

DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL READINESS IN ARMY LEADERS

by

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This research project is dedicated to Army leaders and the chaplains who serve them.

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Abstract

This research project addresses *Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders*. The project asks: *How can Army leaders develop and sustain a resilient spiritual core that undergirds strong moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?* The project explores how Chaplains can help leaders get upstream of emotional and spiritual crises, so that when inevitable personal and professional challenges come along, and especially when faced with possible Large-Scale Combat Operations, they are prepared to navigate the rapids.

The project includes interviews about spiritual resilience with eight retired women Army leaders who are West Point graduates. It addresses how my qualitative research and key topics such as Posttraumatic Stress/Posttraumatic Growth, Moral Injury/Moral Drift, and writings about midlife spirituality inform my conclusions. Finally, the project offers chaplains an outline for a spiritual readiness training event for leaders and recommendations for individual counseling with leaders.

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PART I. DEFINITION

Defining the Problem of Army Leader Spiritual Readiness

“BLOOD! BLOOD! BLOOD MAKES THE GRASS GROW!” we chanted over and over in the sweltering heat of July 1980 as we thrust and parried our way across Target Hill Field with our M16s and fixed bayonets. Our voices echoed against the granite hills along the Hudson River. “WHAT’S THE SPIRIT OF THE BAYONET?” screamed the cadet instructor. “TO KILL, SIR!” our company of 120 West Point new cadets screamed back. A few weeks later we traversed the wooded bayonet assault course, armed with pugil sticks that resembled giant Q-tips. Artillery simulators whistled and exploded above us as we raced through thick smoke from one obstacle to the next. The cadet cadre shouted incomprehensibly and pounded us with pugil sticks as we dodged trees, darted under barbed wire, and scrambled over log walls. Memories of those close combat training days during Cadet Basic Training, better known as Beast Barracks, haunted with me well into my Plebe (freshman) year.¹

Months after Beast summer ended, I wandered into the chaplain’s office on a break between classes. Bayonet training taught us we had two options in battle: KILL or BE KILLED. I entered West Point as an idealistic eighteen-year-old, hooked by the ideals of *Duty-Honor-Country*. Serving our nation, preserving freedom and democracy – those were noble causes I understood at eighteen. The brutal reality of what fighting our nation’s wars meant had become very real to me during Beast. At the same time, I was experiencing a powerful deepening of my faith through the Academy’s rich Protestant and Catholic campus ministry programs. My inquiry was urgent: “Chaplain, is it okay to be a soldier and a Christian?” His reply was wise and calm, and it frustrated me deeply. I wanted him to tell me the answer. Instead, he directed me to

¹ This scene is borrowed from an unpublished novel I wrote for my MA thesis at the University of Hawaii in 1996.

passages in the Christian scriptures that referenced soldiers and centurions (e.g., Matthew 8:5-13, 27:54; Mark 15:39-45; Luke 7:2, 23:47; Acts 10:1, 21:32, 28:16; John 15:13). Read and pray, he told me. I did and I found no clear answers. I did observe, however, that Jesus never condemned soldiers and centurions. At their best, they were loyal protectors, compassionate souls, ones who recognized Jesus as the Son of God when others did not. And Jesus's great commandment was clear to my eighteen-year-old, more-literal-than-not understanding of scripture: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn. 15:13, NRSV).

It took years of study and prayer and life experience to make peace with living in the gray zone of believing that war is both terribly wrong and sometimes a justifiable act of love. After graduating from West Point in 1983 and 1984 respectively, my husband and I served as Army Signal Corps (communications) officers. When not spending our free time with our Army friends, we were leading Bible studies for teenagers in our church youth group or taking them on camping retreats. I left the Army in 1991, a few years after my husband left to attend seminary, to support him in his new ministry as an Episcopal priest and start our family. I was raising two children and working as an administrator in an independent college-preparatory school in Sun Valley, Idaho when terrorists attacked our homeland on September 11, 2001. Shortly after, our country embarked on the Global War on Terror. I watched from a distance as our West Point classmates led soldiers into combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. News reports told me young men and women were returning home with broken bodies and broken spirits, others packed in ice inside metal caskets. Like many Americans, I paid attention to news and cared about our service men and women, especially those deployed, but I didn't have skin in the fight. I was able to sleep at night without fearing losing someone close to me in a war zone half a world away. And like most Americans, I didn't see a way to support our military members in a direct and tangible way.

In 2006 our family moved from Idaho to California when my husband was called to serve as a cathedral dean in Sacramento. There, I answered my own long-felt and long-avoided call to pursue ordination as an Episcopal priest and I began seminary in Berkeley. An email to students from our seminary student dean in 2008 led me on the path to become an Army Reserve chaplain after a twenty-year break in military service. “An Army Reserve recruiter visited campus today,” the dean wrote. “I hate war. I hate violence in all its forms, but who needs ministry more than military members and their families?” In my late forties, her words spoke to my heart and to the memory of the chaplain who had ministered so well to eighteen-year-old me.

When I left the Army in 1991, I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to answer another long-felt and long-avoided call to become an Army chaplain. In 2011, I began serving in uniform again as a part-time drilling reservist. Six months later, at nearly 50 years old, I found myself low-crawling under live fire at the Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course. Our class of newly-minted officer chaplain and chaplain candidates, ranging in age from early twenties to late forties, joined the young Basic Combat Training soldiers for the Night Infiltration Course (nicknamed NIC at Night). Mortar simulators blasted and M60 machine guns rattled as tracer rounds streaked the night sky. I watched the young, enlisted trainees enter the course ahead of us, dive to the ground and scurry off, so young, so close in age to my own nineteen-year-old daughter and fifteen-year-old son. I wondered if any were as scared and conflicted as I had been at their age on the Bayonet Assault Course. The difference was in summer 1980, we were immersed in a cold war that produced no combat casualties, and now in summer 2012, we were deep into two hot wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that would leave tens of thousands of soldiers wounded or dead. I knew then that those young men and women enduring Basic Combat Training would need chaplains with them downrange who understood the mental

and physical exhaustion of low-crawling across a field, elbows and knees scraped through knee and elbow pads by rocks embedded in the dirt, their heads hugging the ground under their Kevlar helmets. Now, thirteen years into service as an Army chaplain, I also know well that the leaders of young soldiers like them also need chaplains who understand their world.

In 2014, I volunteered to deploy to Kandahar, Afghanistan as chaplain for an active-duty aviation battalion. I volunteered again to mobilize in 2017 to stand up the chaplain section for Special Operations Command Africa, stationed in Stuttgart, Germany, with trips to visit forward deployed units in Africa. I then joined the Active Guard Reserve program in 2018, where I served fulltime in Army chaplain recruiting for four years. I am now in my final assignment as deputy command chaplain for 9th Mission Support Command, the Army Reserve command with units dispersed across the Indo-Pacific region. I lean toward pacifism, but the reality is that war exists in this broken world, and we will continue to send men and women into harm's way. My hopes and prayers are for soldiers to be as emotionally, ethically, and spiritually grounded as possible when we do. We need chaplains willing to low crawl through the valley of the shadow of death with them. As chaplains, we are called to help young soldiers be spiritually ready for life's inevitable challenges, in times of war and in times of peace. Our spiritual care also includes soldiers in senior ranks, men and women who bear the privilege and burden of leading, training, and caring for the well-being of their subordinates. Caring for leaders is essential, and supporting their spiritual readiness is the focus of my research project.

The Research Question

According to the Army's Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) Program manual, "Spiritual readiness addresses the development of qualities derived from a person's worldview—religious,

philosophical, or human values—needed to endure times of stress, hardship, and tragedy.”² This research project aims addresses the question: *How can Army leaders develop and sustain a resilient spiritual core that undergirds strong moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?*³ The project explores how chaplains can help leaders, especially command teams and key staff leaders at battalion level and above, develop and sustain their spiritual core. The project includes a training outline of a training—*Developing and Sustaining Leader Spiritual Readiness*—and recommendations for individual leader care.

PART II. EXPLORATION AND ANALYSIS

The Issue in My Context

Chaplains are the lead professionals for the Spiritual Domain of the Army’s H2F Program. The Chaplain Corps implemented a Spiritual Readiness Initiative (SRI) grounded in the work of Lisa Miller, psychologist and “professor in the Clinical Psychology Program at Teacher’s College, Columbia University,” who founded the Spirituality Mind Body Institute.⁴ The author of *The Spiritual Child* and *The Awakened Brain*, Miller has done extensive research on how spirituality impacts the human brain. Her team concluded in a 2018 study of brain scans, conducted while reading spiritual scripts to research subjects, that the “results demonstrate neural mechanisms underlying spiritual experiences across diverse traditions and perspectives.”⁵ Miller’s research revealed stunning results comparing brain scans of persons who reported religion or spirituality as of higher versus lower importance. Miller claims MRI scans showed “[t]he high-spiritual brain was healthier and more robust than the low-spiritual brain, and data

² *Field Manual 7-22 Holistic Health and Fitness* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2020), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN30964-FM_7-22-001-WEB-4.pdf.

³ At the suggestion of Professor Graham Reside, Vanderbilt Divinity School, I added “moral complexity” to the H2F description of spiritual readiness.

⁴ “The Author,” *Dr. Lisa Miller* (blog), accessed February 17, 2024, <https://www.lisamillerphd.com/>.

⁵ Lisa Miller et al., “Neural Correlates of Personalized Spiritual Experiences,” *Cerebral Cortex* 29, no. 6 (June 1, 2019): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhy102>.

indicated that “[s]pirituality appeared to protect against mental suffering.”⁶ Miller asserts that spirituality is the strongest protective factor against depression, suicidality, substance abuse, and high-risk behaviors for eighteen-to twenty-five-year-olds.⁷ The Army Chaplain Corps’ Spiritual Readiness Initiative focuses on chaplains enhancing the spiritual readiness of their personnel, with emphasis on junior soldiers in the eighteen-to twenty-five-year-old age group.⁸

I have provided care to leaders well beyond young adulthood who are struggling with spiritual and emotional issues that threaten their well-being and challenge their readiness to provide consistent positive leadership under pressures they face in their personal and professional lives. Leaders are taught selfless service, to put their soldiers first. They focus on soldier care and resilience and may neglect their own needs, fearing vulnerability and stigma.

At Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA), I served under Brigadier General (BG) Donald Bolduc, a leader who overcame his fears and sought help for traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress. SOCAFRICA was activated in 2008 and did not have a chaplain assigned until BG Bolduc filled the vacancy in 2017. In our initial meeting, the general was open about his struggles and how counseling and his faith was helping him heal. I was aware of his interview with *The New York Times*, stating he wanted “soldiers under his command — who are stationed in some of the continent’s most difficult parts — to know that seeking help will not hurt their careers.”⁹ My job was to bring the spiritual domain to the command’s

⁶ Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life* (New York: Random House, 2021), 7.

⁷ Lisa Miller, “Spiritual Awakening and Depression in Adolescents: A Unified Pathway or ‘Two Sides of the Same Coin,’” *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 77, no. 4 (December 2013).

⁸ Lisa Miller, “The Science of Spirituality” (U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Spiritual Readiness Initiative Training, Schofield Barracks, HI, May 2022).

⁹ Dionne Searcey, “A General’s New Mission: Leading a Charge Against PTSD,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/world/africa/donald-bolduc-ptsd.html?auth=login-google1tap&login=google1tap>.

Preservation of the Force and Family¹⁰ team of mental health, financial and peer counselors. I learned in SOCAFRICA and subsequent commands that leaders (senior officers and non-commissioned officers) would benefit from focused attention on their own spiritual readiness.

In Vanderbilt's Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Integrative Chaplaincy program, one of our Integrative Mental Health modules provided chaplains with a three-part video series on *Upstream Suicide Prevention*. The series "touches on common aspects of the human experience that have relevance for all people – identity, community, relationships, meaning and purpose, and resilience."¹¹ The idea of getting upstream of potential struggles resonated with me as I began this project. Chaplains can help leaders get upstream of emotional and spiritual crises, so that when inevitable personal and professional challenges come along, they are better prepared to navigate the rapids. In *Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway writes, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places."¹² Chaplains can help leaders tend the emotional and spiritual wounds they carry from combat deployments and other difficult life experiences so they can grow strong in their broken places. The positive ripple effect of leaders who are solidly emotionally and spiritually grounded cannot be underestimated. The same is true for the negative "toxic" ripple effect of leaders who lack solid emotional and spiritual grounding.

Army Profession and Leadership Policy,¹³ addresses "counterproductive leadership," including "toxic leadership" and "destructive leadership styles."¹⁴ Army Leaders "must remain

¹⁰ POTFF Staff, "About POTFF," *Socom.Mil*, April 20, 2021, <https://www.socom.mil/POTFF/Pages/About-POTFF.aspx>.

¹¹ "Upstream Suicide Prevention," *Veterans Affairs Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC)*, n.d., <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/IMH/upstream.asp>.

¹² "Ernest Hemingway Quotes," *Goodreads*, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6592630-the-world-breaks-everyone-and-afterward-many-are-strong-at>.

¹³ *Army Regulation 600-100, Army Profession and Leadership Policy* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2017), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN3758_AR_600-100_FINAL_WEB_.pdf.

