

‘We Are Here for People’

A California husband and wife were appointed as VFW Post and Auxiliary chaplains, respectively

Dec 18, 2023

Before joining the VFW Auxiliary in 2018, Jan Bazdorf had never been to a VFW Post.

“My next-door neighbor used to go with her friend to VFW Post 9578, and I was invited to go with them one evening,” Jan said. “And since I had nothing to do, I said, ‘Sure!’”

While visiting Post 9578 in Alpine, California, Jan said a Post member walked up to her and introduced himself. That member was Theo Bazdorf, a longtime chaplain of the VFW Post in Alpine, about 25 miles northeast of San Diego.

“I remember him saying that he had never seen us there before, and he asked me if I was eligible to join the VFW,” said Jan, whose father, Charles, served in the Navy during World War II in the South Pacific. “He found out that we could join the Auxiliary, so he left and came back with applications. I then signed up for the Auxiliary.”

Theo, who has served as Post 9578 chaplain since 2011, is an Army veteran who served from 1958 to 1964, including two years active and four years reserve service. He was stationed in South Korea with the 2nd Medium Tank Bn., 40th Armor Regt., 7th Inf. Div., which made him eligible to join VFW.

Jan said that while getting to know Theo, she was drawn to him, saying he is a “quiet but interesting” person.

“And that’s when our bond started,” Jan said. “I know I could always find him at the VFW Post because he was there seven days a week.”

In 2019, Jan was elected chaplain of the Auxiliary at Post 9578. Later that year, in September, the couple married.

Theo, who joined VFW in 2009, said that he and Jan are not just chaplains who show up to meetings to offer prayers. The couple works to help and say they listen to anyone who needs

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someone to talk to. Jan describes herself and Theo as “emotional people” who want to help others.

“We are not trained counselors — we didn’t study psychology — but we are here for people who have a need to talk to someone,” Theo said. “We are just empathetic. Having empathy is what every VFW chaplain should have.”

In 2022, Theo was selected as California’s District 1 Chaplain of the Year, VFW Department Chaplain of the Year and the National Chaplain of the Year. Due to a change in leadership, Theo became Post 9578’s quartermaster in July. While he is no longer the VFW Post’s chaplain, he said he is lucky to be able to serve in the VFW alongside his wife. Jan agrees.

“We are happy we get to live this life together,” Jan said. “I can’t imagine doing anything else in my life that brings me this much joy. We feel blessed.”

This article is featured in the November/December 2023 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiwa](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.