from the fountain on the right side of the table and return to your seat.]

Prayer

Chaplain

God, you have delivered us from the scourge of war. May we who have been scarred by war be reconciled to each other, to our enemies, and to you. May we become peacemakers in all that we do. May we always be channels and instruments of your peace. Grant to those who are as yet untouched by war the great gift of continued freedom from the terrible agonies of armed conflict. We ask this in the peace which you alone can provide. Amen.

Words of Parting

As we close our gathering, let us read the following together:

May what is wounded in my life be restored to good health.

May I be patient with the time it takes to heal.

May I find moments of beauty and joy to sustain me.

May I keep hope in my heart.

[All participants are invited to take a stone with them if they so desire as a reminder of restoration.]

Restoration Ceremony Notes

Preparation Set-Up: This service may be conducted in any type of setting. In the front of the group is a table covered with a blue, green, red or beige tablecloth. (We use a blue cloth and a red cloth one on each end of the table. This arrangement reinforces the movement from one side to another.) It is not recommended that white be used, as it ordinarily symbolizes an altar cloth. On the table are two containers – one on each end. On the left end of the table is a vessel symbolizing military service. This could be a canteen cup, a bowl covered with cammo cloth, a helmet, etc. (We use a WWII helmet that our Chief has. On the right is a large vessel filled with river stones, in the center of which is placed an inner container. Coming from the large vessel with the stones are other river stones which are arranged as if flowing from the large container. During the Restoration part of the service, water will be poured over the river stones to surround the inner container. (We use a small fountain for running water with the river stones arranged to give the impression of a stream flowing from the fountain to the edge of the table. A container of rock or natural looking pottery is placed among the rocks.) These containers (or fountain) represent the move toward healing, forgiveness and restoration. Military unit patches or service insignias (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines) for each of the service members or Veterans will be provided by Chaplain Service. These patches may be given to the Veterans following the ceremony for a remembrance. (We purchase the insignias therefore it is cost prohibitive to give them to the Veterans following the ceremony. Instead, we invite anyone who would like to take a stone as a remembrance of the move to healing.) Veterans may also use their own personal insignias and/or unit patches. A candle of remembrance is set behind a three ring binder (We use a black one) containing the names and dates of all the troops killed in Iraq. (To include Veterans from other wars and conflicts, such as Vietnam, we state that we are using the names in the book to pay tribute to all American service men and women who have died for our country.) The book is placed in the middle of the table. You can find this list and print it from www.iraq.pigstye.net/wd1.php. (This is an antiwar site, but it's the only place we could find a list like this one. It's amazing how meaningful it is to the Veterans. Everyone who moves his/her insignia to the water container stops in front of that book and some of them look up the name of a buddy.) The candle may be lit before the ceremony or during the **Counting our Losses** part.

Staff and Volunteers: The service is conducted by a chaplain and a reader. Meditative music may be used before and after the ceremony. (We have found that silence works better than music because music before and after seems to remind people of a church service.) Silence is maintained until the ceremony begins. Staff members need to be available to Veterans following the ceremony so that any who need to debrief have resource people accessible. Be prepared for some Veterans to express strong emotions during the service.

*Bonita Barnes
Veterans Administration*