¹⁴ *AR 600-100*, 8.

vigilant to guard against counterproductive leadership behaviors from themselves as well as in the units with which they serve. Counterproductive leadership can take different forms, from incompetence to abusiveness, all of which have detrimental impacts on individuals, the unit, and the accomplishment of the mission.”¹⁵ A quick internet search of “Army toxic leadership” reveals the issue remains highly problematic. In a recent article “Breaking the Cycle: Eradicating Toxic Leadership,” Master Sergeant Robert Flak posits that addressing toxic leadership requires a “comprehensive and systematic approach at all levels in the Army” via “robust training modules in professional military education” and “a cultural shift within the Army, promoting a leadership ethos grounded in respect, integrity, and empathy.”¹⁶ Chaplains can help eradicate unproductive leadership by promoting Spiritual Readiness among leaders in their commands.

This project explores how spirituality is foundational for productive Army leaders who promote an ethos grounded in respect, integrity, and empathy. It investigates how this grounding guards against counterproductive leadership and supports leaders who embody the Army’s core leader competencies (*Leads others, Extends influence, Leads by example, Communicates, Builds trust, Creates a positive environment, Prepares self, Develops others, Stewards the profession, Gets results*) and the Army’s key leader attributes (*Character, Presence, Intellect*).¹⁷

As an Army chaplain, I am reminded of General Douglas MacArthur’s eloquent *Duty-Honor-Country* speech – his farewell address to the Corps of Cadets in 1962. “The soldier above all others prays for peace,” he said, “for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest

¹⁵ AR 600-100, 8.

¹⁶ Robert Flak, “Breaking the Cycle: Eradicating Toxic Leadership,” *NCO Journal*, Army University Press, January 8, 2024, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2024/January/Breaking-the-Cycle/>.

¹⁷ *Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2019), 1–16, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18529-ADP_6-22-000-WEB-1.pdf.

wounds and scars of war.”¹⁸ They were sobering words for the ears of young cadets who would soon be lieutenants leading soldiers in the jungles of Vietnam. They are sobering words for today’s leaders, especially the more seasoned and senior officers and non-commissioned officers who bear wounds and scars from twenty years of protracted war. Given the prospect of Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) with near-peers in our future, we are at a critical period of ensuring our leaders are spiritually ready. Are they emotionally, spiritually, morally, and ethically grounded to navigate potential leadership challenges? Do they carry wounds and scars that need to be healed? Are they prepared to face, and to help their soldiers face, future wounding and scarring? Chaplains can implement Spiritual Readiness training that targets senior officers and non-commissioned officers to help leaders assess, strengthen, and sustain their Spiritual Readiness and to support the spiritual development and readiness of their subordinates.

Addressing the Problem of Army Leader Spiritual Readiness

In the first three semesters of our DMin program work, we explored the intersection of chaplaincy and mental health through the Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services (MHICS) certificate program. We presented and discussed case studies concerning ministry with individuals in our contextual settings in combination with study and application of evidence-based mental health interventions. I have long-believed that spirituality and psychology are deeply intertwined. This doctoral program reinforces that belief. The MHICS modules and practicums enhanced my understanding and application of pastoral care in a way that more fully integrates spiritual and psycho-social-emotional in my ministry.

¹⁸ Douglas A. MacArthur, *Thayer Award: General Douglas MacArthur’s “Duty, Honor, Country” Farewell Address to the U.S. Corps of Cadets* (United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 1962), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_42_aLGkRpg&t=2s.

Our first semester modules introduced three primary modalities of evidence-based mental health interventions: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), Problem-Solving Therapy (PST). ACT is a helpful intervention for chaplains to leverage, especially with leaders who feel trapped by past traumas (military-related or not) or paralyzed by attachment to a rigid and inflexible conceptualized self. In the second semester, we delved into the study of mental health issues: Mood Disorder, Suicide, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Moral Injury. Through spiritual readiness training and counseling interventions, chaplains can address these issues with leaders and helping them get upstream of the issues. The module on *Spirituality, Suffering and Resilience* in the final semester of MHICS also informs my project. I will return to these MHICS module topics later in this paper with further description as to how they inform my research of the problem and development of solutions to the problem.

The problem is real – leaders, even the seemingly strong and successful ones, are vulnerable humans who struggle with emotional and spiritual issues. I have ministered to numerous leaders in garrison and combat zone settings struggling with feelings of being overwhelmed, of inadequacy, of extreme frustration working with or for other leaders who display counterproductive leadership. Appendix A offers an overview of the ACT Hexaflex Model and references to websites by two therapists who share information that may be helpful to chaplains desiring to use Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with leaders.

Qualitative Research Interviews

I entered the Army during the Cold War, under the recruiting slogan *Be All You Can Be*. I returned to the Army deep into the Global War on Terror, under the slogan *Army Strong*.¹⁹ The Army is returning to its *Be All You Can Be* roots as we work to deter a hot war with near-peer

¹⁹ “The Many Recruiting Slogans Of The U.S. Army Since WWI,” *SOFREP* (blog), February 9, 2022, <https://sofrep.com/news/the-many-recruiting-slogans-of-the-u-s-army-since-wwi/>.

competitors.²⁰ This research project connects to these Army slogans. What makes leaders *Army Strong* in terms of the Spiritual Domain of Holistic Health and Fitness? And how do they continue to build and sustain that strength so they can embody *Be All You Can Be*?

To help address these questions, I conducted individual interviews with former Army leaders who were successful as career Army officers and who also faced personal and professional challenges in the Army. I explored how the following topics intersect my qualitative research and informed my conclusions: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Posttraumatic Stress and Posttraumatic Growth, Moral Injury, Moral Drift, Ethical Leadership, Science of Spirituality studies by Lisa Miller, spiritual writings of Richard Rohr and others, and theological perspectives (human flourishing, incarnational theology, death/resurrection).

My research included interviews via Zoom with eight women West Point graduates who are retired Army leaders. I chose to privilege the voices of women and to limit my focus of interviewees for three primary reasons: 1) The DMin research project paper is restricted to 45-55 pages; 2) In discussion with Dr. Graham Reside, my consultation group facilitator when I began this project, he thought West Point women leaders could be an interesting group to study and suggested limiting the interviews to approximately five; 3) I believe the wisdom and experience of these women leaders—the first generation of women to meet the challenges of West Point, graduate from the Academy, and serve a full career as an Army officer during a period of extended combat operations—can offer important voice and valuable insight to the study of spiritual readiness for leaders of all genders. The emotional and spiritual challenges that the first generation of women West Point graduates to complete an Army career faced were significant

²⁰ Rose Thayer, “‘Be All You Can Be,’ Army to Market for New Recruits with Old Slogan,” *Stars and Stripes*, December 1, 2022, <https://www.stripes.com/branches/army/2022-12-01/army-recruiting-slogan-advertising-campaign%2%A0-8267208.html>.

and I believe their lessons in resilience can be informative for all leaders regarding building and sustaining spiritual readiness.

Fifty-one women responded to my recruiting message and thirty-two completed an initial survey. I developed a comparison spreadsheet and selected five women to participate who represented as broad a diversity as possible. I expanded the interviews from five to eight to ensure a diversity in spiritual traditions among participants. Interview subjects were leaders who served as commanders at battalion level or higher or held another senior leadership position of significant responsibility during a combat deployment or in a senior position that took them to an area of hostile or potentially hostile operations. They represented diverse backgrounds and experiences regarding sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, marital status, and parenthood. They included officers who served in combat arms, combat support, combat service support, and specialty branches: Aviation, Air Defense Artillery, Engineer, Signal, Transportation, Judge Advocate General. Regarding spiritual tradition, they identify as: Jewish, Catholic, Episcopal, Baptist, Protestant, Christian non-denominational, Spiritual, and Non-Religious. They ranged in age from mid-forties to mid-sixties. Appendix B provides more detail about the study process.²¹

Before each interview, I offered three questions as prompts for conversation:

- 1. How do you describe your spirituality? Describe any practices, activities, rituals, communities that have supported the development and sustainment of your spiritual core.*
- 2. Reflect on 1 or 2 challenging times in your personal and professional life. How has your spirituality guided and sustained your resilience and moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?*
- 3. What advice do you have for Army leaders in developing and sustaining a strong spiritual core, particularly in light of preparing for the prospect of Large-Scale Combat Operations?*

²¹ Andrea Baker, "IRB Packet: Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders," Institutional Review Board Approval (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, October 5, 2023).

These leaders described their successes and struggles with deep vulnerability and transparency. Their desire to share their thoughts and reflections regarding their spiritual development and resilience for the betterment of leaders who come behind them was inspiring. It was an honor and privilege to interview each one. Their stories inform the final two sections of this paper.

Diversity in My Context

As of June 2022, “[t]he total number of Soldiers in the Active Component is 465,239. Males account for 84.4% and Females account for 15.6% of the total. The Racial/Ethnic distribution of the Army is as follows – White, Not Hispanic: 54%, Black, Not Hispanic: 20.2%, Hispanic: 17.2%, Asian or Pacific Islander: 6.9%, American Indian or Alaskan Native: 0.9%, and Unknown/Other: 0.8%.”²² Of particular note, the Active Component demographics show that among enlisted ranks, the ratio of White/Non-Hispanic soldiers to Race/Ethnic Minority soldiers is generally equal (Private 49%:51%, Sergeant Major 55%:45%). Among commissioned officer ranks, the ratios are quite different (Second Lieutenant 66%:34%, General Officer 84%:16%). There is a large gap ratio of males to females among all enlisted and officer ranks (Private 85%:15%, Sergeant Major 87%:13% and Second Lieutenant 77%:23%, General Officer 92%:8%).²³ This data shows that the senior enlisted leader ratio for race/ethnicity is far more balanced than among senior officers. The data confirms there are significantly more men than women in the Army at every rank. The data also shows that the higher the rank of the enlisted or officer soldier, the lower the percentage of women and persons of racial/ethnic minority.

My current context in a major Army Reserve command, with the headquarters on the island of Oahu and subordinate units located in Maui, Hawaii, Alaska, Washington, Guam,

²² U.S. Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G1, “Active Component Demographics” (Washington, DC: The Pentagon, June 30, 2022), <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2022/08/05/90d128cb/active-component-demographic-report-june-2022.pdf>.

²³ U.S. Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G1.

Saipan, American Samoa, Republic of South Korea and Japan offers a broader diversity of Asian and Pacific Islanders and women than the Active Component. 73% are men and 27% are women. Key leaders are often not local. Many of those who occupy Troop Program Unit (part-time drilling reservist) battalion and brigade command and primary staff positions at the lieutenant colonel and colonel levels, as well as several senior non-commissioned officers in master sergeant and sergeant major positions, travel from locations on the mainland U.S. Most senior-level leaders who are reservists on active-duty status are also from the mainland U.S. Non-local senior-level leaders are mostly White (some Black and Latino) and mostly male officers and non-commissioned officers. This mix of leaders at the highest levels (who are mostly non-local and on assignment for two to three years) with subordinate leaders and more junior soldiers (who are local and long-serving) is noteworthy. These disparities in rank concerning local versus non-local leaders have the potential to create tension within the command. Conducting a Spiritual Readiness training event that brings the command's leaders together could not only bolster their individual spiritual cores but also enhance esprit de corps among this diverse group.

Regarding religious demographics, a 2019 *Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity in the Armed Services* report for Congress states:

Religious diversity in the military is broadly representative of the U.S. population. Approximately 70% of active duty military personnel consider themselves to be of a Christian denomination. Less than 2% of active servicemembers identify with Judaism, Islam, or Eastern religions.... This breakdown is consistent with the religious makeup of the U.S. population. Americans practicing non-Christian faiths account for 5.9% of the U.S. population suggesting that non-Christian faiths may be underrepresented in the military.²⁴

²⁴ Congressional Research Service, "Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity in the Armed Services: Background and Issues for Congress" (Washington, DC: Members and Committees of U.S. Congress, June 5, 2019), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44321>.

In my current context, I have conducted hundreds of meetings with soldiers during administrative mobilization exercises to confirm their religious preference and discuss concerns they may have. With the missionary legacy across the Pacific Islands, Christianity is the predominant religious preference among our soldiers. While unit administrative data shows Unknown religious preference for 25% of assigned soldiers, when I meet with soldiers individually, few claim no religious preference and those who do tend to be from the mainland U.S. Data shows many identify as Catholic (31%), Non-denominational Christian (24%), or they specify a Protestant denomination (13%). A few affiliate with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (2%) or Buddhism (1%). Approximately 1% total identify as followers of Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Islam, Judaism, Sikh, or Hindu traditions. Less than 1% specify being followers of other spiritual traditions (Heathen, Magick and Spiritual, Native American, Pagan, Wiccan, Asatru, Shaman, Other). A small number identify as Agnostic, Atheist, or No Religious Preference (2% total).

In approaching Spiritual Readiness training and individual counseling with leaders, it is critical to know the audience. What religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, social, gender demographics are present? How might the demographics shape the training and one-one conversations? PART IV. STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE will further address the chaplain's considerations when engaging leaders about their spiritual readiness.

