

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GREATER PROFESSIONALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

NAVY CHAPLAIN CORPS

by

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Abstract

Professionalism in the United States Navy Chaplain Corps is lacking. While there is ample work explaining and codifying what a chaplain should do and be, in practice the isolated nature of Naval Chaplaincy limits accountability. Autonomy creates individualism that fails to adhere to agreed upon principles.

When chaplains do work together, conflict is common, and resolution is often insufficient. Outside investigators resolve conflicts and chaplains are not involved in holding the community accountable. Time that is wasted by conflicts causes the Chaplain Corps to lose credibility and opportunity to care for others, thus impeding the mission of the Chaplain Corps.

This project explores actions that could be taken to minimize conflict, improve resolution, professionalism, and accountability in the United States Navy Chaplain Corps.

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Introduction

I am the victim of Military Sexual Trauma.

This started prior to writing this paper and continued to occur through a good portion of this writing. It transformed my life and has changed the way I view myself, my calling, and the Navy. The “VA uses the term ‘Military Sexual Trauma’ (MST) to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment experienced during military service.”¹ While I am not alone, there is little comfort knowing MST occurs to so many.

For seven months my supervisory chaplain was incessant with his inappropriate language and banter about his sex life, his opinions on race, and comments about the LGBTQ+ community that I found unacceptable. When he was specifically informed that his speech and words were inappropriate he disagreed and continued his behavior unabated. My situation was not unusual, and I believe that the United States Navy Chaplain Corps as an institution could do far better in fostering a professional environment and discouraging inappropriate behavior.

The rate of sexual assault in the Navy is appalling. “Reporting continues to rise in the Navy. In FY 2021, the latest year that data were available, there were 1,883 reports, up 9.2 percent over the previous year, United States Naval Institute News previously reported. Last fiscal year’s report, released in September 2022, showed the Navy’s rate of sexual assault increasing. One in 10 sailors reported unwanted sexual contact. In the Marine Corps, 13.6 percent of Marines reported unwanted sexual contact.”² Reflecting on my personal experience, I had to make sense of what had happened and explore this topic further.

¹ US Department of Veterans Affairs. “Military Sexual Trauma,” December 1, 2023. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp#:~:text=VA%20uses%20the%20term%20%E2%80%9Cmilitary,when%20unable%20to%20say%20no.>

² Heather Mongilio, “Annual Pentagon Sexual Assault Study Shows Increase in Navy Reports, Overall Trends Unclear,” April 27, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/04/27/annual-pentagon-sexual-assault-study-shows-increase-in-navy-reports-overall-trends-unclear.>

A lack of professionalism was at the crux of my experience. For this discussion, I define “profession” as follows:

A Profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others.

It is inherent in the definition of a Profession that a code of ethics governs the activities of each Profession. Such codes require behavior and practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual. They define and demand high standards of behavior in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues. Often these codes are enforced by the Profession and are acknowledged and accepted by the community.³

This definition of professionalism highlights the need to be ethical, interact with others in a manner requiring trust, hold one another accountable, and to learn from research. Too often chaplains do not follow these guidelines. When the United States Navy uses the term professionalism it more closely aligns with our understanding of discipline, that is, a predictable manner of behavior. The United States Naval Chaplain Corps did not “demand high standards of behavior in dealing with professional colleagues” when it came to the actions of my supervisor. My supervisor had a history of inappropriateness which was never adequately addressed by the institution and caused a great deal of harm to myself and at least two other chaplains. This paper explores examples and causes of the lack of professionalism in the Navy Chaplain Corps as well as recommendations for higher standards in dealing with the public and professional colleagues.

How did this situation develop? How do high standards fail? Why do we not correct one another? This work is an attempt to make sense of the nonsensical and learn from mistakes in order not to repeat them in the future.

³ “What Is a Profession? Australian Council of Professions ACoP.” Accessed February 9, 2024. <https://professions.org.au/what-is-a-professional/>.

The Homogenous Chaplain Corps

The Navy Chaplain Corps consists predominantly of white, male, cisgender Protestants, of which I am one. There are about 900 chaplains charged with providing, facilitating, caring, and advising for the free exercise of religion to a Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard population of 625,000 (not including their dependents). The Chaplain Corps has to serve a population that is much more diverse than its own demographic.

Efforts are underway to recruit a more diverse population of chaplains, but it takes many years to change the culture of a 248-year-old organization. The solution isn't just to have a Chaplain Corps which matches the diverse population of the Navy. If the Navy identifies 5% of its population as Wiccan, recruiting 45 Wiccan Chaplains isn't enough. With geographical and operational challenges, a Wiccan Sailor could go their entire career without meeting a Wiccan Chaplain (if such a chaplain existed). Rather, in addition to becoming a more diverse community, chaplains need to become better at connecting with those who come from different faith traditions or who's religious beliefs are different than their own.

Multiple Bosses, Multiple Agendas

A military chaplain works in at least two institutions. The institution of the military is the one most recognizable, but there is also the institution of a chaplain's endorser. The military is not in the business of religion, so the military trusts that religious organizations send the best candidates for chaplaincy. There may be additional accreditations or institutions to which a chaplain belongs, [i.e., board certification through the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) or the National Association of Veterans Affairs Chaplains (NAVAC)]. In

practice, the obligations and service to multiple institutions can cause unforeseen conflicts for a chaplain.

Multiple supervisors lead to less accountability rather than more. Chaplains may or may not interact with their religious endorser. Some faith groups have decentralized leadership styles that offer greater autonomy. A chaplain may or may not be inclined to place themselves in the community of professionals of the ACPE or NAVAC. In the real world, a chaplain serves at least two supervisors in the form of their Commanding Officer (CO) and their Supervisory Chaplain.⁴ Many Navy Chaplains are sent to the military as a denomination's "missionary" and even appear as much on the local church's missions bulletin board in their fellowship hall.

In Religious Organizations where proselytization is part of their belief (and there are many), tension exists for those chaplains. How does a chaplain appropriately balance their convictions to proselytize with the needs of the person to whom they are ministering? If a human being is a living document, does the chaplain listen to the story and provide feedback, or do they get out the red pen and make corrections?

If the person seeking care comes from a different background than the chaplain, there are power dynamics that most white, male, cisgender, Protestants do not recognize or appreciate. It has been my experience that chaplains who have done work to recognize the power and authority they wield are few and far between. There ought to be a balance between the voice of the chaplain and the voice of the other. It takes maturity and discipline to realize that the way that works for me may not be the best way for my neighbor. Too many chaplains are ready to declare

⁴ The CO often knows very little about chaplaincy. They typically rely on past experience, personal beliefs, or feedback from servicemembers along with a myriad of other inputs to determine if a chaplain is doing a good job or not. The supervisory chaplain provides guidance but has no official authority over the subordinate chaplain. This is yet another example of allowing the chaplain to choose which leader they like best and who they will follow. It is all too easy for chaplains to choose how they operate because they are free from accountability and supervision.

“the truth” rather than walk along with someone to help them discover their truth. “The ultimate source of wisdom, however, lies not in the canon per se, but in the patient and healing encounter. In the healthcare setting, evangelism is seen as counter-productive to the goal of empowering patients to utilize their own spiritual resources in healing.”⁵ Rather than giving the prescription of good news it may be more therapeutic to sit with another in their bad news.

Know Thyself...OK, at least Learn About Thyself

I have an ongoing journey of self-discovery and have learned and changed more than I thought possible. There were three significant encounters where my inability to appreciate my privilege caused significant conflicts (two during my CPE experience and one in the year following). Reflecting on those experiences has made me more attuned to how people perceive similar experiences differently, which has provided insights and benefits both realized and what is yet to be discovered.

Yet, it is hard to know what I do not know. I am just beginning to get comfortable at being uncomfortable but there is more work to do. I realize that most of what I think is right is probably at best 60% correct. I look back at things I was absolutely certain about 10, 20, or 30 years ago and shake my head at how confused I was.

Persistent questions remain and include the following: How am I being received by the person I am interacting with? What roadblocks are keeping the person from trusting me? How can I increase the trust that I have with the individual to provide the best care? What is the issue? Rather, what are the issues?

⁵ Kimberly Bloom-Feshbach, Nathan Goldberg, and Joseph J. Fins, “Paternalism, Evangelism, and Power,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 3 (April 21, 2020): 1259.

The Issue? Clear Guidance That Isn't Followed

The United States Navy Chaplain Corps has an identity issue. While the organization espouses the mission of the chaplain as being Providing, Facilitating, Caring, and Advising,⁶ the execution of the mission is subjective. It is all too easy for a chaplain to profess these skills to the recruiter or at chaplain school and then interpret the meaning of each to fit their agenda. There also is no clear understanding of which is most important. To say all are equal invites confusion. It may seem that caring is common to the other three but finding further clarification on the Navy Chaplain Corps informational website provides little specificity.

The Navy Chaplain Corps mission is:

- Providing religious ministry and support to those of your own faith
- Facilitating the religious requirements of those from all faiths
- Caring for all servicemembers and their families, including those subscribing to no specific faith
- Advising the command in ensuring the free exercise of religion

The explanation of the mission reveals that “all faiths” of “all servicemembers and their families” are to have access to “the free exercise of religion.” While some faiths extol adherents to look not only “to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others”⁷ this care for others is often superseded by the need to advance a chaplain’s convictions.

When a chaplain enters Navy service, they are immediately faced with a young, uncertain population many of whom do not have fully formed convictions. The young Sailor or Marine has more money, freedom (during liberty), and responsibility than most civilians their age. These factors contribute to the popular mantra in the military to “work hard, play hard.” To

⁶ “Navy Chaplain.” Accessed April 7, 2023. <https://www.navy.com/careers/navy-chaplain>.

⁷ Philippians 2:4, NIV

keep young Sailors and Marines from trouble, the chaplain is often encouraged to help provide structure or activities to help their Sailors and Marines make better decisions.

Some chaplains believe that the solution is to create a disciple who follows their faith system because that path worked for the chaplain. It is human nature to perceive that personal successes may be imparted to others. It is with this motive that evangelism takes place.

“I Can Save You!”

If a chaplain has a robust theology of a Christian Substitutionary Atonement, the need to save another from their eternal destruction is a powerful motivator. Saving another person's life is something all can agree is important. It is indeed loving to cause inconvenience or even pain for the greater good. Chemotherapy and radiation are painful tools to destroy the greater problem of cancer. A caring person would want to save even their worst enemy from eternal damnation and perpetual torment. Indeed, if a person comes to a chaplain, they generally have some need or problem for which they desire help. A chaplain can offer the professional and life experience advice that a person in need desires. The best help some chaplains provide is an introduction to the faith that has all the answers.

But what if a chaplain's theology is not accurate? How can any theology be proven? How can anyone's theology be important enough to supersede another person's? What if the person in front of the chaplain doesn't share the conviction that they are on the road to Hell? Indeed, what if the person doesn't believe Hell exists? Is theology a matter of intellectual assent or behavioral practice? “A good doctor, or by extension, chaplain, needs to be self-reflective about how one's narrative might distort the perception of patient needs and, therefore, impede the application of

knowledge to clinical practice.”⁸ One person’s heresy is another’s orthodoxy. A chaplain may view their actions and words as care while they may be received coercively.

It is therefore of utmost importance to hold on loosely to deeply held theological convictions. As paradoxical as that sounds, it is necessary in the context of chaplaincy. A chaplain must realize that there are many ways to journey through life and a person seeking the care of a chaplain may choose paths that the chaplain may disagree with.

This requires the acknowledgment that there is theological uncertainty and debate in a pluralistic setting. The Navy is not a congregation, synagogue, or coven. It is a diverse population mirroring the diversity of the nation it serves. The population is becoming increasingly skeptical of churches and institutions that actively cover up sexual abuse or financial impropriety, or groups that preach love and kindness but turn around to be exclusionary towards marginalized groups. Seemingly benign television ads about Jesus irritate many over the hypocrisy of the people donating to the cause.⁹

⁸ Kimberly Bloom-Feshbach, Nathan Goldberg, and Joseph J. Fins, “Paternalism, Evangelism, and Power,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 3 (April 21, 2020): 1263.

⁹ Aidan Pollard, “The ‘He Gets Us’ Jesus Ads That Ran during the Super Bowl Preached a Message of Unity. Instead, They Just Made Everyone More Angry.” *Business Insider*, December 1, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/he-gets-us-jesus-ads-preached-unity-made-everyone-angry-2023-2>.

The Current State of the Chaplain Corps

When a professional uses their authority and power inappropriately, the negative impact ripples through society. The influence of a military chaplain is greater than that of civilian clergy. The military chaplain enters their branch as an officer and not as an enlisted servicemember. Moreover, a military chaplain does not start at the lowest officer rank. Instead, they begin their career as an O-2 or in some cases an O-3. In the line officer community, an O-3 is an Officer with at least four years of military experience. The average servicemember notices the rank and may assume the chaplain has more years of service when in reality, it may only be a few weeks. Add to the power dynamics the aforementioned privilege that many Navy Chaplains possess, and more influence is imparted to the chaplain. The person seeking counsel from the chaplain may have a belief in the divine and the authority of clergy which adds to raising the power differential.

It is stated in Navy Instruction¹⁰ that “every chaplain applicant must be willing to function in the military’s pluralistic environment, respecting the rights of individuals to determine their religious convictions. Applicants must be willing to support the free exercise of religion by all servicemembers, their families, and other authorized users.”¹¹ In real-world practice, there is significant variation in the willingness of chaplains to support the free exercise of religion by all servicemembers. Free exercise of religion by all servicemembers may conflict with the faith of the chaplain. This becomes an issue when servicemembers become embittered toward religion due to the presence of the chaplain.

¹⁰ Navy Instructions are orders in the form of written documents that establish Navy policy, procedure, and requirements. Following instructions is not optional, in theory. In practice there are so many that it is difficult to follow all of them.

¹¹ SECNAVINST 1730.7E 2.i.(2)

It takes a great deal of courage for a Junior Sailor to express disagreement with someone of a higher rank. If an individual is in crisis seeking answers, they are more open to ideas or concepts that might alleviate the crisis. Servicemembers are occasionally ordered by their chain of command to meet with the chaplain. In some instances, the servicemember is just appeasing their chain of command by talking with the chaplain.

