

The Office of the Chaplain

United States House of Representatives

Guest Chaplain Instructions for Member Offices

Thank you for your interest in providing a guest chaplain to offer the prayer for an upcoming legislative day. The Guest Chaplain program is specifically designed to allow Members to identify and sponsor individuals from their districts who represent their own or their community's religious traditions. This opportunity is intended to honor the Constitution's commitment to religious accommodation and free expression of religion.

The tradition of opening legislative sessions with prayer reaches back to the First Continental Congress in 1774. At the request of Members, a local minister offered an invocation on behalf of the lawmakers. In 1789, one of the first acts of the new Congress was the appointment of a Chaplain.

*As practiced by Congress since the framing of the Constitution, legislative prayer lends gravity to public business, reminds lawmakers to transcend petty differences in pursuit of a higher purpose, and expresses a common aspiration to a just and peaceful society.*¹

The current practice of opening prayers continues this tradition, while respecting Members' increasingly diverse faith commitments.

With that in mind we ask that Members and Member Offices abide by the following expectations:

- A Member-sponsored Guest chaplain will be from the Member's congressional district and known personally by the Member.
- Guest chaplains must be ordained, or the equivalent, by the religious tradition with which they are presently affiliated.
- The sponsoring Member should plan on providing the first One Minute Speech following the prayer to welcome the Guest Chaplain personally.
- The dates available for guest chaplain prayers will align with the last legislative day of the week.
- Members are limited to one guest chaplain request per Congress. Please recognize that we may not be able to accommodate all the requests we receive.
- The House of Representatives is comprised of Members of many different religious traditions; therefore, your guest should be mindful of the importance of providing a prayer inclusive of this diversity. The opening prayer will be offered on behalf of all Members.
- The opening prayer must be religious in nature², and should serve to "solemnize the occasion."³ Legislative prayers typically "seek peace for the Nation, wisdom for its lawmakers, and justice for its people."⁴
- The guest chaplain will be required to submit a copy of the prayer a week ahead of time for inclusion in the Congressional Record.
- The Member is the official host of the guest chaplain.

To sponsor a guest chaplain, Members will write a letter of nomination addressed to the Chaplain and include the following information:

- Guest Chaplain's Bio/CV
- Guest Chaplain's complete contact information (address/email/phone)

- Member's connection to the guest and the reason for recommending the individual
- Member's office staff contact information
- Letters may be emailed to < a href="mailto:ChaplainOffice@mail.house.gov">ChaplainOffice@mail.house.gov or sent to HB-25 by Inside Mail or delivered in-person to our admin office in HC-2 The Chaplain will send an official letter of invitation to the guest chaplain (with a copy to the Member) with the agreed upon date, outlining the procedures for the day and describing the parameters of the prayer.

Logistically, there are several other elements which the Chaplain's office will communicate to the guest chaplain and of which your office should be aware:

- On the day of the prayer, the guest chaplain should arrive at the sponsoring Member's office at least 45 minutes before the prayer.
- If provided with vehicle information ahead of time, the Chaplain's Office will request permission for the guest chaplain to park on the Capitol's SW Drive.
- The Member and/or staff should escort the guest chaplain (and any family/guests) to H217 (the Speaker's Ceremonial Office), arriving no later than twenty minutes before the opening of the session. (If they have a large group with them, please allow plenty of time for the entire party to get through security to enter the Capitol). The Rayburn Room is the alternate meeting location if H-217 is not available.
- The Chaplain's assistant will meet the guest chaplain and the Member and explain the procedure for leading the prayer.
- It is customary to take an official picture with the Guest Chaplain, the Chaplain and the Member before/after the opening prayer occurs. The Chaplain's Office will arrange for a photographer from the House Office of Creative Services to be present. This will be charged to the sponsoring Member's office.
- The sponsoring Member's staff member accompanies family members or other guests of the guest chaplain to the House Gallery (Gallery 3 – opposite the Rules Committee). If it is a large group – the staff should escort the guests directly to the Gallery to allow for plenty of time for security screening. Please remember the limits on electronics and bags in the Gallery.
- The Member, guest chaplain and Chaplain will proceed to the House Chamber so the guest chaplain can be shown where to stand.
- As the first item of business after the House convenes, the Guest Chaplain will be introduced by the Speaker or Speaker pro tempore and then offer the Opening Prayer.
- Following the approval of the Journal and the Pledge of Allegiance, the sponsoring Member welcomes the Guest Chaplain by offering the first One Minute Speech.
- Following the one-minute speech and final photos, the guest chaplain's duties are complete.
- The Chaplain Office staff will take the Guest Chaplain and family to the Congressional Prayer Room, if they are interested, immediately after the prayer or at another agreed upon time. A Capitol Tour would be arranged by the Member's office.
- It is recommended that the sponsoring Office send the guest chaplain a hard copy of the Congressional Record, a video link from the day of the prayer and the picture with the Member and the Chaplain.
- If you have any questions, please contact the Chaplain's Office at 5-2509

¹ Town of Greece v. Galloway, 572 U.S. 565, 575 (2014).

² Barker v. Conroy, 921 F.3d 1118, 1130 (D.C. Circ. 2019).

³ Town of Greece, 572 U.S. at 583.

⁴ Id.

The Reverend Dr. Margaret Grun Kibben, Chaplain, U.S. House of Representatives

U.S. Capitol, Room HB25, Washington, DC 20515-6655

Phone: (202) 225-2509

Fax: (202) 226-4928

E-mail: ChaplainOffice@mail.house.gov