Theological Issues

In the discussion of theological issues for this project, I begin with an obvious question, *What is Spirituality?* Army Field 7-22 (FM 7-22) *Holistic Health and Fitness* (H2F) describes Five Domains of Soldier Readiness: Mental, Spiritual, Physical, Nutritional, and Sleep. FM 7-22 builds on the definition of Spiritual Fitness in Army Regulation 600-63 Army Health Promotion:

“The development of the personal qualities needed to sustain a person in times of stress, hardship, and tragedy. These qualities come from religious, philosophical, or human values and form the basis for character, disposition, decision-making, and integrity.”²⁵ Writing about the Spiritual Domain of the Army’s H2F initiative, Nina Borgeson reports, “This meaning [of spiritual readiness] is drawn from the Soldier’s spiritual dimension, which is influenced by their core beliefs, values, motivation and identity. The spiritual readiness domain is inclusive and applies to both religious and non-religious people regardless of background, philosophy, or religion.”²⁶

In the same article, Borgeson shares an observation by Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Paul Fritts, then command chaplain at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command’s Center for Initial Military Training. Reflecting on spiritual readiness, Chaplain Fritts quoted General George C. Marshall: “The Soldier’s heart, the Soldier’s spirit, the Soldier’s soul, are everything. Unless the Soldier’s soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end.”²⁷ Soul sustenance is critical for soldiers and units.

Recently retired Army Chief of Chaplains, Major General Thomas Solhjem, often spoke to chaplains about our unique call to develop and support the spiritual readiness of our soldiers. In an interview with Christian Broadcast News, Chaplain Solhjem said, “When you put on the uniform, in service to your country and you’re asked to possibly lay down your life in rendering service to your country we have a moral obligation to fulfill to care for the soul of that soldier.”²⁸ Developing and sustaining spiritual readiness in soldiers, with a particular focus on caring for the

²⁵ *Army Regulation 600-63, Army Health Promotion* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2015), 44, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/r2/policydocs/r600_63.pdf.

²⁶ Nina Borgeson, “Holistic Health and Fitness: Building Spiritual and Mental Resilience,” *Army.Mil* (blog), February 23, 2021, https://www.army.mil/article/243612/holistic_health_and_fitness_building_spiritual_and_mental_resilience.

²⁷ Borgeson.

²⁸ Eric Philips, “Caring for the Souls of Soldiers: Why Military Chaplains Are More Needed Than Ever In the Time of COVID-19,” *Christian Broadcast News* (blog), June 8, 2020, <https://www2.cbn.com/news/us/caring-souls-soldiers-why-military-chaplains-are-more-needed-ever-time-covid-19>.

soldier's soul, is the heart of what Army chaplains do. And we need to remember that our obligation extends from our most junior ranking soldiers to our most senior ranking leaders.

Chapter 10 of FM 7-22 is dedicated to the Spiritual Readiness domain of H2F and addresses its importance to overall soldier readiness. In summary:

Spiritual readiness...directly impacts the resiliency of individuals and organizations. Encouraging Soldiers to connect and reflect on the worldview or value system that informs their core beliefs, principles, ethics, and morals can empower them to endure and overcome stress, hardship, and tragedy. Leaders have a responsibility to support spiritual readiness practices and create a climate where dignity and respect guide the process. Understanding common spiritual readiness practices enables leaders to support individual spiritual readiness development, sustainment, maintenance, and repair.²⁹

The chapter includes a section on Spiritual Readiness Assessment, a tool chaplains can use to help soldiers self-assess and aid their individual spiritual development. The field manual stresses the importance of spiritual assessments not being artificial, judgmental, rigid:

For this reason, each Soldier creates an assessment based on personal aspect and perception of spirituality. For example, Soldiers who find hope in their own personal achievements when experiencing hardship or adversity, base their assessment on the degree to which achievement is effective in bringing that hope and thereby reinforce their belief in personal achievement. Others who find hope in religious beliefs may base their assessments on connection to those beliefs or practices that reinforce those beliefs.³⁰

Additionally, Table 10-1 offers sample spiritual readiness factors soldiers can use to assess their own spiritual readiness with focus on relevant factors. The major topics of this sample assessment intersect with theological reflection themes: Personhood (value and purpose), Identity (self and self in relation to others), Growth Orientation (mindset), Personal Agency (control/can't control), Coping Strategies (respond to adversity), Connection (connections – solid/broken/repair,

²⁹ FM 7-22, C-1 10-17.

³⁰ FM 7-22, C-1 10-15.

forgiveness of self and others).³¹ I will return to the discussion of the spiritual readiness factors as they relate to my theology later in this section.

While Chapter 10 of FM 7-22 offers a description of Spiritual Readiness, examples of how to assess Spiritual Readiness, and suggested Spiritual Readiness Practices, it does not define Spirituality. In the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Spiritual Readiness Initiative “Strong Warrior Strong Spirit” *Spiritual Readiness Handbook*, the authors offer this definition of spirituality, differentiated from religion: “Spirituality is the innate human capacity that is shaped by religion, culture, family and community.” Based on the brain research of Miller and twin studies by Kendler et al, they assert, “Science shows that spirituality is a natural capacity in every human being, religious and non-religious.” Moreover, “[s]pirituality is part of the human composition, just as we are physical and social beings, so too we are spiritual beings. We come equipped to connect with G-d, our Higher Power of the sacred presence in the Universe, whatever our tradition might be (even if we grow up outside of a religious tradition).”³²

In answering the question, *What is Spirituality?*, I turn next turn *Forging the Warriors Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet Prayer*. Leaning into the Latin etymology of the word *spirit*, meaning *breath*, the authors write that “spirit has traditionally been understood to be the animating force, or the energy within living beings.”³³ They define spirit as “the vital animating force within living beings; the part of a human being associated with mind, will, and feelings; and the essential nature of a person.”³⁴ They go on to say that the human spirit influences how one thinks, acts, and feels about life.³⁵ They conclude that “the development of

³¹ FM 7-22, 10-5-10–16.

³² *Spiritual Readiness Handbook* (Washington, DC: Office of the U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains, 2022), 5. (All quotes in this paragraph from this source.)

³³ Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews, eds., *Forging the Warrior’s Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet Prayer* (Sisters, OR: Jerico, 2007), 58.

³⁴ Snider and Matthews, 60.

³⁵ Snider and Matthews, 60.

the human spirit should form the cornerstone of any leader development program.”³⁶ Of special importance to my research project is this assertion about leaders:

A leader’s spirit imbues in his soldiers the purpose, direction, will, and courage to do the right thing in the very complex and chaotic environment of combat, where life, death, and strategic interests of the country hinge on the leader’s decisions. Leaders who nurture their own and their followers’ spirits are preparing their soldiers to meet the harsh rigors and stresses of combat, thereby enhancing the combat power of their unit, promoting the growth of their followers as humans, and helping protect soldiers from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other battlefield pathologies. In its published doctrine, the Army has recognized the critical importance of developing the human spirit, incorporating it, among other places, in the master plan for promoting soldier well-being in its totality.³⁷

The Army leader’s spirit provides the true North when the stakes are highest. Leaders who give attention to building and sustaining their spirits and the spirits of their soldiers are getting upstream of potential chaos ahead and shoring up critical spiritual resources to navigate combat.

Drawing on definitions and descriptions of Spiritual Readiness, Spiritual Assessment, and the Human Spirit, I offer this definition of Spirituality, as it relates to Army leaders:

Spirituality is the essence of who leaders are as human beings. Through beliefs and spiritual practices (religious or non-religious), culture, and community, spirituality forms and informs their values and shapes their actions and decisions. It is the core grounding that undergirds their strong moral and ethical character in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity. It is the source of the true North that gives them purpose and clarity when situations seem hopeless. It is the life force that gives them strength and courage to bounce back and grow from adversity. It is the fountain of wisdom they embody and impart to their soldiers to develop and sustain their own spiritual readiness.

Having addressed the issue of defining Spirituality, I return to the spiritual readiness factors in FM 7-22, as they relate to my theological understanding of Personhood, Identity Growth Orientation, Personal Agency, Coping Strategies, and Connection. I view each factor

³⁶ Snider and Matthews, 60.

³⁷ Snider and Matthews, 59.

through the lenses of Human Flourishing and Incarnational Theology. Christian Smith, lecturer with *Upstream Suicide Prevention*, describes human flourishing in Aristotelian terms:

Things that exist have a certain nature and...their role in life...is to become what they are.... What...does it look like if what we are develops, becomes the most robust, healthy, impressive version of what we are?³⁸

An Anglican priest in Wales articulates well how I understand Jesus and God's call to follow him: "The Word became flesh and lived among us' (Jn 1:14). Therefore, we should 'make flesh' or 'incarnate' the love of God in the communities within which God has placed us."³⁹

Becoming the most robust, healthy, impressive version of who God created each of us to be and incarnating the love of God in service to others empowers humans to flourish.

Personhood (value and purpose). For me, personhood is grounded in abundance that leads to human flourishing. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10, NRSV). St. Irenaeus is quoted as saying, "The glory of God is the human person fully alive."⁴⁰ I believe God created humans to have value and flourish, to be fully alive in body, mind and spirit: "For it was you who formed my innermost parts; you who knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13-14, NRSV). God's power in us gives us purpose: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20-21, NRSV).

Identity (self and self in relation to others). God made us in God's likeness: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he

³⁸ *Video #1 Human Flourishing*, Upstream Suicide Prevention (Durham, NC: Horizon Productions, 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABFFk0N8Koo&t=609s> (9:35).

³⁹ Jordan Hillebert, "Putting the Incarnation Back in 'Incarnational,'" *Covenant Church in Wales, Commentary* (blog), January 3, 2017, <https://covenant.livingchurch.org/2017/01/03/putting-the-incarnation-back-in-incarnational/>.

⁴⁰ "The Glory of God Is the Human Person Fully Alive," *St. Matthew's United Methodist Church, Bowie MD* (blog), accessed March 23, 2024, <https://stmatthews-bowie.org/the-glory-of-god-is-the-human-person-fully-alive-st-irenaeus/>.

created them” (Gen. 1:27, NRSV). In relation to one another, I lean into the Episcopal Church *Baptismal Covenant*: “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”⁴¹

Growth Orientation (mindset). Greg Wilson points to several biblical stories, namely the story of Naomi in the Book of Ruth, that demonstrate posttraumatic growth, defined by Tedeschi and Calhoun as “positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with traumatic or highly challenging life circumstances.”⁴² Naomi lost her husband and both sons. God transformed her grief and trauma into new life through a new family with her daughter-in-law Ruth (the wife of one of Naomi’s deceased sons) and Ruth’s new husband Boaz. Stories of posttraumatic growth are stories of resurrection, of rising from death into new life.

Personal Agency (control/can’t control). The psalmist writes to God, “In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed” (Ps. 139:16, NRSV). I envision God knowing our life stories—our joys, sorrows, decisions—from before we were conceived to eternity. And we have agency to see what’s within our control, what’s outside our control. What choice is best takes prayer, holy listening, and mindful discernment.

Coping Strategies (respond to adversity). “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28, NRSV). While we live in a broken world, God is ever-present, drawing us to wholeness. Seeking and accepting help from others who embody God’s love enables growth, healing, and flourishing.

⁴¹ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York, NY, 1979), 305.

⁴² Greg Wilson, “Trauma as Tutor: Posttraumatic Growth in the Ruth Narrative,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 374.

Connection (connections – solid/broken/repair, forgiveness of self and others). “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39, NRSV). Sin is that which separates us from God, from others, from our true self. Seeking, offering, and accepting forgiveness; repairing broken relationships and finding healthy new ones when repair is not possible—these actions restore and birth connections.

Army chaplains operate in a pluralistic environment and perform or provide religious support for a diverse population.⁴³ Being grounded in their own theology and faith tradition is imperative, while simultaneously respecting the theology and faith traditions of those they serve.

Ministerial Practice Issues

Army chaplains have two primary roles: religious leaders and religious advisors. As religious leaders, “Chaplains conduct the religious programs and activities for the command and provide professional advice, counsel, and instruction on religious, moral, and ethical issues.”⁴⁴ As religious advisors, “Chaplains advise the commander and staff on matters of religion, morals, and morale.”⁴⁵ While FM 7-22 governs the Spiritual Readiness Domain of Holistic Health and Fitness, DA Pam 165-19 governs Moral Leadership. H2F and Moral Leadership are the commander’s programs, but the chaplain is the command’s key advisor and lead instructor regarding Spiritual Readiness and Moral Leadership.

I return to a line from my working definition of Spirituality for Army leaders: *It is the core grounding that undergirds their strong moral and ethical character in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity.* Spiritual Readiness and Moral Leadership are

⁴³ *Army Regulation 165-1, Army Chaplain Corps Activities* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2024), 1, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN32960-AR_165-1-000-WEB-1.pdf.

⁴⁴ *AR 165-1*, 7.

⁴⁵ *AR 165-1*, 8.

interconnected and there is an urgency to implement training programs. With focus on junior soldiers, leaders must not be neglected in Spiritual Readiness and Moral Leadership training. In fact, leaders deserve special focus in these topics given what may be demanded of them:

The U.S. Army Operating Concept describes significant readiness challenges the Army will face when anticipating armed conflict marked by increased complexity, threats, enemies, and adversaries that are becoming increasingly capable and elusive. These challenges highlight the need to develop morally sound leaders and cohesive teams that will thrive in conditions of complexity and uncertainty. Therefore, Army concepts and the Army's Force 2025 and Beyond comprehensive strategy identify leader development as a near-term priority, noting that competent ethical leadership cannot be substituted with advanced technology or sophisticated weaponry.⁴⁶

Given the possibility of *armed conflict marked by increased complexity, threats, enemies, and adversaries that are becoming increasingly capable and elusive*, the need to ensure Army leaders are emotionally, spiritually, ethically, and morally grounded has, perhaps, never been greater.