The role and efficacy of the chaplain can be greatly improved by acknowledging these dynamics. It can be beneficial to even say as much out loud in front of the other person. For some counselees, the power dynamics are unimportant and they can look past them. For others, the chaplain represents someone who is speaking on behalf of the commanding officer, the chain of command, or the divine. Prior to counseling, it can enhance a beneficial relationship if the chaplain acknowledges there may be a perception of a power differential, including observable dynamics and dynamics yet to be discovered. “Rather than avoiding power’s ubiquity, we contend that doctors and chaplains have a moral obligation to use their power, and use it wisely.”¹² Whatever the relationship between the chaplain and the counselee, there are differences that, when openly acknowledged during the initial establishment of the relationship, enable greater communication and care.

Presbyterian Minister Fred Rogers said, “Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people.”¹³ Unconditional positive regard adopts a stance that the individual is acceptable and worthy of support. Many faiths have an appreciation for the love of neighbors. Unfortunately, some chaplains believe that an individual must change in order to be loved by the divine or by others.

¹² Kimberly Bloom-Feshbach, Nathan Goldberg, and Joseph J. Fins, “Paternalism, Evangelism, and Power,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 3 (April 21, 2020): 1261.

¹³ Fred Rogers, “Quotable Quote,” goodreads, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/423742-knowing-that-we-can-be-loved-exactly-as-we-are>.

Because of the power differential structure within the military, chaplaincy is one of the last places where the minister holds tremendous authority. In some civilian settings, trust erodes between parishioners and clergy. With authority comes responsibility. United States Military chaplaincy has been under scrutiny for over 200 years.¹⁴ Acknowledgement of the valid concerns surrounding power differentials could increase the effectiveness of the chaplain.

Continued learning, peer review, regular accountability, and established metrics are a few ways that military chaplaincy could become more professional and similar to other staff corp officers. The typical Chaplain fights against the institution directing them. There is a tendency to retreat toward one's faith tradition and reject the military from telling how ministry ought to be done. Yet, setting these standards would not have the intent of micromanaging, but rather cultivate a caregiving culture that benefits the Military, the Chaplain, and the person seeking care.

Why Is This Personal?

There are many reasons a person chooses to become a Chaplain. Some reasons are noble; to serve one's country, a family history of military service, to ensure that servicemembers can practice their faith, to see the world. Other reasons are more pragmatic; the pay is better than a civilian minister, there was no other place that would take them, the military is a mission field, it offers health care or education benefits. Seldom is there only one reason. Often it is a blend of reasons.

Each person has their unique story on how they came to be in the military (or not to be in the military). My story begins with the economic downturn of 2008. Economic security was one

¹⁴ Hans Zeiger, "Why Does the US Military Have Chaplains?," accessed April 7, 2023, <https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/academics/research/policy-review/2009v2/why-does-us-military-have-chaplains.htm>.

of the primary reasons Navy Chaplaincy began to look attractive. Money was not the only factor, but it was a contributing factor. With my 12 years of non-ordained ministry experience and a completed Master of Divinity, it wasn't a decision out of character with the life I was living. However, it was a decision that affected all areas of my life including the lives of my wife and three children.

I took to heart the history, tradition, and expectations of the Navy Chaplain Corps. The Navy was an easy decision due to my family history¹⁵ and our desire to live by the water.¹⁶ It was all new to me, but I wanted to make the best of the opportunity. I completed the training and additional educational opportunities, and chased after the most challenging assignments. I assumed (quite incorrectly) that all Chaplains understood the competitive nature of our calling and worked diligently at serving the servicemembers of the sea services.

After nine years of service and promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Commander, things began to look different. At this point, the difference between Lieutenant (O-3) and Lieutenant Commander (O-4) became clearer. It has been said that Lieutenant Commander is the line where one is welcomed to "the Professional Chaplain Corps."¹⁷

While this may be a fair statement, it also depicts the lack of military bearing displayed by so many incoming Chaplains. These Chaplains are the ones who work most directly with Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen. These Chaplains are the ones who are the most critical

¹⁵ My maternal grandfather was a SeaBee Chief in World War II. Although he passed away before I was born, I was told that the SeaBees were the reason we won World War II. My father-in-law served as a Hull Technician Chief in Vietnam on the USS Hassayampa (AO-145) and my uncle served as an electrician on the USS Benjamin Stoddert (DDG-22). I never understood why my uncle knew exactly how many days he served in the Navy and was so glad to be out. Now, I understand.

¹⁶ My wife grew up on Lopez Island and I grew up in Seattle. We have never been far from salt water.

¹⁷ A great observation shared by LCDR Matthew Drayton, CHC, USN

in dealing with the difficulties of military life. They are also more familiar with civilian ministry than with institutional care-giving.

At the mid-management supervisory level, the mistakes that Lieutenant and Lieutenant Junior Grade Chaplains make become obvious. Supervisory chaplains spend much of their time consumed by working through problems created by the lack of professionalism, humility, and basic officership of first- and second-year chaplains. Newer chaplains find familiarity in the ministry and newness in the military, thereby defaulting to their own denominational biases and standards. This juxtaposition of experience and inexperience creates a dynamic that requires confidence and humility. A new chaplain ought to feel simultaneously wise and clueless.

As I embarked on the Intermediate Leadership Course for Chaplains, I learned many tips and techniques about supervision, and I developed a one page paper on my philosophy of leadership (that I have not looked at since). As the instructor explained different challenges and scenarios in leadership, I shared my experience with the Lieutenant I was currently supervising. I shared generically since it was not the most flattering story I had to share. The instructor of the class shared that he knew who I was speaking of since the chaplain had recently completed the basic course. He commiserated with me and let me know that the chaplain had developed a reputation of stubbornness and arrogance at the Chaplain School.

I found the chaplain that I was supervising to have many challenges including falling asleep in the chapel during work hours, telling nurses how to do their jobs, ignoring and forgetting meetings, claiming to do work that did not get done, and the like. I was a new supervisor and I was stupefied that he could have “passed Chaplain School” and that such things could happen in the Chaplain Corps without being addressed at the most fundamental level. I did my best to correct the errors and for my efforts, he submitted a formal complaint. After three

months of investigation, it was found that the complaint was unsubstantiated, and my career continued.

I have personal experience with supervisory chaplains who were in over their heads and did not know how to lead effectively and have suffered the consequences. My trajectory was different from theirs and I was not following their way of getting promoted. The problems I observed in supervisors ranged from not being present during work hours, sexual and racial harassment, uneven discipline for Religious Program Specialists, unnecessary use of profanity, and general laziness. The result of this poor leadership resulted in my loss of productivity, possible moral injury, atrial fibrillation, and the need for counseling from four different therapists in each of my last three duty stations. The loss of personal productivity is unmeasurable and the drain on resources that could be used for Sailors who are struggling is tragic.

I filed a sexual and racial harassment complaint against a supervisor who abused his authority. The complaint was substantiated, and the supervisor was relieved of leadership responsibilities and removed from our workplace. I am now counted among the many in the military who are victims of sexual and racial harassment. Making the situation worse was how leadership did nothing to help with closure. A new supervisor encouraged me to just stop thinking about the situation and “get over it.” In light of the recruiting challenges facing the military currently, the lack of care for Sailors subjected to harassment is unacceptable and must improve if goals and objectives are to be achieved. The chaplains in the Navy Chaplain Corps must do better if there is any hope of fulfilling the mission to be helpful to the people we are called to serve. The time and opportunity lost due to a lack of professionalism is unwarranted.

Not long after this experience, a chaplain I supervised filed a complaint against me. The chaplain suggested that I created a hostile work environment and insinuated that I was a bully.

Each servicemember is required by the Department of Defense Instruction to have their common access card (CAC) in possession at all times. This chaplain was on duty and was without his common access card (CAC) for 48 hours, which led to disciplinary action. The servicemember was unhappy about the reprimand and as mentioned before, chaplains do have some challenges when it comes to conflict resolution. His solution was to file a formal complaint. How ironic that those who specialize in helping others cannot help themselves.

De-emphasize Provision for One's Own Faith Group

If the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer, the whole world begins to look like a nail. For some new chaplains, the Navy is the first opportunity they have to come face to face with something other than what their seminary trained them for. A first-tour chaplain I met with shared surprise when they found out the CO they worked for was not a religious person. "But the CO is so nice and kind! I thought for sure she was a Christian!"

There is a benefit to assuming that a person across from a chaplain is more different than similar. It may be that there are many commonalities between two people, but assumptions that are made about a person can be counterproductive to positive interactions. Appreciation of the other person is necessary for relationship building.

The role of a chaplain differs from a civilian minister in that the chaplain has a "congregation" that is a kaleidoscope of faiths with few similar to that of the chaplain. The response to this ranges from an opportunity for conversion to an opportunity for conversation. The best response would be to appreciate the other just as they are. This continuum reveals some who work with the other until it becomes clear that they are a lost cause for evangelism and give up. On the other hand, some abandon conversation altogether with the other when certain

information is revealed about that person. This is most clearly reflected when it comes to addressing members of the LGBTQ+ community. There are provisions in place for chaplains to opt out of situations where they directly minister to the LGBTQ+ community. However, this seems to be the epitome of hypocrisy in that a chaplain reveals that they are incapable of talking to someone based on who they are. I am sure that the LGBTQ+ community has experienced far worse than being dismissed by a Navy Chaplain, but this is in direct opposition to the call to “Care for All” that the Navy Chaplain Corps espouses.

In the context of the US Military, a decision was made at the highest levels in the Department of Defense to be inclusive. If a person can't abide by the decisions of leadership in the military, they should resign their commission over their conflict of interest and inability to fulfill the mission. Just as military servicemembers face many requirements (i.e., they can't attend political rallies in uniform, maintenance of height and weight standards, grooming standards, etc.) one of the requirements for a chaplain is to “Care for All.” It ought to be enforced. A chaplain who says, “I can't talk with you, but I know someone who can,” is uncaring and abrogates their responsibilities. There are conditions where the only person that the service member can talk to is a chaplain who, by personal ethics, can't speak with them.

If a chaplain is focused primarily on providing for their faith group, they risk missing the unexpected joy of connecting with someone from which they might learn something. Developing an attitude of care and curiosity will make the other person feel valued and appreciated. Curiosity requires stepping beyond one's own theology in order to understand another. “Spiritual care professionals who simply use their theology to interpret the care seeker's narrative, practices, and meaning systems may believe in an exclusivist way that their meaning system is the only true

meaning system.”¹⁸ This may not be an acknowledged bias, but an assumption that the world views of others fit nicely and completely into the worldview of the caregiving chaplain.

Although the caregiving chaplain may intend no harm, real work must be done to learn about the uniqueness of the other. “Given the coercive and violent history of Christianity’s participation in colonialism, spiritual care professionals need to be aware of the implicit comparative method underlying their practices of care, lest they colonize the religious or spiritual world of those who are not Christians.”¹⁹ Those who are the colonizers are unable to grasp the impact that their actions have on others.

One particular action in a caregiving interaction is that of touch. A discussion came up about the proper use of touch and, more specifically, hugging. A female chaplain expressed that she occasionally hugs people she knows or with whom she has deployed. I expressed that I seldom feel comfortable hugging another person. As a tall, white, educated, male, officer chaplain, I realize some significant physical and power dynamics can affect the conversation. I do realize that sometimes a homesick Sailor wants to be comforted with a hug. Many inappropriate relationships begin with a single touch.

I did not tell the female chaplain that she should not hug people, but I did share with her that a hug appears different depending on who is initiating it and who it is between. This simple observation is lost on some. One chaplain I worked with made a habit of hugging every man he knew. Interestingly, he didn’t hug females. Still, he developed a reputation on the waterfront for being strange. Rather than being corrected, many in leadership thought that was just his “style.” I suspect that his actions did not help his career as he failed to promote.

¹⁸ Carrie Doehring, “The Practice of Relational-Ethical Pastoral Care: An Intercultural Approach,” in *Navigating Religious Difference in Spiritual Care and Counseling: Essays in Honor of Kathleen J. Greider* (Claremont Press, 2019), 46.

¹⁹ Doehring, “The Practice of Relational-Ethical Pastoral Care: An Intercultural Approach.”, 46.

Chaplains in the military often have not done the necessary work to understand their own biases and blind spots. The Navy is not a place to be insecure or uncertain of one's job. A common misconception is that Chaplains are underappreciated and/or underutilized. A recent report²⁰ shared many valuable actions to take to raise morale and lower the rates of suicide in the military. In one email discussion, a chaplain responded to the report with the following commentary:

Search for 'chaplain' in this document. 'Chaplain' appears 4 times, each is incidental and inconsequential. It's astonishing that a \$2.4 million study and report completely ignored Chaplains. Especially considering recent data (from last year's PDTC²¹) indicates that religious practice is the #1 preventive measure against suicide. The document has ZERO mentions of religion. Comfort dogs get a paragraph while Chaplains are ignored. If ever you needed an example of intellectual dishonesty, this is it.

Meanwhile, the report mentions Psychiatrists eight times, Chaplains four times, Psychologists four times, and Social Workers two times. Chaplains are included just as much as any of the other care-taking professions that would be relevant to the conversation of suicide. To perpetuate the narrative that "chaplains are ignored" is dishonest. Yet, many Chaplains would support this argument.

If Chaplains are ignored, it is all too often because of their own desire to be left alone that contributes to irrelevance. Supervisory (O5 and O6) Chaplains are often looking toward retirement or their next assignment. All too often the chaplains they supervise are looking for decisions and direction from leadership. Recently, our department head did not appear in our office on a normal workday. The next day he notified the assistant department head that he had

²⁰ SPRIRC. "Preventing Suicide in the U.S. Military: Recommendations from the Suicide and Response Independent Committee." Department of Defense, January 4, 2023.

²¹ Professional Development Training Course. An annual three-day course for all Navy Chaplains and RPs. It is often accompanied with the Professional Development Training Workshop creating a four-day training environment.

“installations at his house” and wouldn’t be coming in again. None of these conflicts were detailed to the team or explained in advance. The staff noted his behavior and the example he set.

When chaplains complain that a report only mentions chaplains four times, it is situations like the unexplained absences described above that contribute to the perception that chaplains are being “ignored.” Examples of poor leadership abound. The simple act of carrying an after-hours duty phone is a challenge for some chaplains. Chaplains I have supervised have slept through phone calls, put themselves in positions where they are unable to answer the phone, and generally avoided going into the hospital when a phone call comes and their presence is warranted. Chaplains are not being “ignored”; they are intentionally hard to reach.

