

A man for our times

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [December 22, 1999](#) issue

Aristotle says that three elements are necessary for a successful argument: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. *Ethos* refers to the character of the one who speaks or writes. Is he credible? Do we regard her as a good person, someone whose experiences inspire curiosity or trust?

Pathos refers to the audience. Is it ready to be moved, emotionally engaged, and living in circumstances that the speaker can understand and address? And *logos* is about the content of the discourse. Is the message informative and substantial? Can it move people?

I would like you to find me a credible character as I witness to my friendship with and respect for James Ford, who is retiring from his position as chaplain of the House of Representatives. I hope that I assess you, my audience, correctly as folks who are looking for people to respect. And I hope you will agree that I have something worthwhile to say about Ford.

Since I am a plunderer, not a plagiarist, I must note that some of my information comes from Tom Webb's November 18 *Chicago Tribune* story about Ford. My own acquaintance with him began 21 years ago when he left West Point for the House. My newsletter *Context* quoted him as having said that he had one foot in a boat marked "military" and the other in a boat marked "church"—and both were sinking. Of course, neither did sink.

We struck up a correspondence and subsequently bumped into each other on many occasions. Ford gets around. I've watched this hearty pastor at various gatherings, not sidling up to the VIPs but catching someone at the margins who was looking a bit neglected, or needy, or just plain interesting.

Since Ford is a fellow Lutheran I'm tempted to say that we are of the same tribe. But the information in Webb's article confirmed that we are not, though we are in similar boats. I gasped as I read of the risks Ford has taken: he sailed across the Atlantic in a tiny boat, flies his own ultralight airplane (though he is not ultralight), rides a

Harley-Davidson motorcycle with his son and, long ago, skied backwards down a Minnesota jump.

Ford has won the respect of the majority of the House representatives and their families. He loves politics when many shun it. He loves politicians, and can admonish, inform and console them. As he retires, many representatives laud his presence with them at baptisms, marriages and burials, always with good sense, good counsel and good words of faith, hope and love.

Let me quote another friend, Representative Lois Capps (D., Calif.). When her husband, Representative Walter Capps, another minister, died several years ago, Ford presided at the funeral. Ford, she said, was "quoting Martin Luther: 'Send your good men into the ministry, but send your best men into politics.'" Capps added: "Our chaplain is both. He is a good man and he is one of the best of men."

Here's to ministry and politics in our sour times, and here's to James Ford, who honorably discharged his duties. I hope other "good people" will follow him into ministry and politics. It's risky. But the backward skiing is optional.