Relationships Between Points of Analysis

In this second part of the research project paper, I explored and analyzed the need for Army leaders to develop and sustain a strong spiritual core. I delved into the Spiritual Readiness Domain of the H2F program and defined spirituality in a way that specifically addresses Army leaders. I offered my personal theological approach to spirituality regarding Personhood, Identity Growth Orientation, Personal Agency, Coping Strategies, and Connection through the overlapping lenses of Incarnational Theology and Human Flourishing. Finally, I noted the chaplain's role as key advisor and lead instructor in developing and implementing Spiritual Readiness and Moral Leadership training designed explicitly for Army leaders.

In PART III, I will reflect on the developmental phase of life in which non-commissioned officers who are master sergeants or above and commissioned officers who are lieutenant

⁴⁶ *Department of the Army Pamphlet 165-19, Moral Leadership* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2020), 1, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/pam165-19.pdf>.

colonels or above generally fall. In doing so, I will engage interviews with retired career Army leaders who shared their challenges and wisdom as they reflected on their spirituality. I will interpret insights their stories impart—in concert with readings on midlife spirituality, post-traumatic stress, moral injury, and moral drift—to the stage for strategic suggestions for practice.

PART III. CONSTRUCTIVE REFLECTION AND INTERPRETATION

Leaders and Midlife Spirituality

Midlife generally encompasses “the ages of 40 to 60, plus or minus 10 years.” Carl Jung “referred to midlife as the afternoon of life” and Erik Erikson considered midlife, the 7th stage of psychosocial development, “conflicted and revolving around generativity vs. stagnation and self-absorption.” In the article *Midlife in the 2020s: Opportunities and Challenges*, the authors assert, “The narrative surrounding midlife needs to move beyond the misconceptions tied to the midlife crisis to consider midlife as a vibrant period with unprecedented opportunities and challenges.”⁴⁷ Midlife can be a time of great flourishing, of being fully alive, a vibrant period for Army leaders to develop spiritual readiness for the opportunities and challenges in this stage of life.

To set the stage for how Army leaders may develop and sustain a strong spiritual core, I turn to James W. Fowler’s *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and Quest for Meaning*. Fowler claims that “faith is not always religious in its content or context,” nor is faith confined to “religious commitment or belief.”⁴⁸ For Fowler:

Faith is a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person’s way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a backdrop of shared meaning and purpose.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Frank J. Infurna, Denis Gerstorf, and Margie E. Lachman, “Midlife in the 2020s: Opportunities and Challenges,” *The American Psychologist* 75, no. 4 (2020): 470–85, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000591>. (All quotes in this paragraph from this source.)

⁴⁸ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, First HarperCollins paperback edition (New York, NY: Harper One, 1995), 4.

⁴⁹ Fowler, 4.

Fowler sees faith as a universal human experience that is broader than religion or belief. Faith is about relationships, transcendence, finding meaning in life, human flourishing, and he outlines a six-stage theory of faith development. Our target group is Army leaders who have spent nearly 20 years or more in military service and range in age from about 40 to 50 or more. Fowler's theory of faith development would generally place them in Stage 5 – Conjunctive Faith (Midlife and Beyond), or possibly Stage 6 – Universalizing Faith, which is rare.⁵⁰

Individuals in Stage 5, our focal stage, are aware that answers are not always easily found and are more comfortable with ambiguity than those in earlier stages. In Stage 5, they are “opening to the voices of one’s ‘deeper self,’” Fowler asserts. He goes on to say, “Unusual before midlife, Stage 5 knows the sacrament of defeat and the reality of irrevocable commitments and acts.... Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience.”⁵¹ Stage 5 is the world of knowing that seemingly contradictory things can be *both x and y*. At this stage individuals have known joy and suffering. They have lived with consequences of their actions and decisions – good and bad.

I next turn to the writing of Franciscan priest Father Richard Rohr. In *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, Rohr describes a theology of spiritual maturation from first-half-of-life-living to second-half-of life-living. According to Rohr's theology of *falling upward*, “the task of first half is to create a proper *container* for one's life.”⁵² You carefully construct your ego or “false self”; that is “your role, title, and personal image that is largely a creation of your own mind and attachments.”⁵³ Eventually, a stumbling block—“some event,

⁵⁰ Fowler, 113. (All quotes in this paragraph from same page.)

⁵¹ Fowler, 198.

⁵² Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, Revised and updated edition (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2024), 1.

⁵³ Rohr, 54.

person, death, idea, or relationship will enter your life that you simply cannot deal with using your present skill set, your acquired knowledge, or your strong willpower.”⁵⁴ Rohr asserts that you “*must* stumble and fall,” and this kind of fall is “*necessary* suffering.”⁵⁵ It can lead to an awakening to spiritual maturity, to falling upward into second-half-of-life-living. You can shed the false self and discover your “True Self” inside your container, “who you are...from the beginning in the mind and heart of God, ‘the face you had before you were born,’ as the Zen masters say.”⁵⁶ I liken Rohr’s description of falling upward to Fowler’s Stage 5 Conjunctive Faith, where one “knows the sacrament of defeat” and becomes “[a]live to paradox.”⁵⁷ New life rises from the ashes of the phoenix. New life rises from the tomb in the death and resurrection of Jesus. New life rises from your carefully-constructed container as you embrace necessary suffering, falling upward, surrendering the false self to dying, opening to resurrection in the discovery of your True Self.

In *The Second Mountain*, David Brooks introduces a theme similar to Rohr’s notions of the stumbling block and necessary suffering. He describes traveling the difficult life road from one mountain top with limited visibility, through a dark valley, to reach a second mountain top where the view is full of insights one could not have seen without traversing the suffering of the valley. He introduces Leo Tolstoy’s descent from success and prestige into “the valley” of despair after the death of his brother and witnessing a horrific execution in Paris. Brooks writes, “Wealth and fame and accomplishment do not spare anybody from the valley.” Some people “go through life without ever stumbling into the valley...[b]ut most of us have had to endure some

⁵⁴ Rohr, 41.

⁵⁵ Rohr, 42.

⁵⁶ Rohr, 54.

⁵⁷ Fowler, 198.

season of suffering.”⁵⁸ The valley, the season of suffering, Brooks asserts, “can be a period of soul-crushing anguish, but it can also be one of the most precious seasons of your life.”⁵⁹ Brooks paraphrases theologian Paul Tillich, writing that “suffering upsets the normal patterns of life and reminds you that you are not who you thought you were.”⁶⁰ For Brooks, suffering does three things: 1) teaches us gratitude; 2) calls for a response; 3) shatters the illusion of self-sufficiency.⁶¹ Brooks uses Christian imagery to describe the route to the second mountain: “Dying to the old self, cleansing in the emptiness, resurrecting in the new. From the agony of the valley, to the purgation in the desert, to the insight on the mountaintop.”⁶² Brooks goes on to write that Second Mountain living is a life of meaning and purpose with four commitments: 1) to a spouse and family; 2) to a vocation; 3) to a philosophy or faith; 4) to a community.⁶³

There are strong connections between Rohr’s second-half-of-life-living and Brooks’ second mountain living. Each theory notes the necessity of suffering to enable spiritual awakening that leads to a fuller life of meaning and purpose. Fowler might view this movement as developing faith, as “moving into the force field of life,” as “finding coherence in and giving meaning to multiple forces and relations that make up our lives,”⁶⁴ as moving into Stage 5 Conjunctive Faith where one discovers the voices of the “deeper self” in midlife.⁶⁵

In this discussion of midlife spirituality, I revisit Miller’s *The Awakened Brain*. Miller shares the story of a woman, “an accomplished journalist...who had put her professional ambitions on the back burner to raise two children and support her husband as he launched his

⁵⁸ David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*, 2020 Random House trade paperback edition (New York: Random House, 2020), 28.

⁵⁹ Brooks, 36.

⁶⁰ Brooks, 37.

⁶¹ Brooks, 37.

⁶² Brooks, 38.

⁶³ Brooks, 83-313. (Brooks offers full descriptions of each commitment.)

⁶⁴ Fowler, 4.

⁶⁵ Fowler, 198.

career.”⁶⁶ The woman sought counseling because her life was unraveling with the news her husband had an affair and wanted a divorce. Miller describes how the woman’s “anxiety ran deeper than her husband’s betrayal, deeper than her sense of abandonment.”⁶⁷ She had worked hard to create a secure home and top-quality opportunities for her children, a childhood different than the one of neglect and feeling unloved that she experienced growing up. Now she was facing her “worst nightmare” and struggling with how she would navigate her upended world, and asking, “What was life—her life—really about?”⁶⁸ Miller writes:

These were spiritual questions. And hers was a classic midlife situation. The old way cracks open. It no longer holds. Or it’s no longer enough. This experience is so familiar in our culture that we give it a new—midlife crises—and recognize its symptoms: affairs, sailboats, sports cars, cavalier business decisions, the impulsive pursuit of something newer, better, fuller before time runs out. I’ve learned to call it midlife *chaos*. The world gets rearranged. Often it’s the things we’ve hidden from or tried most to control—our deepest fears and vulnerabilities—that assert themselves in midlife. We might discover that our choices have led us further and further from our true goals and desires. Like [this woman] we are jolted out of the status quo and into a reckoning and understanding that our customary way of dealing with life’s uncertainties—trying to control the outcomes—is no longer working.⁶⁹

Miller knew the traditional treatment model of cognitive behavioral therapy [CBT]—with its focus on examining and transforming “underlying beliefs about love, safety, self-worth”—would be inadequate for the woman’s growth and healing. While CBT might “help [her] feel uplifted and hopeful,” it would not “offer [her] a bigger life or bigger view of the world.” CBT could help the woman “change her thoughts but not her lens.” Miller wanted to help the woman “heal in that deeper, transformative way—to ignite the protection and power of awakening and

⁶⁶ Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 128.

⁶⁷ Miller, 129.

⁶⁸ Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 129.

⁶⁹ Miller, 129-130.

fuel the big blast of healing that comes when spiritual awareness reshuffles the meaning we make from our lives.”⁷⁰

This woman was experiencing what Rohr calls “necessary suffering” that leads to second-half-of-life-living. She could not prevent the fracturing of the secure container she had so carefully constructed for herself and her family. The death of her marriage, however, was offering her an excellent opportunity to discover what was inside that carefully constructed container she had built. From Brook’s perspective, she was descending from the first mountain into the deep dark valley of despair where transformation happens so we can discover the path to the second mountain of clarity and wisdom.

As the woman loosened her tight grip of control, she began to surrender to life’s uncertainties and to embrace the chaos. Her lens shifted as she gained a “fuller vision” and “a new map of reality.”⁷¹ Miller encouraged the woman “to examine the things life was showing her that might take her by surprise.” Her “family broke [a]nd it did not destroy [them].”⁷² She discovered support from “people near and far who’s fallen off the radar,” and exclaimed to Dr. Miller one day, “All these people are showing up! It feels like love is everywhere.”⁷³ She found fulfilling work “as a women’s advocate,” discovered joy in connecting with people and nature, and unearthed the spiritual life she had buried because of her husband’s view that spirituality had no evidence or serious value.⁷⁴ She embraced generative midlife opportunity and flourished.

Through Fowler’s lens of stages of faith, the woman was entering deeply into Stage 5 – Conjunctive Faith. Her clear vision of what her family should and would look like was blurring.

⁷⁰ Miller, 130. (All quotes in this paragraph are from this page.)

⁷¹ Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 132.

⁷² Miller, 131.

⁷³ Miller, 132.

⁷⁴ Miller, 133.

As she embraced the ambiguity the ending of her marriage created, she could see how her fear of being alone and sometimes “acting out of meanness” had pushed her husband away.⁷⁵ She began as Fowler writes of Stage 5, of listening to the voices of her deeper self.

Like late adolescence and young adulthood, midlife can be a time of great existential upheaval. Or not. “We can choose how we approach life during major inflection points—adolescence, midlife, times of loss or trauma,” Miller writes. We can deny the “booting-up of spiritual awareness” and medicate our pain “[o]r we can open the door...to the foundational, felt awareness that we are loved and help and part of it all.”⁷⁶ Midlife, then, can be a place of deep spiritual awakening. Midlife can offer the opportunity to engage the awakened brain, by building on a foundation of spiritual beliefs and practices that may be there already, by revisiting lost ones that once nourished us, by letting go of those that don’t, and by taking on new beliefs and practices. Through new and reenergized spiritual beliefs and practices, Army leaders can activate their awakened brains in midlife and increase their spiritual readiness.

In the next section of this paper, I will explore the transformation of awakened leaders, centering on six areas of spiritual awakening and spiritual healing. I will explore the transformation from Loss to Recovery, from Post-traumatic Stress to Post-traumatic Growth, from Moral Injury to Moral Healing, from Moral Drift to Moral Steadfastness, from Marginalization to Inclusion, and from Garrison Mindset to Battlefield Reality. In doing so, I will weave in experiences and wisdom that retired West Point women Army leaders revealed in their interviews. To protect their privacy, I changed their names and obscured identifying details.

⁷⁵ Miller, 133.

⁷⁶ Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 143.