The culprit is most likely unrealized burnout and fatigue. In all of the above issues, more self-care and time away from the office may help chaplains engage when called upon. Operational tempos in the Navy are high for chaplains as the current goal is to have a chaplain on every destroyer in the fleet. There are currently 72 destroyers and 17 cruisers in the US Navy. The DDG-51 Initiative was created to help mitigate stress on destroyers. This initiative strives to have a chaplain as a part of the ship’s company rather than just a rider. While this is a rich and valuable service opportunity, life on a small ship in the US Navy is incredibly taxing. Close quarters, few port calls, and very few places to have time away from those you minister to contribute to compassion fatigue.

This compassion fatigue from operational billets carries over to shore duty. It is typical for a chaplain to rotate from operational duties to shore duty. With an emphasis on persistent operational readiness comes fatigue when there is no bandwidth to recover. No chaplain signs up to be a “bad” chaplain, but when someone is exhausted, they need rest. If self-care is not scheduled and purposeful, poor performance results.

“When are you Chaplains going to join the Navy?”²² This question was offered by a seasoned Religious Program Specialist Chief who has observed a lack of professionalism from Chaplains over his entire career. A simple interview with Religious Program Specialists (RPs) will reveal horror stories of Chaplains who abuse their authority and shirk their responsibilities; in doing so, they sabotage their ministry and hurt those who work with them. Too many have created moral injury in the RP ranks. The action of Chaplains who disregard kindness is more than just one person having a bad day; it is a pattern of behavior that needs correction.

When correction comes, there is a double standard between RPs and Chaplains. Chaplains are given a pass because they represent the divine. RPs are dealt with more harshly; consistent with those in the enlisted ranks. This is typical between officers and enlisted, but Chaplains have greater leniency than other officers stemming from the freedom and access they are given. Most have never been enlisted and do not initially understand the difference between enlisted and officer.

While some RPs may be in need of correction and improvement, contributing to it may be lack of leadership from the Chaplain. There are also Chaplains who also need correction and improvement, but do not receive the coaching or feedback that would make them better managers. Providing coaching and feedback takes time and energy. Chaplains who do not seek out guidance for improvement rarely receive any.

Another frequent occurrence in the Chaplain Corps is the insecurity of supervisory chaplains when confronted with a hard-charging chaplain they are leading. There is an all too-present fear of being exposed as lazy, unrelatable, and/or irrelevant at this level. A Commander (O-5) Chaplain recently shared an interaction he had with his Supervisory (Captain, O-6) Chaplain. The O-5 Chaplain is a second-tour, hard-working, and fair chaplain. The O-6

²² RPC Myron “Russ” Andrews, USN

Chaplain raised questions on how he was managing the religious program at the air wing. The O-5 chaplain replied that their Commanding Officer had zero complaints or concerns about how the chaplain was doing.

This was not satisfactory for the O-6. Presumably, to show that some supervisory work was being done, the O-6 tasked the subordinate with meaningless projects that the CO did not request nor desire. Ultimately, the Command Religious Program is owned by the Commanding Officer. What the CO wants, the CO gets.

Chaplains are unique in the military in that they have more than one superior; there is a staff corps chain of command and chaplains work for COs, not other chaplains. There is a chronic amnesia by supervisory chaplains that this is the case. When the fear of being exposed as a lazy, unrelatable, and/or irrelevant chaplain becomes too great, bad supervisory decisions are not too far behind. The embarrassment is that almost everyone in the command knows what is happening. Certainly, other Chaplains and RPs see through the charade.

The antidote is authentic caring. Authentic caring is challenging because it takes effort and empathy. It takes an imagination to think about what the other person is going through. It takes work! It takes self-reflection to understand how a chaplain can or cannot connect with the pain of another. It takes the needs of the other and momentarily places them in greater importance than the needs of the chaplain. "This opening up of oneself to the other arises from a radical recognition that this obligation to and responsibility for the other comes first."²³ The conversation and relationship does not occur to nurture the chaplain, it is for the other. Stated another way, the action is not to benefit the caregiver, but the one needing care.

²³ Carrie Doehring, "The Practice of Relational-Ethical Pastoral Care: An Intercultural Approach," in *Navigating Religious Difference in Spiritual Care and Counseling: Essays in Honor of Kathleen J. Greider* (Claremont Press, 2019), 56.

Experienced chaplains may try to reinvent themselves as a mentor or guide to younger chaplains. The tragedy is what worked for them in their early years, likely won't work now. There is a constant need to learn the current culture of the military, the demographics and motivations of the Sailors and Marines entering the service, and make adjustments to connect with the newest servicemembers. The culture, however, is taught to honor, respect, and follow rank. Chaplains do not always acknowledge this and think that their subordinates truly like them or care for them. Instead, they have ignored their rank and the benefits it bestows.

There are painful consequences for the servicemembers a chaplain works with when they don't acknowledge their privilege. Life in the military is difficult. No rank or job is exempt from frequent and unexpected moves, time away from loved ones, and doing undesirable tasks. This is the nature of war. A chaplain who does not practice adequate self-care can become overwhelmed psychically or emotionally by the pain of the people they serve. It becomes difficult to discern who is the most miserable on a typical sea deployment. "Being in a ship is like being in jail, with the chance of being drowned," is the way 18th-century writer Samuel Johnson put it. The chaplain on board has the best quality of life²⁴ among the crew and still experiences significant difficulty.

The chaplain at sea loses credibility when they don't acknowledge the privilege they have compared to the crew and process their loneliness and frustration. The soul who starts to feel sorry for themselves will garner no sympathy from the Ensign who is standing watch from midnight to 0400 in a sea that has multiple close contacts. In such an environment the chaplain

²⁴ The chaplain at sea does not stand watch, sets their own hours, can take a nap in the middle of the day, can work out when they want and really only provides a daily prayer and a weekly service. Most Sailors would dream of such a relaxed time at sea.

should respond to the people's needs while somehow processing their personal experience separately.²⁵

The struggle is real and chaplains are human. The person closest to the chaplain is the Religious Program Specialist, their enlisted helper. This person often suffers the brunt and worst of a chaplain's frustrations. Some chaplains fail to allow their RPs to go to physical training when throughout the military it is understood that this is a healthy way to deal with stress and necessary to remain in physical readiness standards. Other chaplains require their RPs to do menial service tasks for them.²⁶ The desire to have a better quality of life comes at the expense of those closest to the chaplain and results in more stress for the RP.

The US Navy Chaplain Corps has many weaknesses, particularly training candidates for the sea services. The addition of more chaplains without adequate vetting and professional standards will create a greater drain and strain on the administration of chaplains. We can't do more with less. We can only do less with less.

²⁵ Having typed this sentence, I realize how darn near impossible it is for a caregiver at sea to process their own experience. The only thing available for self care is exercise and a little time for personal ritual. I ran on a treadmill, read the Bible, stared out over the ocean, and tried to find quiet places to be alone. Other than those items, the traditional methods to avoid compassion fatigue—time with family and friends, a good conversation, restful sleep, time off, visiting a therapist—these were unavailable at sea.

²⁶ An RP relayed a story to me of a chaplain who required an RP to enter 100 personal names and numbers into his government phone. The chaplain was upset when a name lacked a capital letter or had a misspelling.

A Theological Basis for Change

One passage of scripture that speaks to the situation well is that of the Samaritan who helped the traveler who had been attacked.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”²⁷

This parable speaks to the importance of care regardless of the other person. The priest and the Levite did not want to get involved. The reasons for not caring for the man who was attacked are many. Maybe the priest and the Levite did not want to get attacked themselves, maybe they were afraid they could not help, maybe they were in a hurry, or maybe they were experiencing ministerial burnout. They also may have had a fear that interacting with the man would make them unclean. Maybe they did not want to get into the messiness of ministry. For whatever reason the opportunity to render aid was missed.

²⁷ Luke 10:25-37

The unlikeliest of people was the person who got involved. It has become lost in translation but “the Good Samaritan” would have been an oxymoron to the first listeners of this parable. Samaria was the land of half-religious people. It was not good in the eyes of the religious leaders. Yet, people who are on the outside are often people who have good moments and can do good things. Those who are on the outside are those who may need the greatest amount of care from the chaplain.

A request came into the office for a couple to meet with a chaplain for pre-marriage counseling. I offered the information to the staff and asked who would like to meet with the couple. A chaplain said that he would take the request and meet with the couple. He was a little surprised when he found out the couple was two males. He began to work toward seeing if another chaplain could do the pre-marriage counseling. There is a balance of the beliefs of the chaplain and the needs of others. In this situation, the beliefs of the chaplain prohibited him from interacting with a Sailor’s needs. The Sailor is forced to get the services they desire from someone else or go without their needs being met.

DoDI 1300.17, states “c. In accordance with Section 533(b) of Public Law 112-239, as implemented by DoD Instruction 1304.28, no servicemember may require a chaplain to perform any rite, ritual, or ceremony that is contrary to the conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs of the chaplain, nor may any Servicemember discriminate or take any adverse personnel action on the basis of the refusal by the chaplain to comply with such requirements.” What requires much greater clarification is what is a “rite, ritual, or ceremony.” If an LGBTQ+ couple were disagreeing about the finances of their shared home, is this conversation a “rite, ritual, or ceremony?” These are two individuals who disagree, yet many conservative chaplains would not be open to counseling or working with the couple and would refer them to someone else.

It is too easy for a chaplain to claim the “rite, ritual, or ceremony” excuse to abrogate their responsibilities and fail to complete the mission in not “caring for all.” What this does is put a greater load on the chaplains who are willing to care for all. In some situations, needs will go unmet because there is only one chaplain in a geographic location. Fewer chaplains are truly willing to care for all and as a result, those willing often find that they share a greater burden. Facilitation should be reserved for differences of religion, not for different views of relationships.

I remember vividly the moment I became accepting of women having the same opportunities in ministry. I was in a job interview for a PCUSA church, and I was asked by the panel how I felt about women in ministry. I responded that I was fully accepting of women in ministry. Prior to that question, I was conflicted and had dodged having to make a decision. The Bible had things to say about women being subservient to men, and I did not want to be contrary to the Word of God. I also did not understand why it mattered since I had experienced women doing everything men do. When I responded that I was fully accepting of women in ministry, I did so because I desired to be hired by the church (which I was). I also was open to the idea that many people had various interpretations of the passages and that I had not done much personal reflection on women in ministry.

The issue at hand is that the United States Navy is a secular institution that has many beliefs that could be contrary to an individual chaplain’s beliefs and those should be fully vetted to ensure the best candidates are selected for the Chaplain Corps. To my knowledge, there are no Jehovah’s Witness Military Chaplains. “Jehovah's Witnesses are conscientiously opposed to war

and to their participation in such in any form whatsoever.”²⁸ Their faith precludes them from serving because the military is contrary to their faith.

There would be a greater opportunity for ministry and care for Sailors if chaplains would select out of military service if they could not participate in marriage retreats, monthly cultural and racial celebrations, or counseling of individuals based on who they are and how they identify. It has been asked, why would any couple want a chaplain who disagreed with their love in the first place? My response is, why would you want to serve in an organization that values and affirms love that you disagree with?

Getting back to the chaplain that was uncomfortable counseling an LGBTQ+ couple, what the chaplain did was fully within the realm of facilitation. He did not feel comfortable doing the counseling. There are similarities in my mind between the parable of the man attacked by robbers and this couple. In the parable, the priest and the Levite did not help the man. We will never know why but we know their actions. In the case of pre-marriage counseling, the military acknowledges marriage in a broader sense than the chaplain did. This is an example of the convictions of a chaplain creating more work for those chaplains who have a more open mindset.

It is helpful to understand Christian Chaplains' open mindset on a scale between Fundamentalism and Christian Orthodoxy (CO). “By orthodox Christianity we mean the acceptance of well-defined, central tenets of the Christian religion. In large measure these tenets are contained in the officially adopted "credos" of the various denominations (e.g., ‘I believe in God, the Father Almighty creator of heaven and earth...’).”²⁹ “In contrast, fundamentalism

²⁸ “Words of Conscience: Statements by Religious Organizations on Conscientious Objection.” Accessed December 8, 2023. <https://centeronconscience.org/jehovahs-witnesses/>.

²⁹ J. Timothy Fullerton and Bruce Hunsberger, “A Unidimensional Measure of Christian Orthodoxy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, no. 4 (1982): 318.

generally has been characterized in terms of something other than belief content.”³⁰ The difference between Christian Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism may be the cause for a chaplain to decide to facilitate for an individual (that is to “hand them off”) or care for an individual (that is to engage with them). What Lee A. Kirkpatrick determined is worth noting. “The results of this study underscore the importance of distinguishing fundamentalism from Christian orthodoxy in the study of religion and prejudice... Fundamentalism was more positively correlated than CO with all five measures of discriminatory attitude.”³¹

In my experience, chaplains who possess a greater sense of Christian Orthodoxy are generally less discriminatory than those who have a greater sense of Fundamentalism. One interpretation of this is that non-Fundamentalist Chaplains can work with more of the population whom they serve. A darker interpretation of this is that Fundamentalist Chaplains may be more prone to discriminatory complaints. In either case, the military would do well to emphasize orthodoxy rather than fundamentalism in recruiting, training, and retaining chaplains.

When I step outside of my comfort zone, personal growth occurs. I would desire that the chaplain who declined the request for the two men to have pre-marriage counseling to challenge himself by saying yes to their request. I realize that to do so could be interpreted as going against the convictions that the chaplain has and impeding his rights. Yet, it reinforces the stereotype that the chaplain is judgmental and does not care for all. Any chaplain who chooses to not engage with someone loses an opportunity to connect with more people. More than missing out on a connection, a chaplain who does not engage misses out on the opportunity to have their ideas

³⁰ Lee Kirkpatrick, “Fundamentalism, Christian Orthodoxy, and Intrinsic Religious Orientation as Predictors of Discriminatory Attitudes,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32, no. 3 (1993): 257.

³¹ Kirkpatrick, “Fundamentalism, Christian Orthodoxy, and Intrinsic Religious Orientation as Predictors of Discriminatory Attitudes.”, 265.

stretched or challenged. There is a potential missed growth opportunity for both the chaplain and the person with whom they speak. In the Navy, Sailors talk. I cannot recount the number of referrals I receive because someone heard from someone else that I was a good person to talk to.³² If a chaplain does not engage, they run the risk of being marginalized and avoided and create greater burdens for other chaplains.

