

# *The Chaplain's Chapter*



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## AVAILABILITY

Here's an original Chaplain Brandon quote for you - "Chaplaincy=Availability". Or, if you prefer - "Ministry=Availability". Or, you can substitute another word like "Parenting, Leadership", you get the idea. But since Chaplaincy is a ministry of presence, availability is really important. Abraham Lincoln said it about lawyers "Time is their stock in trade". You can't minister to somebody if you're not there. Now, you can't be everywhere at once, but you have to make yourself available. Can someone find you by putting your name into a search engine? Can you be "Googled"? Is your home phone number in your local telephone book? Are you a member of your local Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis club, Elks Lodge, VFW, Inter-Faith Council, ETC.? When someone sees you, do they know you are a Chaplain or Minister of the Gospel? Wherever you are, do you look like the "minister in the room"?

Of course, in the United States Corps of Chaplains, we are a uniformed ministry. But, even before joining the Corps, I wore clergy shirts often. And, for the past 3 or 4 years, I wear a pectoral (or clergy cross) when wearing ANY soft clothes (i.e. suit, casual, etc.). Even if I am wearing shorts and a t-shirt just to run to the grocery store, my clergy cross lets people know who and what I am. One of the best articles I have ever read on this subject is by Rev. Ken Collins. Please write this site URL down, or copy and paste it into your browser and read his essay at <http://www.kencollins.com/pray-26.htm>

While sitting at your computer you can get a certain amount of work, communication and ministry done, it is by no means a substitute for "pressing the flesh" and being seen by people. I have actually walked into a room and felt the tension from a group release. I have walked onto a campus and had a school administrator walk (half-run) up to me and say "thank God you are here". Less dramatically, I counseled yesterday with a couple I will be marrying this Saturday. They were apprehensive upon meeting me, as they sought me out due to factors such as the groom's church requiring the bride to complete classes, the cost at another church, the fact that they had a very young daughter already, and were getting married after being together for 9 years. As I am fond of saying; if a couple wants to get married at the Karaoke bar where they met, that's okay by me. That judging job is already taken, and I will make myself available. Along those lines, if the couple wants me to wear a tux to match the wedding party, I've got one. If they want clerical robes, no problem. Collar, suit, class A uniform, whatever. I did turn down a request for a frog costume once, but officiated anyway (in a suit). When 45 minutes were gone, they were completely at ease, had decided on an order of service, vows, the whole ceremony, and were very appreciative of my sense of humor and obvious experience. They were referred to me by a deli clerk at the local market, whose family I have done a couple of weddings for. How did she know about me? Because of my work at the VFW where her husband is a member, and because she knew I was a minister/chaplain from seeing me in the store. In a word...availability.

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