Awakened Leaders – from Loss to Recovery

Interview Subject #5 shared her poignant story of loss and healing. Kimberly was a young adult immersed in the keep-a-stiff-upper lip environment of the military when her mother died. She describes her Christian faith as strong but not buoyed in a particular faith community. No one asked how she was doing, and she didn't seek anyone to talk with about her deep loss and sadness. She tells how her mother's death had taught her the importance of leaders checking on their soldiers and extending compassion to them in times of loss. While she felt God's presence then, and recognizes now that she "couldn't have made it otherwise," she buried her grief as a young adult and carried it alone as she moved through a successful career. She tells how she "put [up] a very strong barrier" and leaned on her default in difficult: "always insulate, insulate, insulate." Twenty years later she was a battalion commander when members of her unit suffered a terrible training accident. She visited her soldiers in the hospital and reached out to the families of those injured and killed. Even so, when the brigade chaplain came to check on her, she defaulted to what she knew: insulate. One evening she came home to a casserole dish on her front porch with a note from an officer's wife who had once served as an officer herself. "I've been watching you from afar," the note read. "And I just want to let you know that sometimes the shepherds need to be cared for too." Kimberly recalls, "I managed to get into my duplex and I sat on the floor, and I sobbed." She describes how "that was a life-altering moment," and how she has shared the message of that story with command teams and spouses, that "shepherds need to be fed and watered and cared for too." No doubt, that life-altering moment—triggered by a caring note and a manicotti casserole—also tapped the deep grief over her mother's death, and it became a source of self-discovery, healing, and critical knowledge to impart to other leaders.

Kimberly’s story demonstrates what happens when a leader awakens to their own sense of loss and suffering. In *Wounded Healer*, Catholic priest and theologian Henri Nouwen writes, “It is an illusion to think that a person can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.” If they are to show up with genuine compassion for their soldiers, leaders must know their own pain and recognize there is strength in seeking and accepting help when they need it. “Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind?” Nouwen claims, “In short: ‘Who can take away suffering without entering it?’”⁷⁷

Awakened Leaders – from Post-Traumatic Stress to Post-Traumatic Growth

Interview Subject #3 described a painful and courageous journey of healing from multiple traumas.⁷⁸ Gloria’s path to a long and successful career immediately began with military sexual trauma. Brand new to her first unit, single and alone, she made the painful decision to terminate the pregnancy conceived in the rape. Her trauma did not end there. Several weeks later she hemorrhaged and underwent an emergency D&C. She stopped breathing when she overdosed on a painkiller in her IV and had to be revived. “I kept thinking God was punishing me over and over and over again for the decision to have the abortion,” she told me. “And that drove me crazy for years until I could reconcile that.” She sought no support until a few assignments later. “I felt this void,” she said. “I wasn’t going to get better unless I could accept what I had done. The nightmares were the worst.” She finally sought counseling for the first of two times in her career. “It got me back,” she said. “I guess I got my mind right.” She shared

⁷⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, 1st Image ed (New York, NY: Image Books, 02), 78. (All quotes in this paragraph from this page.)

⁷⁸ Subject #3, Interview, November 1, 2023.

how “that horrible experience helped [her] help others through horrific situations, whether it was a rape or other things.” Her trauma moved from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth.

Gloria’s second encounter with mental health services came several years later after her return from serving as a brigade commander in Iraq. During the deployment some of her soldiers had died during an ambush. She was their leader and felt responsible. “I didn’t recognize I was suffering from PTSD,” she said. “I was angry at everything. My soldiers died. I didn’t have closure. I didn’t have a lot of things.” Her mother told her, “You are not the same person. You have to get help.” Getting mental health care was not yet an accepted practice for leaders so Gloria slipped in a side door to meet with the counselor, a veteran who had served in Vietnam and had been also diagnosed with PTSD after his experiences in combat. “I finally got closure through him and rekindled my spiritual self.” Gloria’s thoughts shifted to a current spiritual practice of scripture reading, reflection, and journaling she has taken up in the past year. “I never should have lost it, when reading all the readings I’ve been reading over the last 365 days,” she said. “I just lost sight that He [God] was always with me. He was even with them [her soldiers] and I just lost sight of that. It’s easy for me to see now but it’s not easy to see going through it. If I had some type of disastrous thing happen to me now, I wouldn’t push Him away. I’m more firmly grounded in my spirituality that He’s always there.”

In the Vanderbilt DMin module *Depression: Mental Illness or Spiritual Struggle?*, Bruce Rogers-Vaughn explores the possibility of spiritual roots for depression. He notes that depression need not present as a depressed affect, but often sleep issues, agitation and other factors are the presenting symptoms.⁷⁹ Gloria’s two significant episodes of depression,

⁷⁹ *Depression: Mental Illness or Spiritual Struggle?*, Course Module, D.Min. Program (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt Divinity School, 2021), <https://vanderbilt.app.box.com/s/2sly4hq5oalirb6em5vk51w3ivtbfae2/file/896673495061>.

evidenced by nightmares and pervasive anger, reveal her spiritual unrest following the traumatic events of rape and combat losses she experienced.

Shelley Rambo, associate professor at Boston University School of Theology, explores spiritual transformation from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth from a Christian perspective. In *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, she explores healing from trauma through the lens of Holy Saturday, the period of dark spiritual struggle between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Rambo calls it “‘the middle’—the figurative site in which death and life are no longer bounded. Instead, the middle speaks to the perplexing space of survival.”⁸⁰ Resurrection cannot happen without surviving the hell of Holy Saturday. “The challenge to theology,” she writes, “is to account for what exceeds death yet cannot be interpreted as new life.”⁸¹ To heal from trauma, we cannot gloss over hell in the middle. We must honor and sit with the pain after death to discover new life.

In *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, Rambo discusses the story of Jesus appearing to Thomas and the other disciples in the Upper Room after Jesus’ death and resurrection. When Thomas refuses to believe it is him, Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds. Rambo explores this encounter as model for experiencing resurrection through touching the wounds of trauma. “In a ‘posttraumatic climate,’” she asserts, this room is a site of reckoning with pasts. It is a place where wounds are touched, where shame, grief, and anger are released. It is a place of tenderness and courage.” She observes how the scene shows “the affective

⁸⁰ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 7.

⁸¹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8.

formation of a community struggling with death and loss.”⁸² The witness of community, even just one other person, to trauma wounds can help transform the pain.

Awakened Leaders – from Moral Injury to Moral Healing

Gloria’s trauma caused by the rape, her decision to terminate the pregnancy, and her near-death experience of hemorrhaging was further complicated by the shame and distress she felt about her choice. She didn’t believe having abortion was the right decision, but under the circumstances, she didn’t think she had a choice. In addition to post-traumatic stress, Gloria bore the additional burden of moral injury caused by her rape and subsequent abortion. Long before losing soldiers in a combat zone in Iraq, Gloria fought an internal battle that wounded her soul. Moral injury can be defined as: “Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”⁸³ While Gloria expressed feeling more firmly grounded in her spirituality today—that God is always there—she was less clear about reconciliation regarding the abortion. When I asked if she feels forgiven, she replied, “I’m not sure about that.” And when I asked if she had forgiven herself, she answered, “Not sure about that” then “I guess I’m mostly there with forgiving myself. You feel stupid about allowing yourself to be put in a situation [like that].”

Nancy Ramsay addresses the power of ritual in healing trauma and moral injury in her essay *Moral Injury as Loss and Grief with Attention to Ritual*. Gloria had lost a part of herself decades ago and was close to full reconciliation but not quite there. Ramsay writes:

Ritual practices such as lament illustrate how rituals assist in healing. I recognize the value of drawing on ritual resources and practices that articulate both confessional and ethical or transformative intention. Ritual practices are essential for human life and life in community. They are especially important in times of transition and crisis. Often when we

⁸² Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, Paperback edition (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 153. (All quotes in this paragraph form this page.)

⁸³ Brett T. Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29 (July 3, 2009): 700.

join ritual practices to shared narratives of faith and ethical life, those rituals empower healing and help restore experiences of belonging. Rituals also have performative power to express, enact, and restore conviction and hope.⁸⁴

While Gloria identified as Episcopal on her initial survey and maintained a daily practice of scripture reading and spiritual reflection, she was not actively involved in a faith community. She shared that she is “in process to start to go back” to church. I asked her if she had ever thought about a Rite of Reconciliation like the one in *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal).⁸⁵ I shared that I have personally used it as a very healing tool, that it gives language to what is sometimes inexpressible. She had not but said she wrote that down to think about. After the interview, I emailed her links to articles and video lectures about trauma, moral injury and a collection of healing rites published by the Episcopal Church entitled *Rachel’s Tears, Hannah’s Hopes: Liturgies and Prayers Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss* that includes several litanies of remembrance, lament, healing, and hope regarding pregnancy losses, as well as *A Rite of Repentance and Reconciliation for an Abortion*.⁸⁶

Interview Subject #8 expressed strong interest in participating in my research, but she was especially concerned about guarding her identity.⁸⁷ Gabriela began the interview with a request for me to pray. She grew up as a devout Catholic and had thought about religious life before she entered West Point. During her time at the Academy, she became a born-again Christian and, now Baptist, grew even deeper in her faith. She had seen my recruiting message to women West Point graduates asking for interview participants and felt compelled to respond.

⁸⁴ Nancy J. Ramsay, “Moral Injury as Loss and Grief with Attention to Ritual Resources for Care,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 1 (February 2019): 143-144, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0854-9>.

⁸⁵ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 447.

⁸⁶ The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *Enriching Our Worship 5 - Rachel’s Tears, Hannah’s Hopes: Liturgies and Prayers Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss* (New York, NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2009), <https://www.churchpublishing.org/siteassets/pdf/liturgies-and-prayers-related-to-childbearing/enrichingourworship5.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Subject #8, Interview, November 18, 2023.

She came to the interview with carefully-crafted notes and with what felt like a need to unburden her soul. Leading up to the interview, she had prayed to be as truthful with me as she possibly could. She shared stories from her early years in the Army as a junior officer of relationships with three officers who were older and more senior in rank. She was single and they were married. One was a married woman. They pursued her romantically and sexually, and while she developed feelings for them and admitted feeling pleasure in their physical encounters, she was the one to end each relationship and years later she still carried a great deal of guilt and shame.

Now she was married and retired from the Army and deeply committed to her faith, her husband, and their children. My call for interview participants had triggered a deep need in her to confess past sins. “The desire is to live a pure life because I believe that’s what God has called me to,” she explained. “We honor and glorify Him for His pleasure by living a pure life. We break His heart when we sin.” She bore a heavy burden of culpability for any part she had in those relationships. Conversely, I was viewing those relationships as encounters between older and more senior officers who were abusing their power with a young, vulnerable cadet then junior officer. I introduced the concept of moral injury to her, and she wrote me a few days later: “Yes, these events were morally injurious to me. I was the victim. I’ve confessed to Jesus and asked for his forgiveness. He has forgiven me. I NEVER would have pursued these relationships. Left to my own accord, they would not have happened. All three put me in an impossible situation.” Gabriela has continued to correspond with me as she continues to process these and other troubling events. I encouraged her to seek therapy, but she is hesitant to do so, preferring to lean into what feels familiar and safe—a strong prayer life, scripture study, and sporadic emails to me (a trusted pastor), asking for spiritual advice and consolation.

Gloria and Gabriela showed me their unhealed wounds of trauma and moral injury. This is what chaplains can do for leaders. We can create upper rooms where wounds are touched, where shame, grief, and anger are released. We can create safe spaces of tenderness and courage.

Awakened Leaders – from Moral Drift to Moral Steadfastness

Periodically, news headlines flash the stories of senior military leaders who lost their way. The three officers Gabriela encountered years ago had lost their moral anchors and began to drift. Had Gabriela not possessed the moral steadfastness to drive her spiritual anchor deeper, she might have drifted far away from her moral and spiritual center with any one of them. Now, as it was then, we see the need for Moral Leadership and Spiritual Readiness training for leaders.

Interview Subject #6 shared a complex and heartbreaking story of moral and ethical challenge.⁸⁸ A talented, dedicated, and hardworking officer, Rose ascended to a position of significant responsibility and was lauded for her leadership. Then, due to circumstances that sounded in large part, beyond her control, she lost her position and her reputation. The burden of leadership can be heavy, and even the best leaders can inadvertently neglect important details that only come to light during an investigation, as was the case here.

Forced to leave her position, Rose described feeling very isolated and abandoned by the institution that she “sacrificed for and believed in” her entire adult life. “It completely turned my world upside down in ways you just can’t imagine,” she told me. We talked about the moral injury she felt—the shame, the bitterness, the betrayal—but what stands out to me in Rose’s story is her steadfast anchor in her faith that moored her as she weathered the storm. “What has helped me first of all, the sense of being a part of something much, much bigger than myself,”

⁸⁸ Subject #6, Interview, October 28, 2023.

she said. “I know that I am a beloved child of God, and none of this changes that. I still have purpose as an individual and identity that is not just my military identity.”

I offered her Rambo’s metaphor of Holy Saturday—that dark space before resurrection—and asked her if she could speak to Holy Saturday and her hope of resurrection. “Maybe this is Saturday night,” she said. “I’m working my way through getting there. Saturday, but sun hasn’t quite risen yet. But yes, I do expect to, for that sun to rise. And to come out of this.” Her husband has been a source of great support, and her pastor helped her work through her shame. That deep sense of being a beloved child of God, above all else, held her steady when she easily could veer off course into despair and resentment that would only hold her in bondage to herself.