In the 1982 movie *Star Trek Two: The Wrath of Khan*, the viewers are introduced to a training exercise involving the Kobayashi Maru. A civilian starship, it is in a dangerous position and in need of rescue. When an attempt is made to rescue the ship, an enemy appears and attacks the rescuing ship. There is no way to “win” the scenario. Either the Kobayashi Maru crew perishes, or the rescuing ship perishes.

I often wonder if chaplains from more proselytizing traditions feel that they are in a no-win situation. When I ask about this tension, inevitably the response is “correct.” In a sense, they must operate in personal conflict. They proclaim at their religious organizational meetings that they are in the military to make converts, yet they have to silence that overt agenda while in uniform. The ethic of the ends justifying the means wins out to satisfy their higher calling to save souls.

The supervisory chaplain faces no-win situations as well. They inherit the staff that is there and the leadership style from one supervisor to another can vary radically. As a newly minted supervisory chaplain, I had certain requirements and expectations of the staff that needed to be addressed. These included not offering commentary to patients on their personal opinions

³² At my first assignment, I became labeled as the “gay” chaplain. Not because I am gay, but because I was the only chaplain of three at the command who would talk to LGBTQ+ Sailors. At the time, I was far less comfortable talking with LGBTQ+ people, but I believed that they needed someone to talk to and I was the only chaplain who would.

of medical procedures, staying awake and not falling asleep in public places during work hours, answering the duty phone when it rang, parking in appropriately designated parking spaces, not tampering with tamper-resistant seals, active participation in Zoom meetings, coordinating care for patients, carrying military identification at all times, etc. An inability to adhere to these standards became a significant issue for two of the chaplains I supervised. Holding chaplains accountable to these criteria resulted in official complaints against me of religious discrimination, racism, creating a hostile work environment, and bullying. There are procedures and instructions on how to document substandard performance, but when put into practice, it was very difficult for these chaplains to accept guidance and critiques.

Inability to accept guidance and critiques is not a new challenge and within the Navy Chaplain Corps may be due in part to theological differences. Several religious organizations do not recognize the ordination of women. How then does a chaplain from those denominations accept leadership and guidance from a female supervisor? How does a chaplain accept leadership and guidance from a leader who may be in a “sinful” relationship? Many opportunities for incongruence may deeply trouble a chaplain either consciously or subconsciously.

Therein lies the challenge for leadership and encouraging junior chaplains to adhere to the standards of practice in the Navy. No one person is a perfect leader. Yet, all of the aforementioned issues I encountered with my staff were simple “do your job” items. By holding these chaplains accountable, my leadership style was questioned and ridiculous allegations resulted. . These were not issues about learning to be in the military, or mistakes from immaturity. Indeed, one of the complainants was three years my senior while the other was almost 40 years old on his second tour.

Unbeknownst to me, I was placed in the Kobayashi Maru—the unwinnable scenario with the chaplains I was to lead. If I did not hold them accountable to the Department of Defense Instructions, Professional Naval Chaplaincy, and a simple reasonable work ethic, I was guilty of not doing my job as a supervisor and Naval Officer. When I did hold them accountable, I was accused of creating a hostile work environment. Could my tone have been different? Should I have had another person in the room to witness the conversation? Could I have offered better training? I suppose so. These complaints may ultimately result in a failure to promote and possibly being processed out of the military.³³

I realize that diversity creates a vast array of subcultures within an institution. I appreciate diversity and am often involved in events celebrating diversity in the Navy. What needs clarification is how to balance individual diversity with the culture of the Navy and the needs to accomplish the mission.

There is a parallel between a chaplain balancing individual convictions with the needs of others in the pericope of children coming to Jesus.

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.³⁴

At the time, the disciples collectively held the conviction that little children were not worth Jesus’ time. The radical nature of this has been lost through the centuries of Sunday

³³ As I shared this idea with others in positions similar to mine, I found it to be a common frustration. Many of those I spoke with were eager to get out of the Navy and work in an environment where they were not second guessed so often and had the freedom to hire and fire people. If this sounds absurd, it is.

³⁴ Matthew 19:13-15 (NIV).

School, Vacation Bible School, and children's messages as part of worship. This specific example deals with ageism. There is no age too young for the kingdom of heaven. This was not always a foregone conclusion. Throughout the Christian Scriptures, there is no demographic outside of the kingdom of heaven. No one is excluded. Adulterers, Insurrectionists, Murderers, Thieves, Soldiers, Men, Women, Slaves, Eunuchs, Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, the list could go on and on, but there is a radical inclusivity in the kingdom of heaven. The aforementioned example is Christocentric, but it is important to state because most of the chaplains who hold individual convictions come from a Christocentric theology.

Many of my leadership mistakes occurred when I expected subordinates to know and abide by Naval Instruction.³⁵ Chaplains new to the Navy know less about the Navy and more about their denomination and theological training. There is a benefit when a chaplain understands that they have much to learn about that which they do not know. While a chaplain is a subject matter expert on religion (especially their own) they are neophytes (unless they were prior enlisted and that brings a whole slew of challenges) when it comes to Naval Customs, Procedures, and Traditions. Five weeks of Officer Development School and eight weeks of Chaplain School cannot fully prepare anyone for the complexities and challenges of operational ministry in a secular service.

I have reflected long and hard on my Navy Chaplain supervisory experiences and I hope that my leadership style has improved now that I realize that every conflict I face with a subordinate could be another Kobayashi Maru situation. These encounters made me realize that I

³⁵ In retrospect, it was quite foolish for me to think that a chaplain would willingly become a student of naval instructions and follow them. This is something that I would do, but as I moved into a supervisory role, I realized that supervisors know the instructions and few of those they lead are aware. It is the supervisor's role to instruct, remind, train, drill and teach others what is included in those naval instructions.

am always one Command Managed Equal Opportunity (CMEO) Complaint away from the end of my career.

The very word “Command” may be the key problem. How the local command conducts inquiries into the complaints creates a potential unnecessary loss of productivity. In all three CMEO complaints in which I have been involved, the investigation begins simply because someone submits paperwork. There is no discernment to evaluate the allegations before beginning that process. There could be value in asking an initial question, “If the alleged statements were true, would they constitute a violation of equal opportunities for all?”

How Change Could Occur

Will the system change? Can the system change?

So each system forces us to play in certain ways, and you have to look not only at what it's doing but also at what it forces you to do. We have the capacity to sail in any system; we also have the capacity to try to change it. That's the dangerous way to go, because we're going to be criticized, rejected, excommunicated, and maybe even killed.³⁶

At the risk of being criticized, rejected, and excommunicated (I am not going to touch the last one on the list), I have highlighted situations where and when the system and the institution failed me and others. There are many for whom the system works well enough, and it is possible they hear my concerns as the grouching of an unhappy minority caught up in workplace drama. Until fate or something bad happens to them, there may not be an acknowledgment of a problem.

Yet, the problem persists. Many in the military struggle with the basic expectations of being in the military. These are not necessarily brand-new accessions. They are people in leadership positions who grew up in a Navy that no longer resembles the institution they sign up to serve. The military is incredibly resistant to listening to the needs and desires of the average servicemember. When confronted with abhorrent working and living conditions, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, Russell Smith said, "What you're not doing is sleeping in a foxhole like a Marine might be doing."³⁷ The suggestion is that there is no reason to change because things are not as bad as they could be.

³⁶Jeff Bridges and Bernie Glassman, *The Dude and the Zen Master* (New York, New York: Plume, 2012): 115.

³⁷ Konstantin Toropin, "Navy's Top Enlisted Leader Tells George Washington Crew at Least They Aren't 'Sleeping in a Foxhole Like a Marine,'" *Military.com*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/04/26/navys-top-enlisted-leader-tells-george-washington-crew-least-they-arent-sleeping-foxhole-marine.html>.

Paradoxically, the Sailor's Creed that is taught in basic training states:

I am a United States Sailor.

I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and I will obey the orders of those appointed over me.

I represent the fighting spirit of the Navy and those who have gone before me to defend freedom and democracy around the world.

I proudly serve my country's Navy combat team with Honor, Courage, and Commitment.

I am committed to excellence and the fair treatment of all.³⁸

There are numerous ways that Navy leadership fails on these precepts, but the most glaring of all is the final sentence. What does it mean to be committed to excellence? Excellence in the workplace is not often agreed upon nor defined. Perhaps a better commitment might be to improvement. What would fair treatment of all look like? When treatment results in someone being treated unfairly, am I ok when I perceive that I am being treated unfairly? Fair treatment for all becomes frustratingly subjective when two Sailors are striving for the same singular opportunity.

Interestingly, the first version of the Sailor's Creed (created in 1986) started with the sentence, "I have chosen to serve in the United States Navy."³⁹ This is a significant difference from the current version. The 1986 version allowed for volunteering to be a Sailor. The current version reduces the individual's identity to that of a Sailor. Being a Sailor supersedes your former identity. You are not merely in the Navy now, you ARE the NAVY.⁴⁰

³⁸ "Sailor's Creed," accessed December 8, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor%27s_Creed.

³⁹ "Sailor's Creed."

⁴⁰ Many the young Sailor has quickly learned what NAVY stands for, Never Again Volunteer Yourself.

The definition of the individual is central to the creation of a worldview. I have had many conversations with servicemembers about their identity. What is the individual's relationship to the institution? The Gospel's view on the relationship of an individual to God and to the empire is informative. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And they were amazed at him."⁴¹ This statement instructs me that I have responsibilities to the government, and I have responsibilities to God. Just as a Navy Chaplain learns to "balance the collars,"⁴² everyone who has faith must determine how that faith interacts with their allegiance to a country. In the pledge of allegiance, we recognize "One nation under God." It has been helpful for me to realize my primary allegiance is to God and my secondary allegiance is to the nation. My identity as a follower of Christ is more important than any other title I hold. The rights afforded by the First Amendment come before all else.

The United States Navy is slow to change and to recognize its shortcomings. The words recited in training become mere platitudes in the fleet. It is either too difficult or too inconvenient to be committed to excellence. Excellence takes work. The institution lags behind what is done on the deck plates out at sea. Those in leadership are always distanced from the direct actions subordinates are making. This will always be the case and necessitates higher leadership to listen and not ignore the problems of the average Sailor.

I once attended a college Bible study where the pastor shared on multiple occasions, "Don't go away mad, just go away." I fear this is the manner that the Navy would like most conflicts to be resolved. In the Bible study I attended, conflict was viewed as not only inevitable

⁴¹ Mark 12:17

⁴² The Navy Service Khaki Uniform that Chaplains wear has a religious emblem on the left collar and a rank device on the right. There is a tension between the two identities of a religious leader and a staff corps officer.

but unresolvable. In a strange twist of exegesis, this church proclaimed an interesting interpretation of Acts 15:39-41, which reads:

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.⁴³

This conflict was viewed as a positive event because it resulted in “strengthening the churches.” While most human beings do not desire conflict, this verse and its interpretation do not desire positive reconciliation but rather counsels separation and possible competition.

As this paper brings to light my difficult reality, I expect the concerns that I highlighted will be categorized as the overreaction of an overly sensitive complainer. This is not surprising when the system works well for so many. It can also be stated that the system worked for me when my supervisor who was inappropriate was removed and the allegations against me were unsubstantiated. What is a concern is the frequency with which these events happen, the loss of work, and the emotional strain it puts on all who are involved.

When I was informed of the first complaint by the Executive Officer (XO), he stated that if you are in the Navy for any amount of time and are being effective, complaints will arise. I was stunned because I thought I was just doing my job in the manner in which I had been trained. Are these conflicts truly inevitable?

There were no after-action discussions of what the contributing factors were to the CMEC complaints and that is one area which could use improvement and more transparency. When a mishap takes place in the Navy that involves damage to material or human injury or

⁴³ Acts 15:39-41 NIV

death, there is generally an extensive after-action investigation that takes place. No such after-action investigation occurs following a CMEO complaint. The responsibility is placed entirely upon the accused. Inevitably, the action taken is to move that one person and “ta-da” the problem is solved.

I am in my ninth month of ongoing physical and mental health therapy, and I am only beginning to see slight progress in healing. The official policy of the Navy states:

Seeking help is a sign of strength. If you, your shipmate, or a loved one are having trouble navigating stress or experiencing a crisis, help is always available. Seeking help is a sign of strength and a sign of the good judgment and reliability needed to thrive in your Navy career. You can reach out to your local Fleet and Family Support Center, Deployed Resilience Counselor, civilian or military mental health provider, or any of the following free and confidential resources.⁴⁴

I have experienced numerous times in the past nine months when I have painfully realized that seeking mental health help is not a sign of strength. I share my struggles to inspire others to seek help. Supervisors and subordinates alike have used this information against me. The message is clear. If you do seek help, do so quietly and do not let anyone know. The Navy all too frequently treats machines like people and people like machines. The priority is placed on the ship, the aircraft, and the mission while all the while forgetting that it is Sailors and Marines who determine how the ship goes to sea, how the aircraft flies, and how the mission is accomplished. It’s as if the human element is buried, forgotten, or left behind.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus interacts with the military of his day. “Then some soldiers asked him (Jesus), ‘And what should we do?’ He replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse

⁴⁴“Getting Help,” accessed February 16, 2024, <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Support-Services/Culture-Resilience/Suicide-Prevention/Getting-Help/#:~:text=Seeking%20help%20is%20a%20sign,thrive%20in%20your%20Navy%20career>

people falsely—be content with your pay.’’⁴⁵ It may be an oversimplification to say that Jesus expects soldiers to be respectful and honest, but it seems that those concepts fit here.

Of course, the difficulty comes in situations when others are not respectful nor honest. A common phrase I overheard in Afghanistan was, “We kill people who kill people because killing people is wrong.” I have the most difficulty in leading people when they seemingly do not play by the rules I thought to be the standard.

Taking on the Kobayashi Maru (A.K.A. What Would Captain Kirk Do?)⁴⁶

I knew a submarine Commanding Officer who had an unorthodox style of leadership. He explained to his crew that the Navy had placed so many requirements and instructions on the crew that the CO believed that there was no way his submarine could get underway if all of the rules were followed. He shared that the Navy would add requirements and never take them away. There were items on checklists that could not be adequately inspected because of time. He instructed his crew that he knew that there was no possible way to do everything, yet safety was of utmost importance when diving below the waves. He said if you need to avoid an item on the checklist, check it with at least one other person, and if both agree, skip ahead on the checklist.

