

Rationale for a Chaplaincy

Having an effective chaplaincy increases the readiness of a unit and helps the commander accomplish the mission. As a staff officer on the commander's staff, the chaplain does this in several ways:

1. Chaplains meet the religious and spiritual needs of soldiers

Chaplains are clergy whose primary responsibility and duty is to meet the religious needs of all military members within the command. This also includes those of a different faith group than that of the chaplain. If a chaplain cannot meet the religious and spiritual needs of some members, then a referral to another chaplain is appropriate. This speaks to the need for a multi-confessional chaplaincy. Chaplains meet the religious needs through:

- Providing worship opportunities
- Offering Bible studies and times of Christian fellowship
- Preaching the Gospel
- Discipling soldiers
- Offering the sacraments
- Pastoral counseling
- Ministry of Presence

A military member who is at peace with God and at peace with others, including his or her family, will be the best soldier and will assist the commander in accomplishing the mission. This happens when chaplains meet the religious and spiritual needs of those in the military.

2. Chaplains serve as an advisor to the commander

As a member of the commander's staff, the chaplain has access to the commander in a very unique way. He or she has the privilege of advising the commander on matters of religion, morals, and morale of the unit. These important areas are frequently overlooked. Rarely is there another staff officer or non-commissioned officer whose responsibility it is to inform the commander on these issues.

3. Chaplains contribute to the well-being of a unit

A chaplain's ministry of presence contributes significantly to the overall health of the unit. A healthy unit has a much better chance of accomplishing its mission. Think for a moment of some of the problems a unit may have that may cause the unit to be unhealthy. In many cases, an effective and trained chaplaincy will help significantly in moving that unit toward health. Other command personnel may have the liability inherent in rank and authority and can be threatening to some military members. Civilian pastors are not part of the unit, and have neither the same access to soldiers nor the same military understanding that chaplains have.

Consider some of the following issues that arise in units that are most effectively addressed by a military chaplain:

Problem: When deployed military members do not have access to worship

Chaplains address the problem by deploying with soldiers and offering worship opportunities.

Problem: Cultural/tribal differences

Chaplains address the problem by providing cultural education and reconciliation classes that can reduce prejudice and ethnic tension.

Problem: Increase in suicides

Chaplains address the problem by teaching Suicide Awareness and Prevention classes, educating all soldiers on signs and symptoms to look for in others who may be contemplating suicide. The chaplain also points soldiers to where they can get emotional and psychological help.

Problem: Soldiers dealing inappropriately with the stress of military life

Chaplains address the problem by teaching Stress Management Classes or Critical Incident Stress Management.

Chaplains address the problem by listening to soldiers and helping them cope with the demands of military life.

Problem: Family Problems/Divorce

Chaplains address the problem by counseling soldiers and families, conducting or sponsoring marriage enrichment weekends or other appropriate ministry to them. By helping families, the chaplain helps the soldier be a better soldier because he or she is then able to focus more on his work and less on his family problems.

Problem: Soldiers dealing with personal problems

Chaplains address the problem by being a listening ear for soldiers and their families. Chaplains are non-threatening, have confidentiality, and are available to counsel soldiers and their families. Many times visiting with the chaplain will either help a soldier solve his problem or give the soldier the strength and coping mechanisms to deal with it. Either way, the soldier improves his or her spiritual, emotional, and mental health and is able to focus better on his job and less on his problems.

Chaplains address this problem by knowing what resources are available both in the military and outside the military to help soldiers with difficult issues they are facing.

Problem: Soldiers must deal with the death of their comrades or their family members

Chaplains address this problem by being part of a notification team that tells the soldier or family member about the death of their comrade or loved one. The chaplain is also available to counsel the soldier or family member and walk with them through the grief process.

Problem: Morale problems in the unit

Chaplains address the problem by learning what the morale issues are and seeking a solution to them. Chaplains, as an advisor to the commander, are able to brief the commander on morale issues and offer recommendations. Chaplains can also conduct surveys to determine morale problems and brief the commander on the results. Frequently morale may improve simply because a chaplain provides a friendly outlet for soldiers to vent.

Chaplains address the problem by offering special chaplain activities such as prayer breakfasts, retreats, or other programs.

Problem: Immorality in the unit

Chaplains address this problem in different ways. One way is by simply being there and being part of the unit. His/Her presence alone serves as an example (and maybe even the conscience) of others.

Chaplains also address this problem through teaching Moral Leadership Classes. They may cover topics such as Consideration of Others, Loyalty, Duty, Responsibility, Selfless Service, Honesty, Integrity, Personal Courage, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Building a Strong Family, Stress Management, Marital Faithfulness, or other classes that will address the need of the unit.

The Covenant and The Code of Ethics for Chaplains of the Armed Forces

The Covenant

Having accepted God's Call to minister to people who serve in the Armed Forces of our country, I covenant to serve God and these people with God's help: to deepen my obedience to the Commandments, to love the Lord our God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. In affirmation of this commitment, I will abide by the Code of Ethics for Chaplains of the Armed Forces and I will faithfully support its purposes and ideals. As further affirmation of my commitment, I covenant with my colleagues in ministry that we will hold one another accountable for fulfillment of all public actions set forth in our Code of Ethics.

The Code of Ethics

I will hold in trust the traditions and practices of my religious body.

I will carefully adhere to whatever direction may be conveyed to me by my endorsing body for maintenance of my endorsement.

I understand as a chaplain in the Armed Forces that I must function in a pluralistic environment with chaplains of other religious bodies to provide for ministry to all military personnel and their families entrusted to my care.

I will seek to provide pastoral care and ministry to persons of religious bodies other than my own within my area of responsibility with the same investment of myself as I give to members of my own religious body. I will work collegially with chaplains of religious bodies other than my own as together we seek to provide as full a ministry as possible to our people. I will respect the beliefs and traditions of my colleagues and those to whom I minister. When conducting services of worship that include persons of other than my religious body I will draw upon those beliefs, principles, and practices that we have in common.

I will, if a supervisory position, respect the practices and beliefs of each chaplain I supervise, and exercise care not to require of them any service or practice that would be in violation of the faith practices of their particular religious body.

I will seek to support all colleagues in ministry by building constructive relationships wherever I serve, both with the staff where I work and with colleagues throughout the military environment.

I will maintain a disciplined ministry in such ways as keeping hours of prayer and devotion, endeavoring to maintain wholesome family relationships, and regularly engaging in educational and recreational activities for professional and personal development. I will seek to maintain good health habits.

I will recognize that my obligation is to provide ministry to all members of the Military Services, their families, and other authorized personnel. When on Active Duty, I will only accept added responsibility in civilian work or ministry if it does not interfere with the overall effectiveness of my primary military ministry.

I will defend my colleagues against unfair discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion or national origin.

I will hold in confidence all privileged and confidential communication.

I will respect all persons of other religious faiths. I will respond to any expressed need for spiritual guidance and pastoral care to those who seek my counsel.

I will show personal love for God in my life and ministry, as I maintain the discipline and promote the integrity of the profession to which I have been called.

I recognize the special power afforded me by my ministerial office. I will never use that power in ways that violate the personhood of another human being, religiously, emotionally or sexually. I will use my pastoral office only for that which is best for the persons under my ministry.