Interview Subject #4 shared a personal story that highlights the movement from moral drift to moral steadfastness.⁸⁹ Mary is Catholic and, as a young officer, she got married in a Catholic church. She ended the marriage a few years later when she realized she didn’t love her husband. “I really got to the point where I said I did not want to have kids with him. I really had to question why am I such a bad person? Why would I...get divorced?” She described searching for answers and having “evil thoughts of, ‘Well, it’d be kind of easier if he was abusive, or...if he was mean, or..., if he got hit by a car, that would be sad, but...I wouldn’t have to be the bad person to...initiate a divorce. But in the end, I just made a decision that the best thing to do, not necessarily the right thing, but the best thing for me was that we did not need to be married.” Mary kept hoping she could change herself to love him. Becoming a divorced Catholic made her question if she “was a good enough person of faith.”

Mary later did fall in love and married again and did have children. Several years later, she shared her story with a Catholic priest colleague and inquired about an annulment. He

⁸⁹ Subject #4, Interview, December 21, 2023.

encouraged her to go through the process and she found it healing. “I think it helped me restore a certain level of...faith with the Catholic system.” She was very upfront. She just didn't love a man that she thought she loved and didn't think it was the right thing to stay married. Gaining the annulment allowed her to go to church with her family and take communion. “So, it was a little bit of a restoration.... And maybe a little bit of reconciliation with the Catholic Church.”

Mary described another challenging situation during a deployment. Her unit lost soldiers and there were rocket attacks on her base, but she experienced no PTSD. Multiple times she spoke of being good at compartmentalizing. She did experience what she described as a distraction. She loved her supportive husband, Joe, and their children, “but my attention had been diverted by someone,” she said. “I was like, oh my God, what is this? This is not supposed to be happening, right? So again, I think to me, that was another little test. And thankfully, [Joe and I] worked all through it.” The “distraction” caught her off-guard, but she was able to say to herself, “[T]hat's not right. I don't know if it's your midlife crisis. I don't know what spurred some of that. I was like, I have to not go down that path.... I think back to that quite a bit and I think that was faith just saying, ‘Mary. Don't be a [jerk].... You were before when you were married and got divorced...This is not what you need to do.’” She thought this experience made her stronger. “Life's got the valleys and mountains.... That was...faith helping and steering and rebuilding.... I think about [Joe's] ability to just be steady and like, I'm here and you know, he was good. So, I think that was definitely faith working on both sides.”

We talked about moral drift and the term resonated with Mary. “[T]hat's a good way to describe it,” she said. “I have to attribute faith to say ‘you could keep going down that road, and you might get some temporary enjoyment, but I don't think that's your long-term path, right?’” She described what anchored her: “I think faith being able to say what's really important—your

family, your [children].... But when there's these other opportunities, and you say, 'Well, if you're gonna fast forward, what does that look like? For your [children]?'... [T]he fact that I could even be distracted, that bothered [me]. Why? Because you'd have everything you need or would want in life.... I felt like that was an evil part.... Our Father is like, lead us away from temptation.”

When faced with this moral challenge, Mary leaned into her Catholic faith and she resisted the temptation to drift. She awakened to the wrongness of the path she was on and the consequences of her actions if she kept drifting. Her faith spoke to her conscience. She valued her marriage and the vows she made to Joe. She didn't want to hurt him or their children. She set her solid anchor and it held her steadfast.

Awakened Leaders – from Marginalization to Inclusion

In this section, I will highlight the importance of understanding the pluralistic environment of the Army. Interview Subjects #1, #2, and #7 demonstrate the necessity for chaplains to heed the call to “perform or provide”⁹⁰ spiritual support to the broad diversity of Army personnel. Katie describes her tradition as Non-religious and Sandy describes her tradition as Spiritual. Sarah is Jewish. All three shared experiences of feeling marginalized in the Army.

Katie's non-religious spirituality evolved over time.⁹¹ She married a West Point classmate after graduation and was soon pregnant with their first child. The pregnancy was not planned but dual military life seemed doable. “We're not at war,” she thought. “I can survive this and then literally...two weeks later 911 happened.” Katie deployed eleven months after the baby was born, while her husband stayed stateside as the rear detachment commander for their unit. She tells how, “[B]efore we invaded Iraq in 2003...I and the other Catholic soldiers in my unit

⁹⁰ AR 165-1, 9.

⁹¹ Subject #1, Interview, December 19, 2023.

got our last rites.... I was still sort of a practicing Catholic and I think that did give me some sort of...peacefulness [sic] about whatever was going to happen.” She shared that “[m]ost of the religious support in the military is Protestant Christianity” and the chaplains held “a lot of church services.” She recalled “feeling very uncomfortable” and like “there wasn’t a good fit for me.” She understands “there’s only so many chaplains and they’re trying to reach the center of mass,” but her discomfort as a Christian made her think “there’s got to be non-Christians in this organization” who “get nothing” [sic] in the way of spiritual support. She “started to become...more introspective and to try to figure out what [her] own spirituality was,” but she neither sought nor received any support from chaplains in her spiritual quest.

Katie described being “baptized, confirmed, married in the Catholic Church,” and “stayed with it because...it’s what you do.” She said, “I think it sustained us...as a young family” and then “it just trailed off naturally.” She defines her “spiritual core as [her] cynicism and stoicism.” She is “very thoughtful about things and intellectual” and she doesn’t “think there’s some invisible higher power sort of guiding things.” She does “think there’s a connectedness in humanity.” She derives a great deal of meaning and purpose in life through her current work as a civilian attorney, by “putting our good in the world or helping people.”

Katie described her “humanist leanings” as particularly helpful when she faced depression and anxiety after retiring from the Army. “I find good people and I lean on them.... I leaned on my husband and my best friend...retreated into myself a bit. I went to therapy.” She didn’t return to “any sort of spiritual grounding...in the traditional sense.” Off and on over the years, Katie has used meditation, practicing presence and journaling, as well as reading and reflecting on the writings of the Stoics, as practices that deepen her spirituality. She shared that our conversation is encouraging her to re-engage with her study of Stoicism and other practices.

Sandy is another former Catholic who gravitated to a non-traditional spiritual path.⁹² She calls herself a “recovering Catholic” who went to church regularly on Saturday evenings while she was growing up. Her family sat in the back pew, and out of boredom, she tried “to memorize all the verses that the priests would say.” She shared, “[It] struck me very hard...that we were told that...we were bad, that we had to repent and fear God. And I never bought into that.” She expressed gratitude that my interview questions addressed “spirituality” versus “religion.” She explained that “when people talk about religion, I think a lot of things have a tendency to...turn in a way that people want you to believe that they believe.... I have always been spiritual. I do believe in God. I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe there was a man Jesus Christ.... For me there’s only one word for God. And that’s love.” She went on to say, “I believe I was, put here on the earth for [a] purpose.... And I think and I feel that I’ve lived my purpose. And I truly believe it’s in service to others.... [M]y spirituality takes me to the place where I’m here to make it better for someone else on this earth. And I feel very strongly about that.”

Sandy recalled being assigned to Germany, chatting with other staff members on a work road trip. “The new battalion chaplain was riding with us,” she said, “and all of a sudden...he says, ‘You know it’s my mission to make everyone a Baptist.’” Sandy said she “almost threw him out of the car.” She claimed, “[M]y job as a leader is try to figure out how the people I lead feel, and then reach them at their level.... It’s people shoving their beliefs on others that I think doesn’t do any good.” Sandy stated that while she doesn’t have any “rigid practices,” “the communities [she’s in] are all about support.” She described how homelessness, for example, is not solved at the national or state levels. “It’s solved in rooms...like spiritual gatherings...or

⁹² Subject #2, Interview, October 29, 2023.

places like the Elks, places like Rotary Club...places where people come together for the greater good. That's where spirituality, like-mindedness of helping your neighbor resonates with me."

Sandy is widowed and the loss is still raw. She and her wife Pamela had founded a non-profit to help vulnerable veterans. This work is clearly a spiritual practice for Sandy, how she lives her belief that God is love. She is part of a spiritual community led by a woman pastor, whom Sandy described as "a shaman" who is a "former Marine" and "part Native American" and a "Reiki Master." The pastor was helpful to Sandy and her wife during her Pamela's illness, and has been an ongoing support in spiritual and emotional healing for Sandy.

Interview subjects #2 and # 7, Sandy and Sarah, both stand on the margins of the Army's traditional Christian majority for two reasons: spirituality and sexual orientation. While Sandy moved away from her Catholic roots, Sarah has remained firmly planted in her Jewish faith.⁹³ Sarah finds great comfort in religious traditions and family-focused values of Judaism. Even so, she asserted, "As a Jewish officer, and as a Jewish cadet, being Jewish is always harder...because...it's profoundly misunderstood." She recalled, "I was just as religious as a lot of my Christian friends...but I had a person cry because she was so sad I wasn't going to heaven because I was Jewish.... I always just did my best to enjoy being Jewish and not ruffle Christian people." While Sarah found the Jewish rabbi and Jewish community at West Point "very sustaining," it was not so in the Army. "Trying to be Jewish in the military is really tough because there's just not a lot of Jewish chaplains. You...have to embrace spirituality, and I found that the chaplains did a really good job. Not ruffle me and I wouldn't ruffle [them]. We just met each other on the place where...God was part of our life...and my chaplain was always part of

⁹³ Subject #7, Interview, December 15, 2023.

my command team.” She said, “[Chaplains] were important parts of making sure my soldiers were great and doing great and [I] always found extremely good counsel from them.”

Sarah was an exceptionally high-performing and respected leader on the fast track to become a general. Given top picks of brigade commands, she chose the one that she knew would divert her career from the general officer track. She did so for reasons deeply grounded in her belief that “family is such an important part of the Jewish faith.” She chose the command closest to where her family lived, the less stressful one that would not take her on another deployment to a combat zone. Sarah’s mother was nearing the end of a long battle with cancer. For Sarah, “being with [her] mom was more important than being a general,” and she wanted to spend as much time as she could with her dying mother. Moreover, Sarah’s relationship with the woman she loved was complicated by the military’s *Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell* policy. “It...was not as open as it sounded,” she said. Her partner could not attend official functions and lived in another town to prevent anyone asking or her telling. Senior leaders who had supported Sarah’s career and mentored her kept telling her they could help her get back on track to become a general. Sarah was firm in her decision and retired after brigade command. “My family didn’t like the fact that I couldn’t acknowledge [my partner, now wife] publicly and ...that all swirls together in the decision” she told me. “But I really saw it as a as a family decision.” I do wonder if Sarah had been able to be transparent about her sexuality and fully supported in her transparency, by her leaders and even her unit chaplain, if she might have chosen to get back on track to serve as a general officer after her mother died. But those were different days.

Today, LGBTQ soldiers can openly serve in the military and the Army Chaplain Corps’ Spiritual Readiness Initiative recognizes the diversity of spiritual traditions among soldiers. It is critical for chaplains to ensure soldiers of all ranks receive the care they need to build and sustain

a strong spiritual core. Chaplains must be proactive in watching for marginalization among those they serve and shepherding them toward inclusion. They can do so in ways that do not violate their personal or religious values. If they cannot perform a spiritual care directly, it is incumbent on them to provide access to a chaplain who can. Neglect of this duty can create moral injury.

Awakened Leaders – from Garrison Mindset to Battlefield Reality

In *War and Moral Injury, A Reader*, Timothy Kudo sets up the problem of moral injury in combat and Kilner offers possible leader interventions to prevent and mitigate MI. In the essay *On War and Redemption*, Kudo says of his combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan as a young Marine officer:

The challenging thing about ethics is you have to figure them out for yourself. What war taught me is that first, you should always strive to do the right thing even though you can't control the outcome. Second, wrong decisions have tragic, irreversible consequences. There is no return. Nothing changes it and no lesson justifies it.... I never pulled the trigger on my rifle, but I ordered other men to kill. For an officer, there is little difference. In all militaries, individuals don't kill, groups do. We are each assigned small tasks in the orchestrated murder of our enemies... After one incident, my commanding officer told me that he was ultimately responsible. Yes, by the letter of the law, that is true. But everything we did over there, we did together.⁹⁴

Leaders are seldom the ones pulling the triggers in battle, but they are often the ones making decisions in combat that determine life or death for the enemy, their own soldiers, and innocent civilians. Striving to always do the right thing on the home front in garrison life and personal affairs sets the stage for ethical action on the battlefield. Leaders must be intentional in building muscles to sustain a strong spiritual core, grounded in strong morals and ethics, a true North to guide them when things are most difficult and complex in the combat environment.

Moreover, leaders have a responsibility to ensure their soldiers are spiritually ready for the trials of combat. In *Leadership, War, and Moral Injury*, Pete Kilner discusses how leaders

⁹⁴ Timothy Kudo, "On War and Redemption," in *War and Moral Injury: A Reader*, ed. Robert E. Meagher and Douglas A. Pryer (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 81.

can prevent and mitigate moral injury for their soldiers before, during, and after combat deployments. “Many combat veterans who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder eventually enjoy post-traumatic growth,” he writes. “The same can be true of Moral Injury. One way that leaders can facilitate the healing process is by fostering a unit narrative that acknowledges the moral tragedies of war yet frames their soldiers’ experiences as opportunities for increased moral self-awareness and moral growth.”⁹⁵ As lead instructors for moral leadership training, Chaplains can help leaders address MI prevention and mitigation with their soldiers.