This CO had a successful command tour and the morale of his crew was high. He trusted those he led and they would follow him to the ends of the Earth. So how does this apply to the state of the chaplain corps?

⁴⁵ Luke 3:14

⁴⁶ Spoiler Alert: Captain Kirk reprogrammed the simulation in order that he could rescue the Kobayashi Maru without being attacked.

The CO was faced with a no-win situation. He changed expectations to accomplish the mission. Likewise, the Navy has placed expectations on the chaplain corps that are no-win. There are days when a chaplain's commitment to excellence will just not be there. Just because you recite the Sailor's Creed does not mean you believe it. If the Navy does not change expectations to meet reality, the chaplain on the deck plates needs to improvise, adapt, and overcome the no-win situation.

What does that look like? How does a chaplain manage? The first and clearest step is to emphasize the goal of the workday. Why are we here? What are we doing? The most irreducible answer is that chaplains care for people. If a chaplain is apathetic, there is no use for them. Who are the people they need to care for? That comes back to the question asked of Jesus earlier, "And who is my neighbor?"⁴⁷ A chaplain needs to care for their neighbor and their neighbor is anyone who is in front of them. I found a T-shirt that reads:

Love thy foreign, homeless, prostitute, imprisoned, disabled, gay, straight, transgender, enemy, blue collar, white collar, old, young, black, white, lonely, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, atheist, male, female, racist, addicted, rich, poor, liberal, conservative, different from you, _____ neighbor.⁴⁸

As if the list were not exhaustive enough there is a blank for anyone who was missed. This is not a list that is specific to any religion and arguably it acknowledges the differences we can exhibit as a result of the First Amendment. This is the core value that all professional chaplains would do well to incorporate in their ministries.

⁴⁷ Luke 10:29b

⁴⁸"Love Thy Neighbor," accessed December 8, 2023, <https://sixthandvintage.com/products/love-thy-neighbor>.

Embrace Conflict

A great deal of pain comes when newer chaplains do not realize how denominational differences lead to conflict. There is no such thing as an all-encompassing protestant denomination. Protestantism (a broad category that makes up the majority of Navy Chaplains) has various interpretations about many theological points that have caused centuries of church conflict. While most Protestant Christians believe in the supremacy of Jesus Christ there is a divergence when the conversation moves much beyond that foundational concept. Issues such as the inspiration of scripture, the Trinity, the atonement, baptism, communion, marriage, dietary restrictions, and sexuality just to name a few, divide Protestant Christianity into various fiefdoms.

When a chaplain meets another chaplain there may be a temptation to identify the other as someone similar. After all, they are both Christian Chaplains. In practice, one may baptize infants while the other may dedicate babies. One chaplain may be queer while the other chaplain does not recognize the ordination of queer people. One chaplain may view scripture as perfect and inerrant while the other may be open to a looser approach and appreciate other holy texts as well. The problem is exacerbated when the difference becomes an “I’m right and the other person is wrong.” While this is a stance that a religious organization may adopt, the separation of church and state does not engage in theological debate. Chaplains are different from one another and the diversity is valuable to the military.

A healthy appreciation of chaplains who have different perspectives and practices from one’s tradition is the beginning of understanding. Moreover, a supervisor does well when they realize how an individual chaplain’s theological beliefs may clash with Navy culture. I recently had to explain to a chaplain who had been in the Navy less than two years that it is not against

the Uniform Code of Military Justice for a supervisory chaplain to use foul language, raise their voice, be grumpy, or give lawful orders that may be disagreeable. While some of these may be unkind, these actions are not unlawful. It seemed very strange to me that someone could be in the military and not understand that such actions may become common in times of stress or combat. I have heard it said, “That incoming missile does not care about your bad day.”

There have been times in my career where I know I can be difficult to work with. It seems that few other chaplains share my intensity⁴⁹. I believe strongly that the person seeking the help of a chaplain ought to be cared for promptly, in a way they need to be cared for, by someone they trust. In the difficult process of collaborative ministry, a chaplain could get their feelings hurt by another caregiver. An emphasis on “this isn’t about you” is required to provide the best care for the other. All too often, a chaplain does not acknowledge their ego and their desire to be respected. In a time of need, a person needs a caring team who does not focus on the individual caregiver’s ego or who gets the credit.

The possibility of forming care teams exists in the Navy but they are sadly often viewed as another bothersome requirement. The Marine Corps does a much better job of creating Human Factors Teams consisting of Military Family Life Counselors (MFLCs), Family Readiness Officers (FROs), chaplains, psychologists, doctors, and the chain of command. The Navy seems to have the misfortune of treating people like parts and parts like people. There is an overemphasis on ships and an underappreciation of the humans who accomplish the mission.

⁴⁹ It has been said by peers that I make caffeine nervous. My attention span has been compared to that of a caffeinated squirrel. It has also been debated whether I am high strung or merely tightly wound.

“They’re Called Orders, Maverick”

In the 2022 film *Top Gun: Maverick*, an entirely plausible dialogue takes place:

Maverick: I have to admit I wasn't expecting an invitation back.

Adm. Solomon 'Warlock' Bates: They're called *orders*, Maverick.⁵⁰

While one would not think that a Captain in the Navy would ever forget about rank structure, this fictitious conversation illustrates a common theme in today’s military. Subordinates sometimes forget who is in charge. As the United States Military moves into a peacetime posture after twenty years of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, servicemembers will increasingly forget how war changes things.

Wartime leaders generally have less time to acquire buy-in and brainstorm ideas. Many incoming servicemembers expect to have their opinions solicited or have opportunities to share. I believe in the last fourteen years the military experience has changed. Leaders are learning to guide others how they would like to be led and not how they feel most comfortable leading. This is the current challenge of leadership. On the one hand, there are orders and on the other hand is the question of whether the recipient accepts those orders.

While it is difficult to imagine this, it is a conundrum that must not be overlooked. As the struggle for recruiting continues, leadership needs to find ways to accomplish the mission while retaining the commitment of the troops. Keeping morale at a level where Sailors maintain effectiveness is becoming increasingly difficult.

Recently, the department I work in had to provide people for an expected, undesirable deployment. Two chaplains and three Religious Program Specialists (RPs) were needed. Due to

⁵⁰ Top Gun: Maverick, 2022 paramount pictures

unique scheduling issues, the two chaplains originally designated had changes of orders that kept them from deploying. Immediately, every chaplain in the department who was potentially deployable, came up with valid excuses for why they could not go. Family issues, health issues, separation issues, and the like became hurdles to overcome in order to find chaplains who would go. Likewise, the RPs shared similar concerns. For the RPs, one was unable to deploy because of the stress caused by one of the chaplains.

This situation caused me to reflect and share with all involved that there are few guarantees in the Navy and in a world where war can break out at any moment. The Navy does not have to provide warning when a deployment is imminent. Also, a Sailor's orders may suggest shore duty, but it is ultimately the needs of the Navy and whether one is physically able to deploy or not that determines whether a Sailor stays or goes.

Love Better

While there is considerable theological variation on the concept of love, the majority of Naval Chaplains come from Christian traditions that emphasize the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The overwhelming message of Jesus is to love. Love one another.⁵¹ Love enemies.⁵² Love sacrificially.⁵³ Love the unlovely.⁵⁴ These exhortations come from the Gospels, passages that most Christians find foundational to faith. Yet, chaplains can become some of the most judgmental people in the command.

⁵¹ John 13:34

⁵² Matthew 5:43-44

⁵³ John 15:13

⁵⁴ Luke 6:35

While there are many religions represented by chaplains, there is considerable overlap when it comes to the concept of care of one's neighbor. Most religions have something to say about community—the community of the faith and the community of those outside of the faith. Moreover, the Constitution of the United States of America (the document all servicemembers commit to defend against all enemies foreign and domestic) begins with, “We the people...” As citizens of the United States of America, there is an implied obligation to join together as citizens.

Community matters. The rights of an individual matter. There remains an opportunity to balance these two forces that are not in balance. When an individual joins the military, there is a loss of individuality. There is an entrance into an elite community. There is a collective identity that ought to be adopted while serving. For lack of a better term, there is a need to love the community. This love for the community is found in many scriptures as well as in the souls of many Medal of Honor Citations and recipients. There is a sacrificial love that is found in religion and service to the country that ought to be revisited.

Again, in the 1982 movie *Star Trek Two: The Wrath of Khan*, Spock's solution to the no-win situation is to use the rubric, “Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.” To which Captain Kirk responds, “Or the one.” In terms of ministry, the people who differ from me are many. The people who are like me are few.

To love the community better, a chaplain has the opportunity to allow the needs of the many to outweigh the needs of the few, or the one (the chaplain). I strive not to serve and minister to further my agenda, but to meet the needs of others.

Conclusion

All is not lost. What is required is a return to a “practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual...and demand high standards of behavior in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues.”⁵⁵ Three strategic suggestions to improve the Chaplain Corps emerged through processing the many conversations, instructions, and my personal experience. First, follow the instructions and processes in place. Second, thoroughly vet and select fewer chaplains to the Chaplain Corps and maintain a high standard. Third, respond to the needs of a changing demographic without judgment.

There are instructions and processes in place for the Navy Chaplain Corps to become more professional. The Navy Chaplain Corps has created the very template to make positive, significant changes possible. My strongest recommendation to right the ship is to follow the documents and instructions that already exist.

Additionally, the Navy Chaplain Corps has a choice to make since religious demographics in the United States are changing. Does the Chaplain Corps intend to bring Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen into the traditional spirituality of the past or will the Chaplain Corps acknowledge the needs of the people being recruited and adjust accordingly? It is my observation that it would be better to respond to the changes in society by acknowledging change and not fighting change. Majority religions may become minority religions and ministers need to adjust.

The Navy Chaplain Corps has done the work to create a strategic plan for Navy Chaplains.⁵⁶ There is a disconnect between the created document and implementation in the fleet.

⁵⁵ “What Is a Profession? Australian Council of Professions ACoP.” Accessed February 9, 2024. <https://professions.org.au/what-is-a-professional/>.

⁵⁶Gregory Todd, “Director of Religious Ministries Strategic Plan 2023” (United States Navy, 2023).

There are monthly and annual trainings for chaplains but often the individual chaplains put a low priority on attending and implementing the training.

Follow Instructions and Policies in Place

“An operational mindset keeps the warfighter in mind at all times.”⁵⁷ The goal of Naval Chaplaincy is to focus on the operational mindset of the warfighter. This is most definitely a growth area for most chaplains in the Navy Chaplain Corps. An operational mindset requires a spirit of humility, authenticity, and a willingness to learn from the warfighter and one another. I realize that some of my reflections in this paper might suggest I lack humility and a willingness to learn from others, but there is also the construct of rank and deference to authority. I suggest that there needs to be a time when chaplains can voice concerns and express opinions privately, while still maintaining respect toward the decisions of superiors.

Recently, senior leaders in the Chaplain Corps met at the Strategic Leadership Symposium to “learn and apply executive planning tools to build connections within their community and enable spiritual readiness execution plans.”⁵⁸ These chaplains have all reached the rank of Captain and have been in the Navy longer than most. While it is encouraging that they are building connections, it is also disheartening to read that after serving decades in this institution there is so much work still to be done in building connections.

“When you get a lot of very successful, talented, and intelligent people at this level together, sometimes we struggle to listen, work together, and trust each other,” said Captain Ben

⁵⁷ From Section 1.1 of the 2020 Strategic Plan found in the Appendix

⁵⁸ Sophia Bumps, “Chaplain Corps Gather in Olympia for 2023 Strategic Leadership Symposium,” DVIDS, July 26, 2023, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/450720/chaplain-corps-gather-olympia-2023-strategic-leadership-symposium>.

Sandford.⁵⁹ A spirit of humility, authenticity, and a willingness to learn from one another is needed to set the tone for subordinate officers to follow. While the strategic plan is a necessary document for the institution, professional teamwork is what is needed in the field and on the deckplates to implement the strategic plan. During the Strategic Leadership Symposium time was spent “intentionally working on our ability to trust and connect with one another, which is one of our primary goals this week.”⁶⁰ While this is necessary and helpful, it needs to be done at all levels of leadership and all ranks.

There are private conversations that can develop trust and connection. Indeed, understanding and appreciating differences with humility leads to better teamwork. A chaplain must understand that they are not infallible and have opportunities to learn and grow. This is true for both senior and subordinate. Both have opportunities to learn from one another.

There is a tool that is not used regularly that could help shape chaplains. Mid-Term Counseling is an opportunity to informally set goals and evaluate performance with a supervisor. A Navy Chaplain has an annual Fitness Report (FITREP) that is part of the official record of a chaplain. This is the form that promotion boards look at to determine who is and who is not promoted. The Mid-Term Counseling is part of the process, but since it is informal, it is frequently not done. It was not until I was in the Navy for five years that I realized that this was something every supervisor should do with all the staff they supervise.

Why it was not done for me prior to my five year mark is an enigma and may have been that my supervisors did not know of the option or perhaps I was doing an adequate job, so no counseling was needed. They also may have thought it was only to be used for punitive reasons.

⁵⁹ Sophia Bumps, “Chaplain Corps Gather in Olympia for 2023 Strategic Leadership Symposium,” DVIDS, July 26, 2023, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/450720/chaplain-corps-gather-olympia-2023-strategic-leadership-symposium>.

⁶⁰ Bumps, “Chaplain Corps Gather in Olympia for 2023 Strategic Leadership Symposium.”

When a supervisor finally shared the process with me, I realized there was an instruction and direction on how to perform the counseling and that it was an opportunity to help an individual focus on where they needed to grow and what they need to do to get there. Mid-Term Counseling is necessary and important to develop the professionalism of the Chaplain Corps. On more than one occasion, I had a higher-ranking officer take off their rank device and express that we were just two human beings talking. While the gesture was helpful, it is next to impossible to speak freely around someone with whom you do not feel safe.⁶¹ The practice of authentic, vulnerable discussion is something that occurs not just once a month, but rather requires regular check-ins.

The challenge is discerning what instructions and orders need to be followed, and which others, not so much. The authentic conversation needs to go both ways and just as superiors have eschewed their rank devices for a time, subordinates need to authentically ask, “What can I learn from this conversation?” Truth be told, there were times when I thought that I had nothing to learn from a supervisor and I look back at those times regretfully. Humility goes both ways.

Humility toward others should lead to an emphasis on caring for those who are different than the chaplain. Indeed, appreciation for the unique peculiarities that make each person an individual is truly a way of caring that transcends differences. If the military is going to protect the country it serves, the military needs all citizens to feel a part of the mission, both those who serve in the military and those whom the military serves. Everyone who is able needs to participate in the all-volunteer force. This forges a broader sense of ownership and participation in a democratic republic.

⁶¹ It is often asked during routine medical check ups, “Do you feel safe at home?” The response to the question should be, “Yes.” A retired chaplain remarked to me about this line of questioning, “Isn’t it interesting that they never ask us, “Do you feel safe at work!?” I fear that many chaplains do not feel safe at work around their supervisors.

Be More Selective

The quality of chaplains decreases when a recruiter is trying to fill quotas. If the chaplain corps could adopt the philosophy that, “a no hire is better than a bad hire” the time that would be saved in administrative actions would be significant. When a complaint is submitted, productivity drops as interviews are conducted and statements are submitted. Additionally, moving people from their workspaces to provide a safe space for those who filed complaints limits the productivity of both parties.

With fewer chaplains, more billets would be gapped. The workload for the chaplain corps would increase. There would be an attempt to “do more with less.” Rather than stretching chaplains, a strategic look at which billets could be gapped would be necessary. Installation chaplains and shore billets may decrease. Stress would increase in the Chaplain Corps.

The benefit would be fewer conflicts due to better candidates. Complaints, both those that are substantiated and unsubstantiated, interrupt so many workdays. Not hiring risky chaplains would benefit everyone.

The screening for new chaplains would benefit from requiring in-person schooling rather than online, a psychological evaluation, and a more robust continuation board process that would enable the Navy to send home those who were not adjusting well.

The Navy Chaplain Corps has always encouraged current chaplains to be on the lookout for potential new chaplains. “Every chaplain is a recruiter,” is frequently stated by higher ranking chaplains to remind the corps that we need to find the best and the brightest to add to the number. It is difficult to maintain quality when struggling for quantity. Many of the best requirements may be waived if a candidate is otherwise found worthy of being a chaplain. The phrase,

“everyone has a waiver” is common in the fleet and indeed I have at least one waiver in my record.

A common waiver is for age. The current information does not clearly state the age requirement⁶² but it was 35 years of age in 2009 when I joined. I was 36 at the time. It is not uncommon to find new chaplains in their late 40s and even early 50s. Many people have well-developed, sometimes rigid worldviews by middle age. The likelihood that an individual will respond well to the discipline of a younger supervisor is diminished. A more mature chaplain may feel that their civilian accomplishments are being overlooked or underappreciated. “Being stripped of the security blanket of past accomplishments can be uncomfortable. Business people don’t care about your past glories; they care about now.”⁶³

The Navy has a standard that requires individuals to request a waiver to stay beyond 62 years of age. An older individual may not have the incentive or ability to stay for 20 years and receive a pension, thus further reducing commitment to the institution.

The Navy Chaplain Corps needs good chaplains. “It’s hoping to hire 90 total new chaplains for active duty and the Naval Reserve during this fiscal year. So far, it’s added just 30 recruits.”⁶⁴ There is an axiom in American Football that states, “Take what the defense gives you.”⁶⁵ Put simply, if the defense is playing pass defense, run the ball. Conversely, if the defense is playing pass offense, run the ball. This may be a season where good chaplains are rare. Rather than lower the standards and give more waivers, perhaps the solution is to utilize other resources

⁶² “U.S. Navy Chaplain Jobs | Navy.Com.” Accessed February 4, 2024.

<https://www.navy.com/careers-benefits/careers/religious-services/navy-chaplain>.

⁶³ Richard G. Weigel, “Mid-Life Career Change: Taking the Plunge,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 67, no. 2 (1988): 123, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1988.tb02067.x>.

⁶⁴ “One of the Navy’s Current Recruiting Drives Is Focused on Faith,” *Deseret News*, May 19, 2023,

<https://www.deseret.com/faith/2023/5/19/23729049/navy-recruiting-chaplains-amid-shortage>.

⁶⁵ David Bernardino, ““Take What the Defense Gives You,”” *Ammunition* (blog), August 13, 2018, <https://medium.com/ammunitionagency/take-what-the-defense-gives-you-9ab89e7b8776>.

for care. Military Family Life Counselors and Social Workers are two resources that can help. They do not fulfill the role of a chaplain but they can complement a shortage of chaplains. The attitude of chaplains who say, “No one can do what a chaplain does” is counterproductive. What good is a chaplain who is not qualified to be a chaplain? Many human resources managers have said, “A no-hire is better than a bad hire.” Many individuals may not present as a “bad hire” but the facts remain that an older chaplain, with less institutional commitment, helps the Navy less. The requirements were put in place for a reason and waivers ought to be given in the most unique circumstances. A significant quantity of chaplains is required to fulfill the mission of the Chaplain Corps. Yet, underqualified chaplains will create more administrative work and leave the mission of the Chaplain Corps unfulfilled.

The Chaplain Appointment and Retention Eligibility Advisory Group serves the purpose of looking at candidates entering the Chaplain Corps and then looking at retaining Chaplains after two years. By instruction:

“The CARE-AG identifies the best and fully qualified applicants to serve in the CHC. In order to assess applicants to this superlative standard properly, the CARE-AG needs expert knowledge of PNC at every level within the CHC. Captain Navy chaplains are best able to comprehend the institutional requirements and challenges of providing religious ministry at every level throughout the Sea Services.”⁶⁶

The standard exists in instruction, but in practice, the process functions more like a pump rather than a filter. The two-year evaluation could provide valuable correction or feedback, but instead, it is a simple administrative hurdle that most pass easily. Surely not every chaplain is worthy to continue. I spoke to a chaplain who processed the CARE board candidates and he

⁶⁶ COCINST 1110. IJ 5.B

expressed that he could not recall any chaplain having been separated from the Navy while he had been working with the CARE board process.⁶⁷

Recruitment and retention of chaplains ought to more highly depend on continuing education. “Clinical pastoral education (CPE) is a combination of professional education and hands-on experience, providing spiritual care to patients, families and staff members in multi-faith clinical setting.”⁶⁸ For many Chaplaincy Positions, four units (one year) of CPE is the minimum requirement. In the United States Navy, not only is it not required, but there is a stigma associated with CPE. There is a fear that Chaplains who take continuing education in CPE risk becoming less competitive than peers who take operational billets. The time spent in CPE results in a Non-Observed Fitness Report (FITREP), which looks less inspiring than a FITREP from observed performance.

Unsurprisingly, a group of people who operate independently becomes skeptical of any organization or individual who offers critical supervision. To willingly submit to a CPE program admits that an individual has something to learn and wants to grow. Too often a chaplain views themselves as the authority on religion and the one having something to teach the world, instead of looking for the world to teach them something.

A requirement for CPE or a pathway to take CPE after becoming a chaplain demands that a chaplain be teachable, correctable, and able to give constructive feedback. There is a cost of time and money for this, but the benefit would far outweigh the difficulty in separating unsuitable chaplains from the military. There would be a better understanding of how to

⁶⁷ This chaplain asked that I not quote him directly, for obvious reasons.

⁶⁸ “CPE Program Overview.” Accessed April 7, 2023.

<https://www.cedars-sinai.org/patients-visitors/spiritual-care/clinical-pastoral-education/program.html>.

participate in interdisciplinary teams and “have a seat at the table” in discussions to which some are uninvited.

Religion can be such a divisive subject. Religion and politics are the two taboos that may derail family functions. The military has explicit instructions about how servicemembers are to conduct themselves regarding politics. The military has instructions to assist servicemembers in the practice and expression of their faith. At this inflection point in the history of the United States, chaplains must work toward bringing unit cohesion instead of bringing infighting and divisiveness. The Strategic Leadership Symposium understands the importance of cohesion. The challenge is to bring cohesion to all ranks, to enlisted and officer, to all branches of service. The enemies of the United States thrive when there is division. Religion can be unique while not being divisive. Inclusivity and diversity are not mere buzzwords, but necessary to hold the military together to accomplish the mission. Chaplains have the opportunity to champion inclusivity and diversity if they can look past their differences.

Respond to the Changes in Society

“We must change. We must divest of legacy capabilities that do not meet future requirements, regardless of their past efficacy.”⁶⁹ Perhaps the most valuable thing may be for a chaplain to imagine what it may be like if the only thing that can be appreciated is the human connection in the here and now. The only certain thing is the time spent together. Devin Moss, an atheist chaplain, spent a year ministering to an atheist, death row prisoner, Phillip Hancock.⁷⁰ For some, this very concept is an oxymoron. Yet, it was a relationship that was created out of

⁶⁹ From Goal 1 of the 2020 Strategic Plan found in the Appendix

⁷⁰ Emma Goldberg and Desiree Rios, “An Atheist Chaplain and a Death Row Inmate’s Final Hours,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2024, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/21/us/an-atheist-chaplain-and-a-death-row-inmates-final-hours.html>.

necessity. “Hancock explained that his initial motive was simple. Because of a Supreme Court ruling in 2022, which said death row inmates had the right to be with their spiritual advisers during the execution, Moss would be able to be in the execution chamber. Hancock wanted someone by his side to ensure nothing went awry.”⁷¹ There was a practical need—Hancock did not want to die alone.

Loneliness is a universal human concern. Indeed societies, cultures, and communities have come about to work together to thrive. Being alone only gets a human being so far. An atheist may not believe in what is unseen, but even an atheist desires connection. Humans crave relationships. Religion is not the only resource that is turned to when facing an existential crisis or death.

“Hancock shared with his chaplain some of the poems and songs he turned to for comfort, like the poem ‘If’ by Rudyard Kipling (‘If you can keep your head when all about you / Are losing theirs and blaming it on you’) and a song by Slipknot that includes the line, ‘Everybody has to die.’ ‘Everybody does die,’ Moss agreed. ‘But you’re different in the sense that there’s a day on the calendar.’”⁷² There is an opportunity to help others make meaning out of their situation as long as there is life. The relationship with a chaplain can facilitate that. Belief or no belief is not a disqualifier for the spiritual care of a chaplain.

The gift that I have learned from writing down these words is the challenge to connect and the greatest way to enter into a conversation is to become a functional atheist. My theology is unimportant when it moves beyond caring. Setting aside personal beliefs to connect and care for the other is a best practice for me. As the religious “nones” are now the largest group in the

⁷¹ Goldberg and Rios, “An Atheist Chaplain and a Death Row Inmate’s Final Hours.”

⁷² Emma Goldberg and Desiree Rios, “An Atheist Chaplain and a Death Row Inmate’s Final Hours,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2024, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/21/us/an-atheist-chaplain-and-a-death-row-inmates-final-hours.html>.

United States,⁷³ the way forward requires chaplains to connect in ways that meet another where they are. If the Navy Chaplain Corps is to survive and remain relevant, it must respond to the needs of the other rather than demand the other to become religious.

The First Amendment⁷⁴ of the United States Constitution informs what Navy Chaplains do and how they operate. Chaplains overemphasize the prohibition of the free exercise of religion, especially their own religion. The other side of the coin is that there is no establishment of religion by Congress. This is where zeal for faith can overwhelm an individual and step into the realm of proselytizing or creating a faith experience for others. The professionalism of the United States Navy Chaplain Corps depends on walking the fine line of not prohibiting religion nor establishing religion. All other problems and difficulties arise when there is an overemphasis on either concept.

So What?

I remember when my children were younger and they spoke affectionately about a toy they received. My son said, “I love my new Lego set!” Almost instinctively, I responded, “Don’t love that which can’t love you back.” I did not intend to be a killjoy, but I wanted him to understand that love is a relational emotion. We ought to love those who can respond.

My words in this project have reminded me of this conversation I had with my son. I am afraid that I expected too much from the institution that I serve. I would now say to the younger, more idealistic self, “Don’t love the Navy, it can’t love you back.” I expected the Navy to feel

⁷³ Jason DeRose, “Religious ‘Nones’ Are Now the Largest Single Group in the U.S.,” *NPR*, January 24, 2024, sec. Religion, <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/24/1226371734/religious-nones-are-now-the-largest-single-group-in-the-u-s>.

⁷⁴ Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

the same way about me that I did about it. The Navy, by design, works with interchangeable people. The Navy objectifies people and uses them to accomplish a mission and nothing more.

This work has been an attempt to better understand how to relate to the institution. It has been the processing of the difficulties and hardships experienced over 14½ years as a chaplain. Some difficulties and hardships were to be expected.⁷⁵ This work was trying to make sense of the friendly fire and the unnecessary friction caused by others failing at their jobs and not meeting expectations. This has been the processing of an individual trying to reframe what has happened to make sense of events. Thank you for taking the time to read it.

⁷⁵ War, deployments, moving, children changing schools, spouses leaving jobs and trying to find new ones, finding new dentists for dependents, finding new churches, meeting new neighbors, losing belongings due to damage and theft, moving away from family, living in a climate one would not chose, living in a foreign country, are a few of the the hardships the servicemember expects. Much of what was discussed in this paper were events that could be mitigated and helped by better and more careful management.

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APPENDIX
THE TEXT OF THE RELIGIOUS MINISTRY STRATEGIC PLAN

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RELIGIOUS MINISTRY
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RELIGIOUS MINISTRY
VERSION 2.0
Feb 2020

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RELIGIOUS MINISTRY
EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINISTRY STRATEGIC PLANNING

This strategic plan is a living document, responsive to changing circumstances and insights gained in execution, which will be reflected in progressive version numbers. Previous strategic plans identified enduring priorities essential to the Department of the Navy (DON): support the free exercise of religion in war and peace, sustain capable active component and reserve component chaplain and Religious Program Specialists (RP) communities, collect and analyze relevant data, and communicate effectively to all stakeholders. Although the language is evolving, the goals of this strategic plan continue in that tradition.

The intent of the plan is to strengthen Professional Naval Chaplaincy (PNC) to empower every Religious Ministry Team (RMT) to offer high-quality ministry, pursue excellence, capture synergies, improve effectiveness, align efforts, share best practices, and mature the professionalism of naval chaplains and RPs for the benefit of all.

Vision: Sea Services supported in the free exercise of religion for the well-being of all, encouraged and equipped to fulfill their honorable commitments in war and peace.

Mission: Minister across the Sea Services in every echelon of command and in every domain to build personal, unit, and family readiness and strengthen spirit, moral character, and toughness.