PART IV. STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

This final part of my research project addresses how chaplains can assist Army leaders in developing and sustaining a strong spiritual core. It draws on the topics addressed in the previous parts of the project, including wisdom gleaned from the interviews with the eight retired Army leaders who are women graduates of West Point. The work addresses two key areas. First, I offer an outline of a Building Strong and Ready Teams (BSRT) training event for unit command and staff teams (aimed at battalion-level and above commanders, command sergeants major, and their key officer and enlisted staff members). Second, I suggest ways in which chaplains can support the emotional and spiritual growth of leaders in their units through one-one counseling. To successfully engage leaders in spiritual readiness development and sustainment, chaplains need to approach this work with maturity and respect for the diversity of spiritual perspectives and richness of life experience leaders in midlife possess.

For several years, Army chaplains led a relationship enrichment program called Strong Bonds. Within the last few years, the Army chaplain Corps has replaced Strong Bonds with a new program called Building Strong and Ready Teams (BSRT). BSRT is “an Army command-

⁹⁵ Pete Kilner, “Leadership, War, and Moral Injury,” in *War and Moral Injury* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 101.

directed, chaplain-led program, community partnered effort that strengthens spiritual readiness for soldiers of all ranks and their families.”⁹⁶ While the program still supports relationship enrichment and skill-building for singles, couples and families, BSRT also aims to help build strong teams within Army units through unit-level training for soldiers and moral training for leaders. Funding for BSRT events has also significantly shifted from providing funds for half day and full day events versus weekend overnight events. Unit chaplains may lead full day (Bravo) and weekend (Charlie) BSRT events, but funding for those training events is more limited. Within my context of the Army Reserve, funding has shifted with priority to promote multiple half-day (three to four-hour Alpha) BSRT training events each year for units, conducted during monthly battle assembly training weekends. Participation in BSRT training is optional; however, providing Alpha events during mandatory battle assembly training weekends, especially in the format of a three-hour working lunch with a meal provided, has significantly increased participation among soldiers. This format for Alpha events utilizes the allotted lunch hour and only two or three additional hours from the precious, limited time commanders have in their unit training schedules during battle assembly weekends.

Building Strong and Ready Teams Training for Army Leaders

While the Army’s Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) and Building Strong and Ready Teams (BSRT) programs are separate initiatives, H2F and BSRT overlap in their intent to build spiritual readiness. To build and sustain spiritual readiness in Army leaders, I envision a three-hour, working lunch (Alpha) training event. In my current command, it could be offered to leaders during a monthly battle assembly weekend, during a quarterly training brief conference,

⁹⁶ “Building Strong and Ready Teams,” *MilitaryOneSource: Health Care and Emotional Well-Being* (blog), accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/benefits/building-strong-and-ready-teams/>.

or during an annual leader training conference. I suggest the following outline for a BSRT training event entitled *Building and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders*:

I. Provide an overview of the Army's H2F Program in FM 7-22 and its five readiness domains (Physical, Mental, Spiritual, Nutritional, Sleep), with emphasis and detail on the Spiritual Readiness Domain. Discuss the Army Chaplain Corps Spiritual Readiness Initiative and the Science of Spirituality research and data from the work of Dr. Lisa Miller. Talk about the Spiritual Readiness Initiative addressing primarily 18–25-year-old soldiers and how there is a critical need to also address the spiritual readiness of Army leaders who are in or approaching midlife. Emphasize the importance of Army leaders building and sustaining spiritual readiness, especially considering the possibility of leading soldiers in Large Scale Combat Operations. We need Army leaders who are emotionally, ethically, and spiritually grounded.

II. Ask questions like “What is spirituality? What grounds you in times of personal and professional challenge? What gives your life meaning and purpose?” and invite responses and discussion. Talk about religion versus spirituality and spiritual practices. Chaplains can encourage discussion by sharing personal examples or stories of work with leaders (appropriately guarding confidentiality). I would share about my interviews with eight retired Army leaders who are women graduates of West Point and offer their insights and wisdom. I recommend leading a spiritual exercise from Miller's *The Awakened Brain* and inviting small group discussion then large group reflection after each exercise. The exercise is: *Holding Council* – a guided meditation exercise that engages awareness of loving connection with supportive guides and mentors, one's highest self, and a higher power.⁹⁷ Ask questions like “What was that like for you? What did you learn? What did you find surprising?”

⁹⁷ Miller, 203-204.

III. Having introduced the concept of spiritual readiness and offered an experience that engages spiritual connection, I suggest presenting the idea that spiritual awakening is often most ripe to occur during one of three periods: adolescence and early adulthood, at midlife, and during periods of trauma or significant loss.⁹⁸ I would note that midlife is precisely where many of the leaders in the room are currently walking in life's journey.

IV. I recommend introducing writings or video clips (speakers and movie scenes) that address spiritual growth. I would include key points from:

- A. Fowler's *Stages of Faith*
- B. Rohr's *Falling Upward: Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*
- C. Brooks' *The Second Mountain*

V. Next, I suggest leading small groups in a second spiritual exercise from Miller's *The Awakened Brain*. I would invite small group sharing (as they feel comfortable), then large group reflection after the exercise. The exercise is: *Three Doors* – a life map drawing exercise that engages awakened attention to three doors closing and three new doors opening.⁹⁹ I recommend providing paper and colored pencils, markers or crayons to draw life maps. I would ask again: “What was that like for you? What did you learn? What did you find surprising?”

VI. I suggest then providing an overview of the following topics and offering personal examples or stories from working with leaders (again guarding confidentiality). I would offer stories from the leader interviews I conducted. I recommend inviting them to illustrate with pictures or words what resonated with them. I would invite them to share in their small groups (as they feel comfortable), then invite reflections in the large group. Ask again: “What was that like for you? What did you learn? What did you find surprising?” The topics are:

- A. From Loss to Recovery
- B. From Post-traumatic Stress to Post-traumatic Growth

⁹⁸ Miller, *The Awakened Brain*, 143.

⁹⁹ Miller, 180–82.

- C. From Moral Injury to Moral Healing
- D. From Moral Drift to Moral Steadfastness
- E. From Marginalization to Inclusion
- F. From Garrison Mindset to Battlefield Reality

VII. I suggest closing the training event by reminding leaders of the importance to build and sustain their own spiritual readiness. I would offer wisdom from the leader interviews when I asked, “What advice do have for today’s leaders regarding building and sustaining their spiritual readiness?” See Appendix C. I would ask the large group: “What are your key take-aways? What are three things that you can do to build and sustain your spiritual readiness?”

Spiritual Readiness Counseling with Army Leaders

Chaplains can also support the emotional and spiritual growth of leaders in their units through individual counseling. Like military veterans, Army leaders “may view chaplains as a more accessible and socially acceptable source of help for emotional distress” than “traditional mental health providers.”¹⁰⁰ Leaders may fear negative impacts on their career or putting their security clearance in jeopardy or being judged as unable to handle the stressors of military life. Because chaplains provide complete confidentiality, leaders may be more comfortable seeking counsel with a chaplain or talking to chaplain who asks about their well-being.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an effective evidence-based method chaplains might employ when counseling leaders. I have engaged multiple leaders who feel overwhelmed or trapped by a work or personal situation. ACT is an excellent tool to aid leaders in increasing psychological flexibility. As I mentioned earlier, Appendix A offers helpful information about the ACT Hexaflex Model and its six core process.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph M. Currier et al., “Theodicies and Professional Quality of Life in a Nationally Representative Sample of Chaplains in the Veterans’ Health Administration,” *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community* 45, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2016.1197748>. (Reference assistance by DMin consultation group members Matt Brown and Carl Headley, 2/22/24)

When leaders indicate a desire to change their situation, Motivational Interviewing (MI) can be an appropriate evidence-based method. MI offers a collaborative intervention process that may appeal to leaders who are used to being in charge. MI's approach involves "a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change." The chaplain's role in MI is to employ a style "of guiding, which lies between and incorporates elements of directing and following styles." The chaplain taps the leader's natural ambivalence in "preparing for change and a place where a person can remain stuck." The goal is to engage the leader in guided conversation "to strengthen motivation for change" and to commit to change.¹⁰¹

The Army's mission to fight and win our nation's wars is serious business for leaders and they often experience high stress. They may be impacted from deployments or years of working in an environment where the stakes are high, the expectations are high, and there is little to no room for failure. Chaplains can introduce mindfulness exercises and journaling practices to help leaders relax and get grounded in times of stress. Chaplains can encourage leaders to seek spiritual practices from their own faith traditions such as Christian contemplative prayer or Buddhist meditation. Play, creativity, and nature are three mediums that leaders may engage to relieve some of the burden they carry. Chaplains may find the references in Appendix D helpful.

Lastly, I want to emphasize the importance of referrals and self-care. Chaplains must recognize their limitations and know when and how to guide leaders to behavioral health care and other resources. Chaplains should also cultivate strong self-awareness and humility in recognizing their emotional triggers and times when they may be overstepping their professional expertise. Spiritual care, especially carrying the gift and burden of complete confidentiality, can

¹⁰¹ William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change*, 3rd ed, Applications of Motivational Interviewing (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013), 12. (All quotes in this paragraph form same page.)

be taxing work. Chaplains would be wise to engage their own spiritual and emotional support with resources like peer support groups, spiritual directors, and therapists.

Conclusion

This research project attempted to answer the question: *How can Army leaders develop and sustain a resilient spiritual core that undergirds strong moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?* I addressed theory behind spirituality and spiritual wounding, shared stories and wisdom from retired Army leaders, and offered ways that chaplains can help leaders develop and sustain their spiritual core. I presented a sample outline for a *Developing and Sustaining Leader Spiritual Readiness* training event for chaplains and offered recommendations for individual pastoral care with leaders. Ideally, I will pilot a training event for leaders in my unit before I retire in October 2024. My hope is to present this project, with a fully developed training curriculum, to Army Chaplain Corps leadership that other chaplains can adapt and implement for the leaders they serve. I also look forward to adapting the curriculum to use in workshops and retreats after retirement.

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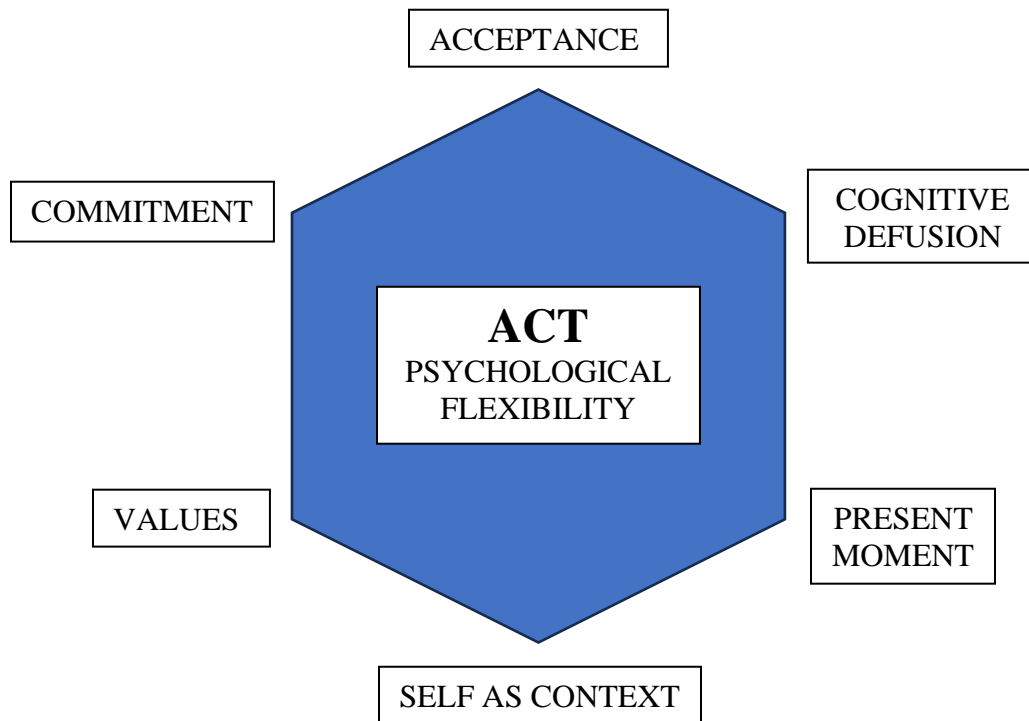
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Appendix A ACT Hexaflex Model and Description



Chaplains can access many online resources regarding ACT. ACT therapist and trainer Jacob Martinez specializes in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and shares his knowledge with clinicians on his website: <https://www.theactmatrix.com/about-and-faq>. Therapist and Licensed Clinical Social worker Julia Timmerman offers an excellent description of ACT in her blog article “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?” She describes the six core processes:

“Acceptance – let go of what we cannot control.

Cognitive Defusion – notice the process of thinking rather than getting caught up in thoughts.

Being Present – become attuned to what is occurring right now, in the present moment.

Self as Context – observe self as separate from yet aware of own thoughts, feelings and experiences, at any given moment, without attachment.

Values – connect to a deeper sense of what matters to make active choices about purpose, direction, behaviors that will allow them to living best life.

Committed Action – strategies to take action toward valued goals while experiencing uncomfortable feelings and thoughts.

Each of these six processes is ongoing. They overlap each other and help to create psychological flexibility.”¹⁰²

Note: I removed an ACT case study in Appendix A of my final project paper to ensure privacy.

¹⁰² Julia Timmerman, “What Is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?,” *Thrive Consulting* (blog), August 25, 2020, <https://www.thrivetrainingconsulting.com/what-is-acceptance-and-commitment-therapy/>.