EXECUTION

The Chaplains Corps Annual Guidance will prioritize the efforts of the professional community for each strategic goal. Echelon II RMTs will lead Echelon III and IV RMTs in developing annual plans to achieve these goals. By aligning their efforts, Chaplain Corps (CHC) leaders will enhance the quality of ministry delivered throughout the DON, capturing and sharing best practices and efficiencies. The goals will focus on engagement with stakeholders across the DON.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The National Defense Strategy (2018) identifies current and future threats and actors in varied battlespaces and indicates that anticipated conflicts may differ drastically from what the Sea Services have known in recent years.

“We as a Navy and Marine Corps team must focus our collective confidence in the goodness of the nation we defend, and on our ability to defend it with vigilance and agility. We must continue to be grateful for, and mindful of, our Sailors, Marines and the families, who make sacrifices daily across the globe to keep the light of freedom bright. We must honor them with how we approach our jobs and in what we do every day to make our Navy and Marine Corps the finest and most powerful in the world- both today and into a very competitive and unpredictable future. – SECNAV Vector 4, Thomas B. Modly, Acting SECNAV

DON CORE THEMES

Action Readiness Capabilities Capacity

- Restore Readiness
- Increase Capabilities
- Build Capacity

RELIGIOUS MINISTRY-ALIGNED GOALS

Goal 1: Operationalize Religious Ministry

Goal 2: Sharpen Core Capabilities

Goal 3: Develop Chaplain Corps Leaders with Intentionality

Goal 4: Champion the Spiritual Readiness of Sailors and Marines

GOAL 1

OPERATIONALIZE RELIGIOUS MINISTRY

To support higher strategy, all RMTs will develop an operational mindset characterized by mission focus, agility, and preparedness to adapt to changing circumstances. An operational mindset shapes how we think, how we solve problems, and how we approach our work regardless of domain assignment. Religious ministry, and those who deliver it, must be ready to surge at any time in support of the warfighter from sea and shore.

“Our competitors see the landscape as continuous; we will do so as well. Restoring agility means realizing that operating in the competition-conflict spectrum can be non-linear and simultaneous – our adversaries can operate at different levels of intensity in different domains at the same time. We will not let rigid thinking or self-imposed structures prevent us from operating in creative ways.”

-A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority 2.0

“We should take pride in our force and recent operational successes, but the current force is not organized, trained, or equipped to support the naval force – operating in contested maritime spaces, facilitating sea control, or executing distributed maritime operations. We must change. We must divest of legacy capabilities that do not meet future requirements, regardless of their past efficacy.”

- Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019

1.1 RMTs WITH AN OPERATIONAL MINDSET AND ALIGNED TO COMMANDER’S INTENT

An operational mindset keeps the warfighter in mind at all times. It integrates every religious ministry (RM) activity in every place with the preparation, support, and reintegration of the service member in combat. On all levels of RM, an operational mindset is responsive, action-oriented, daring, creative, and focused on the mission. An operational mindset internalizes the just purpose for war and, in all assignments and circumstances, develops strategies, campaigns, and programs that employ both military and civilian resources. The mindset is results oriented. It targets the needs of the people we serve. It seeks the most effective and best-coordinated options. It uses all tools and processes of the DON institution to fund and prioritize its efforts. An operational mindset at the supervisory level takes into consideration long-term objectives and second- and third-order effects.

1.1 LINES OF EFFORT

Chaplains at Echelon II, in collaboration with chaplains at Echelon III, will revise evaluation, assessment, and inspection tools to assess unit-level RM alignment with commander’s mission and intent.

Chaplains at Echelon II and III will review current operational plans, annexes, and appendixes of their subordinate units to ensure proper RM integration.

Chaplains at Echelon IV and below will demonstrate to their supervisory chaplains an awareness of and alignment with higher-level plans, annexes, and appendixes in the delivery of RM.

RMTs will align RM planning with the commander's mission and priorities and, in consultation with their supervisory chaplain, draft an appropriate written plan for RM.

“Develop a lethal, agile, and resilient force posture and employment. Force posture and employment must be adaptable to account for the uncertainty that exists in the changing global strategic environment.”

– 2018 National Defense Strategy

1.2 A CHC ALIGNED TO DON'S MISSION IN SUPPORT OF THE WARFIGHTER

The mission of the DON is to man, train, and equip combat ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas. More specifically, the current security environment demands that the Navy and Marine Corps be prepared at all levels for distributed operations, guided by commander's intent up, down, and across the chain of command. Now more than ever, it is important that every chaplain and RP knows how the DON fights in order to know where the RMT fits. The CHC will align with the mission to advise the commander and support the service member.

1.2 LINES OF EFFORT

Chaplains at Echelon II, in coordination with chaplains at Echelon III, will develop training materials to contextualize the delivery of RM consistent with higher level policy (NSS, NMS, etc.), guidance (DPG, CPG, etc.), and operating concepts (Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, etc.) using a Subject Matter Expert (SME) on the topic of operational planning.

The Deputy Chief of Chaplains will identify recommended reading to enhance RMT understanding of the DON mission.

1.3 RMTS ORGANIZED FOR AGILITY

The CHC will organize to deliver RM in the DMO/EABO environment. The DMO/EABO construct is dynamic, forward, kinetic, mobile, isolated, joint, lethal, and focused on dispersed small units. Improved agility in the delivery of RM requires changes at every level of the CHC. It requires better situational awareness at the unit level. At the supervisory level, it requires better coordination and command advisement. At the corps level, it requires greater emphasis on Key Leader Engagement (KLE) in order to help demonstrate that the Navy and Marine Corps are values-based partners.

1.3 LINES OF EFFORT

The Director of Religious Ministry (DORM) will work with Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) to simplify resource sponsorship in order to sustain optimal CHC strength and expedite transfer of assets in response to critical combat requirements.

Chaplains at Echelon II will provide Echelon III and IV RMTs guidance and training materials related to theater KLE.

Chaplains at Echelon II and III will identify RM requirements to support the DMO/EABO construct and develop religious support plans to meet priorities in changing global contingencies.

Chaplains at Echelon II will prioritize RM requirements (TPFDD, etc.) and Phase 2 force laydown plans, anticipating the movement of RMTs to meet the most critical needs.

Supervisory chaplains will coordinate movement of RMTs under OPCON and TACON that might result in the movement of an RMT out from under its parent command.

Senior supervisory chaplains will test delivery models by participating in large scale exercises (LSC, Global Series, CPX, etc.) to meet global contingencies and provide senior advisement to the commander's decision process (through participation in Maritime Operation Center (MOC), Functional and Cross Functional Teams, exercise Working Groups, 7-Minute Drills, White Cell, Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) injects, warfighting strategy, etc.)

Chaplain of the Coast Guard, in collaboration with the Commander, Pacific Fleet Chaplain and U.S. Fleet Forces Command Chaplains, will assess operational plans under each COCOM to identify RM requirements and integrate RM in the DMO/EABO environment. The Chaplain of the Coast Guard will also develop a training plan for all USCG chaplains.

The Deputy Chief of Chaplains for Reserve Matters will initiate a review within all Budget Submitting Offices (BSOs) and provide a plan to present to their Operational Support Officers for the redistribution of both chaplain and RP reserve billets to best support their requirements. The Commander Navy Reserve Forces Command (CNRFC) Chaplain, in collaboration with the Marine Forces Reserve (MARFORRES) Chaplain, will encourage all Reserve Component RMT members to drill with their supported commands as often as possible to receive training.

1.4 INSTALLATION RM DELIVERY MODELS THAT EXEMPLIFY AN OPERATIONAL MINDSET

Some of the toughest and most complex ministry challenges are found ashore, precisely where chaplains are least likely to be found in the fight to come. Chaplains and RPs serving in installations need to prepare and equip those communities for any eventuality. An operational mindset ashore requires adaptive and responsive strategies to meet generational needs and resource constraints. Installation RM will prioritize liaison, coordination, and facilitation capabilities in response to increasing demands on existing resources.

1.4 LINES OF EFFORT

Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) and Marine Corps Installations Command (MCICOM) and other Commands with interests in installation ministry will

Coco CNIC, MCICOM, and CNRFC will develop an integrated plan for emergent needs that uses retired military chaplains and partnerships with local civilian religious communities.

N0973, in collaboration with CNIC, MCICOM, and Fleet and Force chaplains, will establish standardized CREDO Core Plus programming for contingency operations and mission support across all phases of war.

Region chaplains will develop a standardized liaison strategy and training plan that partners with local civilian religious communities to build capacity for meeting the needs of warfighters, using both CHC and civilian resources.

Region chaplains will partner with Commander, Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC) to include CHC recruiting in their plans for liaison and facilitation work with local religious communities.

GOAL 2

SHARPEN CORE CAPABILITIES

Naval chaplaincy exists to support the free exercise of religion in the unique environment of the military. RMTs use all four core competencies of naval chaplaincy (provide, facilitate, care, and advise) to do so. Commanders often say, "Chaplain, take care of my people." Chaplains understand that to do so properly, they must apply all four core competencies. Maximizing proficiency in the core competencies to sharpen capabilities requires intentional

effort. Chaplains and RPs must continuously hone their skills through study, use, self and peer assessment, and cooperative ministry.

“Be brilliant in the basics. Don't dabble in your job; you must master it... Battles, conventional or irregular, turn on the basics of gaining fire superiority and maneuvering against the enemy. Fire and maneuver -block and tackle - decide battle. The Corps exists to win battles. That is inseparable from making Marines who stand for its values in tough times. Anything that doesn't contribute to winning battles or winning Marines is of secondary importance.”

-“Call Sign Chaos” by Gen James Mattis, USMC (ret)

GOAL 2 OUTCOMES

2.1 CHAPLAINS ENGAGED IN THE COMMANDER’S DECISION MAKING

Chaplains earn the trust of commanding officers and unit leaders when they contribute reliable advice to decision-making processes. RPs earn the trust of their chaplains and unit leaders by rendering relevant and insightful advice about the Command Religious Program. The DORM coordinates training on policy and practice advisement (as defined by SECNAVINST 1730.10A), including configuration of religious support resources within the area of operations, ethics, moral character development, morale, religion, and other factors which may impact the commander’s decision.

2.1 LINES OF EFFORT

As directed by the DORM, the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center (NCSC) will conduct twelve PDTCs on advisement and the commander’s decision-making process in FY20.

Chaplains at Echelon II will collaborate across claimancies to publish standards for advisement and liaison products (Religious Needs Assessment (RNA), Post-Deployment Brief, Letters for waiver in support of Religious Practice Requests, use of the Command Religious Program Analytics Tool (CRP-AT), unit readiness assessments, etc.).

Supervisory chaplains will assess the quality of products to their corresponding standards. Supervisors will require chaplains to provide appropriate advisement products (7-minute drill, decision brief, discussion brief, quad slides, etc.) that demonstrate coordination with each staff section to identify the commander’s requirements for advisement and liaison.

Chaplains will provide an assessment to their supervisory chaplain indicating where and in what form they provide advisement in the commander’s decision-making cycle.

2.2 A DEVELOPED CORE COMPETENCY OF FACILITATION

Facilitation at the command and CHC level is an underdeveloped competency. PNC emphasizes the obligation to treat all people with dignity and respect without regard to any differences in belief. Individual facilitation is more than mere referral; it is about knowing one’s limits and still finding ways to meet people’s needs. It requires direct engagement, advocacy, and follow-up. Facilitation at the command level necessitates deliberate and systematic networking with local religious organizations to build relationships that will eventually help meet religious requirements. Strategic level partnerships with Religious Organizations as non-federal entities help to create understanding and remove barriers that hinder support to sea service personnel and their families.

2.2 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will charter a working group representing all types of CRPs ashore (TECOM, NETC, USCG, etc.) and will publish guidance in collaboration with CNIC and MCICOM to help determine which religious needs are best facilitated by inviting local communities into the CRP and which are best facilitated by encouraging service members and their families to connect with local religious communities. This guidance will also describe how

RMTs educate and inform local religious communities on how best to meet the needs of warfighters and their families. This guidance is linked to outcome 1.4.

The DORM will develop national partnerships in support of improved facilitation.

NCSC will update PNC leader course curricula to reflect facilitation and networking policy.

Supervisory chaplains will include a discussion of the boundaries between provision and facilitation within their annual PNC counseling.

Chaplains at all echelons will advise their commanders regarding local implementation using facilitation guidance provided by the CHC (statement of work for volunteers, material support, base access, background checks, etc.).

2.3 A CHC ENGAGED AND SKILLED IN PROVISION

Provision is the cornerstone of PNC. Chaplains will deliver relevant, inspirational, and transformational provision within their respective faith traditions, as authorized by their RO, across assignments at sea and ashore. The Navy protects the rights of chaplains to provide according to their own manner and form in religious practice. Every chaplain must also protect his or her Religious Organization's (RO) manner and form in religious practice. Navy chaplains in all places must be faithful representatives of their RO. . All chaplains are ultimately responsible for enhancing their skills in providing ministry according to the chaplains' faith tradition (i.e.; homiletics, liturgics, prayer, administration of sacraments and rites, and spiritual disciplines.)

2.3 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will charter a working group to determine the usefulness of a Community of Interest (COI) focused on provision and the reinstatement of a homiletics funded graduate education (FGE) program.

Supervisory chaplains will use their existing reporting mechanisms (CRP-AT, monthly reports, etc.) to verify that all chaplains deliver provision (preaching, worship, devotional study, prayer, etc.) to authorized personnel at least once a month.

Chaplains at Echelon II will publish guidance for the professional promotion, planning, and delivery of provision, up to PNC standards, which is effective and relevant to the people served. Supervisory chaplains will provide quarterly coaching to this guidance.

2.4 ROBUST AND STANDARDIZED COMPETENCY OF CARE

Although chaplains spend 80% of their time in the core competency of care, standards of care are not well-understood and there are few uniform means of CHC-validated products systematically associated with those tasks. DMO/EABO requires RMTs to operate in a dispersed and interoperable environment, making minimum standards essential to effectiveness. The counterpoint to the Navy's protection of a chaplain's RO's manner and form in religious practice is the chaplain's obligation to care for all people, even those who have no religious requirements. This care is delivered to standards set by the CHC and is designed to promote excellence, efficacy, and consistency wherever Navy chaplains serve. Every chaplain and RP should always be asking if there is a standard for a particular activity, thinking about refining the standard when there is one, and sharing best practices as often as possible.

2.4 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will charter a working group, led by the N17 Chaplain, to identify the contents of a standard tool kit that addresses common spiritual crises, to include mental health, suicidal behaviors, combat effects, grief, death and loss, and also promotes grit, life skills, and healthier relationships.

The DORM, supported by the Pastoral Care COI, will publish a counseling manual to articulate the differences between counseling in the provision competency, counseling in the facilitation competency, and counseling in the care competency. The manual will focus on short-term solution-focused advice, quality handoffs during referrals, maintaining consistent care for the warfighter, protecting confidentiality, maintaining physical accountability of the counselee, and requirements for follow-up.

The Metrics Governance Board (MGB) will develop guidance for the use of Interactive Customer Evaluation (ICE) surveys related to PNC throughout the DON.

GOAL 3

DEVELOP CHAPLAIN CORPS LEADERS WITH INTENTIONALITY

Effective delivery of RM requires professionally competent chaplains and RPs of good moral character. As RM personnel move up in rank and are assigned to greater levels of responsibility, they must be able to handle the increasing complexity of leadership. It is essential for chaplains and RPs to continue to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities to deliver RM that is responsive to domain requirements and operational realities.

“As we deliberately work to develop each aspect of leadership, over time, competence, character, and connectedness become three inseparable lanes of the path we travel. Moving down this path becomes the most challenging journey we can take as Navy leaders.”

–Navy Leader Development Framework 3.0 2019

GOAL 3 OUTCOMES

3.1 AN RP RATE FOCUSED ON EXCELLENCE IN PROGRAMMATIC

FUNDAMENTALS

The DORM has named program management and administration as the two primary professional competencies of the RP rating. RPs must excel in these competencies in order to support chaplains and the CHC effectively. Professionalization of the rate identifies career progression in terms of developmental steps required from junior to senior levels and indicates individual maturation in the rate. In combat, effective force protection capabilities are required of RPs, but are viewed as secondary to the two primary competencies of program management and administration.

“The Navy the Nation needs will require our Enlisted Sailors to be continuously flexible, more innovative and confident in achieving operational excellence in tougher and more challenging environments. Character development and adherence to our ethos must be reinforced periodically throughout a Sailor’s career by applying challenge, training, education, and accountability.”

–MCPON: Laying the Keel 2019

3.1 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM, in collaboration with the RP Senior Enlisted Leader (SEL), will charter a working group, led by an O-6 chaplain, to identify behavioral indicators associated with the professional competencies at each level. The working group will identify required and recommended military and civilian courses, schools, training, degrees, and certifications, to develop administrative and programmatic expertise..

The DORM will charter a working group, led by the RP SEL, to identify the professional competencies and occupational standards associated with being a tactical defensive combatant charged with the personal security of the chaplain across the spectrum of threat.

The DORM will direct a Navy Training Requirements Review (NTRR) of the RP school curriculum, to align the curriculum with the approved professional competencies and standards identified by the working group.

The enlisted community manager, in conjunction with N0971, will execute a study on the historic effects of striking and how striking might be used to strengthen the rate.

RP leaders at Echelon II will clearly define the four levels of community expertise (RP, RP Supervisor, RP Senior Supervisor, and RP Executive), including the programmatic and administrative competencies relevant to each level.

3.2 ALIGN PNC TRAINING AND EDUCATION ACROSS THE CHC

Training, education, and lifelong learning are essential to PNC. Chaplains return to the NCSC at each promotion and RPs also engage in continuing education. They gather for the annual Professional Development Training Course (PDTC) and they hone their professional edge in regular area-wide training. PNC leaders must constantly convey the overarching themes of PNC in all these gatherings to promote interoperability of RMTs and the rapid development of advanced proficiency in PNC. The NCSC is the nexus of training aligned with community priorities and requirements. It is imperative that we position the DORM and NCSC staffs to respond effectively and nimbly to PNC and CHC wide requirements, as directed by the DORM, and support Echelon II identified training requirements.

3.2 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will charter a working group led by N0977, in collaboration with CNRC and CNRFC, to identify training, education, and supervision requirements for the Chaplain Candidate Program.

Assign the NCSC Director additional duty to the DORM as the CHC Training Officer (N0977).

The NCSC will have oversight of all course development and delivery to include PDTC, Basic Leadership Course (BLC), Intermediate Leadership Course (ILC), Advanced Leadership Course (ALC), Senior Leadership Course (SLC), RP-A School, and Program Manager's Course. The DORM will staff the Professional Development Training Workshop (PDTW) from N0973.

The Director of NCSC will present the DORM with a plan for making the delivery of education and training at the NCSC more effective, including improved pedagogical methods and techniques, the use of wargames, the use of elements of a 360 degree peer review in leadership courses, the assignment of grades for all course work, and a process for dealing with course failures.

The Director of NCSC will present a plan to the DORM to make contracting and delivery of PDTCs responsive to PNC requirements.

The Director of NCSC, on behalf of the DORM and in collaboration with Echelon II chaplains, will be responsible for coordinating CHC-wide PNC training and education to include: PNC content of Echelon II directed training, CHC resource development and distribution, management of AEP programs, and promulgation of a master training plan for the CHC.

3.3 A CHAPLAIN CORPS THAT EXECUTES THE NAVY LEADER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Navy Leader Development Framework insists every officer community and enlisted rating will structure development around three elements: character, competence, and connections. Training and education that supports these three elements will be developed and delivered. The CHC will model the use of the Navy Leader Development Framework to expose

gaps and propose solutions to prepare our leaders. Within PNC, we will enable access to all the processes of community development, institutionalizing transparency, participation, objectivity, and predictability.

“Our Core Values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment and our attributes of Integrity, Accountability, Initiative, and Toughness will always guide us. They underpin who we are as members of the profession of arms: united by our common oath, dedicated to our special standards of ethics and character, and constantly honing our unique expertise in the art and science of naval warfare.”

-FRAGO 01/2019: A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority

3.3 LINES OF EFFORT

PNC creates opportunities for development of leaders across the community commensurate with rank and experience (working groups, COIs, advisory groups, etc.). Junior leaders will develop individual competence, personal character, and build connections. Mature leaders will strengthen the performance and character of their teams, deepening the connections within the team and with other leaders (Navy Leadership Development Framework 3.0) through evaluation of observed performance.

The DORM will direct the development of a repository to house and share PNC best practices, COI products, scholarly and journal materials, promising practices, lessons learned, and training materials. The DORM will also direct the identification or creation of a forum that allows real-time communication and feedback.

The DORM will cooperate with CNP in developing community specific content within the new fitness report system.

N0973 will expand the PNC Leader Development policy (COCINST 5351.2) from competency and character aims in monthly training to an emphasis on connections vital to the growth of chaplains and RPs.

3.4 IMPROVED USERS OF METRICS AND DATA COLLECTION

The collection of data and the use of metrics are critical in all areas of service in the DON. The CHC is growing in the complex interaction of these two tasks. At every level, chaplains and RPs need to be thinking about how to measure what they are doing, how to measure the impact of their activity, and how their actions can be connected to other measurements. The DORM has established a MGB and a CRP-AT Operations Officer who provides functional management of the CRP-AT. These entities are critical as we take a serious approach to data collection that is useful at every level of advisement and supervision across the CHC. The CHC will develop metrics that are integrated with the systems of the DON that do not eclipse the delivery of RM, that reflect the values of PNC, are based in collaboration, and illuminate areas for improvement.

3.4 LINES OF EFFORT

The CRP-AT Operations Officer and the chair of the MGB will establish a comprehensive training plan, manual, and webinar supporting CHC competency concerning the CRP-AT.

The MGB, in collaboration with the Professional Naval Chaplaincy Executive Board (PNCEB), will identify the metrics best suited to demonstrating the positive effects of RM, the effective delivery of RM, and the efficient use of resources.

The MGB will determine the suitability of each CRP-AT product line for use in CHC research, validation of best practices, command advisement, and RMT supervision.

The MGB will secure a suitable funding stream for the CRP-AT.

The MGB, in collaboration with chaplains at Echelon II, will establish business rules for the use of the CRP-AT.

GOAL 4

CHAMPION THE SPIRITUAL READINESS OF SAILORS AND MARINES

Religion is integral to the identity of the majority of Sea Service personnel. For many service and family members, faith and religious practice are indispensable to readiness. They are unique and crucial sources of strength and stability. The Navy CHC exists to promote religious freedom in the unique environment of the Sea Services and to strengthen the spirit of all who defend our freedoms at and from the sea.

“Leaders must ensure Marines are well-led and cared for physically, emotionally, and spiritually, both in and out of combat.”

- Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019

“The soul of the Marine Corps, as previously noted by Commandant Barrow, is sound. While sound, this does not mean we should ever neglect it or assume it will persist without consistent and purposeful reflection and active cultivation.”

- Commandant’s Planning Guidance 2019

GOAL 4 OUTCOMES

4.1 SERVICE MEMBERS WHO INTEGRATE THEIR RELIGIOUS FAITH INTO A LIFE OF SERVICE

Many service members find their most powerful connections and their strength of character in the practice of their religion. The Constitution protects the religious liberties of all service members, requiring commanders to safeguard the free exercise of religion for every Sailor, Marine, and Coast Guardsman. The CHC has both the responsibility and the privilege of promoting those freedoms, inspiring others in their faith, and demonstrating that the personal and public exercise of religion is valuable to both the individual and the command. The CHC will deliver RM that focuses on the specific circumstances and mission of the people in any given time and place, getting them through another day of service, and connecting what they are doing today with their highest values and priorities.

4.1 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will charter a cross functional working group (to include the N097 Public Affairs Officer, NCSC representative, N0973, COIs, etc.) to provide courses of action for knowledge management within the CHC including devotional resources for service members and families, digital delivery models, RM resource storage and access, information sharing, a repository of best practices, application development, etc.

Chaplains at Echelon II will develop training and publish guidance to educate chaplains and the warfighter on religious liberty in all phases of war.

Chaplains Echelon III will educate RMT’s on the topic of religious liberty in all phases of war.

Supervisors will ensure that all RMTs develop and provide RM resources that help integrate faith and daily life throughout the week to service and family members.

4.2 SPIRITUALLY READY CHAPLAINS AND RPS

Chaplains and RPs are required to represent the highest values of the nation and must be exemplary in conduct. PNC sets standards for conduct upheld by intentional layers of support and accountability through supervision, mentoring, and coaching. Chaplains are required to be true to the tenets of their RO and must represent their faith group with credibility and integrity.

The CHC is responsible for institutionalizing the connections that provide accountability for character and conduct.

4.2 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will provide standards for critical notification requirements including: death, injury, illness, failures in upholding PNC standards, investigations on Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) violations, final dispositions of any legal action, personal crises, anything that discredits the CHC, etc.

All supervisory chaplains will provide annual PNC counseling to evaluate their subordinate chaplains on adherence to PNC standards, involvement with their RO, identification of a mentor, cultivation of their spiritual life, and involvement with a faith community.

Supervisory chaplains will provide subordinate RPs annual PNC counseling. Supervisory RPs will coach subordinate RPs on occupational standards, self-care practices, career development, etc.

4.3 A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR SPIRITUAL READINESS DELIVERED WITHIN THE DON

Warfighting readiness assumes warfighter readiness. Therefore, the DON has a compelling interest in the integration of the warfighter's mind, body, and soul. Not every service member finds spiritual strength in the practice of religion, but every service member needs spiritual strength to fight and win. The CHC is uniquely positioned to provide the Sea Services a common language and communication strategy that speaks to the issues of spiritual readiness with meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in life connected to strength of soul. Every chaplain and RP needs to help their people recognize and understand their own spiritual needs in order to steel themselves for the fight to come.

4.3 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM and Deputy DORM will continue to support the Service Chiefs in the development of Spiritual Fitness and Toughness programs throughout the career of the service member.

The DORM will charter an advisory group from the CHC, academic community, and caregiving professionals to develop a common lexicon that defines terms and distinguishes between terms such as religion, spirituality, spiritual readiness, spiritual fitness, and toughness as these concepts and terms connect with the individual's motivation for service.

The DORM will charter a working group that includes chaplains with ethics subspecialties, ethicists, CPE chaplains, line officers, and the other Service chaplaincies to articulate how religion, spiritual fitness, toughness, integrity, accountability, initiative, and grit connect to core values.

4.4 PRODUCTS THAT PROMOTE SPIRITUAL READINESS

The CHC provides the insight, professional skill sets, and community connections to enable service members to develop resilience through spiritual aims connected to one's sense of meaning and purpose in life. Products placed in the hands of RMTs that foster spiritual readiness, particularly to help prepare service members for the adversities in life and the effects of combat, are critical to our success on the deckplate. While developing a common language that describes the spiritual component of readiness, chaplains and RPs will build common assessment tools and life skill products that develop readiness throughout the Sea Services.

4.4 LINES OF EFFORT

The DORM will charter a working group from all COIs to develop products that equip warfighters to overcome personal challenges, especially the moral issues surrounding war, adversity, and hardship.

The same working group will develop measures of effectiveness for deckplate ministry that fosters spiritual strength and motivation that will be sustained in the face of adversity.

The N17 Chaplain will collaborate with RMTs and other helping professionals to establish and employ spiritual assessment products that address the tone of force and force preservation concerns. Supervisory chaplains will review products and seek input on their effectiveness from the subordinate chaplains' Commander.

“By their patient, sympathetic labors with men, day in and day out and through many a night, every chaplain I know contributed immeasurably to the moral courage of our fighting men.”

– Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz

CONCLUSION

Naval chaplaincy exists to support the men and women who faithfully serve the nation as a part of the Sea Services. The presence of RMTs in the midst of Sailors, Marines, and Guardsmen safeguards and demonstrates the exercise of religion as free and valuable. Religious Freedom connects constitutional liberty with public good, a necessity in meeting the intent of the National Defense Strategy. The defense of our nation is dependent upon both the readiness and resilience of the force.

Warfighting readiness rests on the personal readiness of the individual. RMTs, positioned to invest in readiness, are equipped to support the nation's warriors through every manner of combat-induced strain and all that combat brings to bear on body, mind, and spirit. RMTs uniquely strengthen, heal, bring hope, encourage, guide, teach, and bear the transcendent elements of faith and religion in times of peace and war.

As the DON invests in its Sailors and Marines, preparing them for the next fight, the CHC will support commanders by operationalizing ministry support in combat, sharpening its core capabilities, intentionally developing leaders, and always championing religion and spiritual readiness.