Appendix B – Institutional Review Board Process

Vanderbilt University Human Research Protections Program

The following documents demonstrate the process I employed to fulfill the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board exemption category process required by Vanderbilt University's Human Research Protections Program. I chose to interview only retired officers, as interviewing actively-serving officers required additional approval from the Department of the Army. One of the interview subjects currently works in civilian status as a Department of Defense employee. I gained permission from her command for her to participate in an interview.

To recruit interview subjects, I posted a message in the West Point Women Facebook group. A group administrator also shared my recruitment message via email with those in the West Point Women Facebook group. To select interviewees, I constructed a spreadsheet that contained several categories and reviewed data among potential interviewees who responded to my recruitment message and then returned the initial survey. Categories included: Rank, Year of West Point Graduation, Branch/Occupational Specialty, Active/Guard/Reserve, Senior-level Leadership Positions, Deployments to Combat Zones or Areas of Potential Hostilities, Ethnicity/Race, Sexual Orientation, Spiritual Tradition, Marital Status, Children.

I selected interviewees who represented the broadest diversity across categories and among potential interviewees. To protect anonymity, I numbered the selected interview subjects in alphabetical order by last name and assigned each one a pseudonym. I made adjustments to suspense dates and, in consultation with Vanderbilt University's Human Research Protections Program Manager, I increased the number of interviewees from five to eight to ensure diversity in spiritual traditions.

I conducted the eight interviews as follows:

Subject #1 - TUE 19 DEC, 3pm EST

Subject #2 - SUN 29 OCT, 7pm EST

Subject #3 - WED 1 NOV, 2pm EST

Subject #4 - THU 21 DEC, 6pm EST

Subject #5 - TUE 14 NOV, 1pm EST

Subject #6 - SAT 28 OCT, 4pm EST

Subject #7 - FRI 15 DEC, 12pm EST

Subject #8 - SAT 18 NOV, 3pm EST

Institutional Review Board Application - Exemption Category
Vanderbilt University Human Research Protections Program

Purpose of the Study/Study Abstract

Provide a brief abstract of the study in lay language. The IRB Committees are comprised of scientists with varied backgrounds, non-scientists, and community members.

I am a 1984 graduate of West Point, Signal Corps officer 1984-91, Chaplain Corps 2011-present. My project addresses *Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders*, with a focus in one section of the project on exploring the spiritual resilience of retired women Army leaders who are West Point graduates. West Point's mission is to develop "leader[s] of character...for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army" (westpoint.edu). The Army's mission is to "deploy, fight and win our nation's wars" (army.mil). Today's Army leaders face the harrowing possibility of leading Soldiers during Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) with near-peer competitors.

With that possibility in mind, my DMin research project aims to answer the question: *How can Army leaders develop and sustain a resilient spiritual core that undergirds strong moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?* The project explores how Chaplains can help leaders get upstream of emotional and spiritual crises, so that when inevitable personal and professional challenges come along, and especially when faced with LSCO, they are better prepared to navigate the rapids.

My research will include individual interviews with five women West Point graduates who are retired Army leaders (ranking lieutenant colonel to general officer). My focus of interviewees is narrow for three primary reasons: 1) The DMin research project paper is limited to 45-55 pages. 2) In discussion with my cohort group professor last semester, he thought West Point women leaders could be an interesting and unique group to study and suggested keeping the number limited to approximately 5. 3) Most military research and writing with which I am familiar was conducted among men for men. I believe the wisdom and experience of these women leaders—the first generation of women to meet the challenges of West Point, graduate from the Academy, and serve a full career as an Army officer during a period of protracted combat operations—can offer important voice and valuable insight to the study of spiritual readiness. I will also explore how the following topics intersect my qualitative research and inform my conclusions: Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT), Post-traumatic Stress & Post-traumatic Growth, Moral Injury, Leadership, Ethics, Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) Spiritual Readiness Initiative, the Science of Spirituality studies by Dr. Lisa Miller, the spiritual writings of Fr. Richard Rohr, and theological perspectives (incarnational theology, theodicy, death/resurrection, human flourishing).

Does your study fit into one or more of the listed categories of exemption (45 CFR 46.104)? Yes

(d)(2) Research that only includes interaction involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following is met: (1) Information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of human subjects cannot be readily ascertained; or (2) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside of the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk or; (3) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in a manner that could identify the human subjects directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Will you be recording or keeping any of the 18 HIPAA identifiers? Yes

Indicate how appropriate protections are incorporated to ensure the privacy of subjects and confidentiality of data. (Please include where data will be stored. Describe how codes will be generated if codes are used to protect identities and who will have access to such codes.)

I will record first and last names, email addresses, and phone numbers in order to schedule interviews. I will conduct and record video interviews via Nvivo or via my Vanderbilt Zoom account which is password protected (selection based on ease of use and assurance of privacy settings). If using Zoom, I will simultaneously record interviews with Otter.ai which will provide a back-up audio recording and transcript of the interviews. I will download all video recordings, audio recordings, digital transcripts, and digital notes to my personal computer, which is also password protected. I am the only person with access to the passwords. I will then backup of these audio recordings and digital files on a thumb drive. I will store the thumb drive and all handwritten notes regarding interviews in a locked cabinet with access under my sole control. I will code each interviewee as Subject #1, Subject #2, Subject #3, Subject #4, Subject #5. I will have sole access to the coding of the interview subjects.

Describe any procedures to be used during the study:

I will interview each subject individually via Zoom/Otter/ai or Nvivo. I will give each subject a copy of the interview questions in advance via email and use the questions during the interviews as prompts to explore their spirituality and how it has influenced their moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity.

I will then code the interviews listening for words, patterns, and recurring responses. I will then conduct qualitative analysis of the coded data, looking for themes that emerge to inform my research.

Will children be the subjects of your study? No

Recruitment:

Describe the specific steps to be used to identify and/or contact prospective participants. (If applicable, also describe how you have access to lists of potential participants.)

I will identify prospective participants via word-of-mouth and via a message I will post in the West Point Women Facebook group (see attached proposed message post). I will begin the recruitment process upon receipt of IRB exemption approval and then allow 5 days to identify potential participants. I will have access to contact information for potential participants via the West Point Association of Graduates, LinkedIn, and Facebook Messenger. Upon initial contact, I will ask each potential participant who indicated interest in participating in an interview for an email address and phone number. From my Vanderbilt.edu email account, I will then email potential interview participants a brief initial survey to complete and return to me via email; I will email all potential interviewees at the same time via bcc. I will allow 5 days for potential interviewees to return the initial survey. Note: I am on a tight timeline in order to conduct all interviews and analyze data prior to the end of the fall semester.

Identify the criteria for inclusion and exclusion and explain the procedures that will be used to determine eligibility. If psychiatric/psychological assessments will be conducted (e.g., depression or suicidal ideation screenings), state who will administer, his/her experience, and how risks will be managed.

Eligible interview participants will be women graduates of West Point who retired from the Army in the rank of lieutenant colonel, colonel, or general officer (any component – Active/Guard/Reserve). They will also be leaders who served as commanders at battalion level or higher and/or held another senior leadership position of significant responsibility. Additionally, they will be leaders who served overseas during a combat deployment or who served in a senior level position that took them to an area of hostile or potentially hostile operations. I am seeking as diverse a group of interviewees as possible (racial/ethnic background, spiritual background – religious/non-religious, married/partnered/single/divorced, children/no children, sexual orientation, occupational specialty/branch).

Describe how the selection of participants is equitable in relation to the research purpose and setting.

I will record how each potential interviewee identifies on the initial survey in each of these categories to aid in diverse selection of interviewees: racial/ethnic background, spiritual background – religious/non-religious, married/partnered/single/divorced, children/no children, sexual orientation, occupational specialty/branch.

I will review the responses from the first 10 potential interviewees who respond via email with a completed initial survey. I will then select 5 interview participants who represent as much diversity as possible regarding the aforementioned categories.

OR

I will number the potential interviewees who respond with a completed initial survey by the deadline, numbering beginning with Subject #1. I will then select the first 5 subjects who responded as interview participants. If any of those 5 subjects decline to be interviewed, I will go to the next subject on the list. No single group will be targeted or excluded regarding: racial/ethnic background, spiritual background – religious/non-religious, married/partnered/single/divorced, children/no children, sexual orientation, occupational specialty/branch.

Please indicate whether you plan to enroll any of the populations indicated below:

Will the study provide compensation to research participants? No

Please be advised, any resident of a country subject to U.S. comprehensive territorial sanctions or any person designated on the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control's Specially Designated Nationals list of prohibited individuals related to national security or foreign policy cannot accept any compensation for participation.

Proposed Recruitment Message Post for West Point Women Facebook Group:

**All, request an academic research assist!
Details Below. Suspense XX October 2023.**

I'm seeking potential interviewees for my research project for the Doctor of Ministry in Integrative Chaplaincy program at Vanderbilt Divinity School. My project addresses **Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders**, with a focus in one section of the project on exploring the spiritual resilience of Army leaders who are women graduates of West Point.

I believe the wisdom and experience of the first generation of women to meet the challenges of West Point, graduate from the Academy, and serve a full career as an Army officer during a period of protracted combat operation can offer important voice and valuable insight to the study of spiritual readiness.

Eligible interview participants will be women graduates of West Point who are retired from the Army in the rank of lieutenant colonel, colonel, or general officer (any component – Active/Guard/Reserve). They will also be leaders who served as commanders at battalion level or higher and/or held another senior leadership position of significant responsibility. Additionally, they will be leaders who served overseas during a combat deployment or who served in a senior level position that took them to an area of hostile or potentially hostile operations. I am seeking as diverse a group of interviewees as possible (racial/ethnic background, spiritual background – religious/non-religious, branch/occupational specialty, married/partnered/single/divorced, children/no children, sexual orientation).

If you are eligible and interested in participating, please indicate your interest in the reply section of this post, or send me a personal message via Facebook Messenger, or email me at [email](#). If you know West Point Women who may be eligible and interested, please send me their names. I will contact them via Messenger or get their contact from AOG or LinkedIn.

Many thanks in advance!

Andrea

CH (LTC) Andrea Baker
USMA 1984

Prospective Interview Participant Guide
Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Research Project, Vanderbilt Divinity School
Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders

Researcher: Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Andrea Baker
DMin Candidate, Vanderbilt Divinity School
[email](#), phone

Thank you for your interest in serving as an interviewee for my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Integrative Chaplaincy research project. Please review the material below, and if you are interested in being selected to interview for the project, please complete the attached survey and email it to me **no later than XX October 2023**.

Abstract: I am a 1984 graduate of West Point, Signal Corps officer 1984-91, Chaplain Corps 2011-present. My project addresses *Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders*, with a focus in one section of the project on exploring the spiritual resilience of retired women Army leaders who are West Point graduates. West Point's mission is to develop "leader[s] of character...for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army" (westpoint.edu). The Army's mission is to "deploy, fight and win our nation's wars" (army.mil). Today's Army leaders face the harrowing possibility of leading Soldiers during Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) with near-peer competitors.

With that possibility in mind, my DMin research project aims to answer the question: *How can Army leaders develop and sustain a resilient spiritual core that undergirds strong moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?* The project explores how Chaplains can help leaders get upstream of emotional and spiritual crises, so that when inevitable personal and professional challenges come along, and especially when faced with LSCO, they are better prepared to navigate the rapids.

My research will include individual interviews with five women West Point graduates who are retired Army leaders (ranking lieutenant colonel to general officer). My focus of interviewees is narrow for three primary reasons: 1) The DMin research project paper is limited to 45-55 pages; 2) In discussion with my cohort group professor last semester, he thought West Point women leaders could be an interesting and unique group to study and suggested keeping the number limited to approximately 5; 3) Most military research and writing with which I am familiar was conducted among men for men. I believe the wisdom and experience of these women leaders—the first generation of women to meet the challenges of West Point, graduate from the Academy, and serve a full career as an Army officer during a period of protracted combat operations—can offer important voice and valuable insight to the study of spiritual readiness. I will also explore how the following topics intersect my qualitative research and inform my conclusions: Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT), Post-traumatic Stress & Post-traumatic Growth, Moral Injury, Leadership, Ethics, Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) Spiritual Readiness Initiative, the Science of Spirituality studies by Dr. Lisa Miller, the spiritual

writings of Fr. Richard Rohr, and theological perspectives (incarnational theology, theodicy, death/resurrection, human flourishing).

Eligible Participants: Women graduates of West Point who are retired from the Army (Active/Guard/Reserve) in the rank of lieutenant colonel, colonel, general officer. They will also be leaders who served as commanders at battalion level or higher and/or held another senior leadership position of significant responsibility. Additionally, they will be leaders who served overseas during a combat deployment or who served in a senior level position that took them to an area of hostile or potentially hostile operations. I am seeking as diverse a group of interviewees as possible (racial/ethnic background, spiritual background – religious/non-religious, married/single/partnered/divorced, children/no children, sexual orientation, branch/occupational specialty).

Thank you again!

Andrea

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Andrea Baker
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Vanderbilt Divinity School

Prospective Interview Participant Survey
Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Research Project, Vanderbilt Divinity School
Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders

Please email completed survey to me no later than XX October 2023.

Researcher: Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Andrea Baker
DMin Candidate, Vanderbilt Divinity School
[email](#), phone

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Race/Ethnicity:

Sexual Orientation:

Married/Partnered/Single/Divorced:

Children (number & ages):

Spiritual Tradition (Religious or Non-Religious):

Year of USMA Graduation:

Year of Retirement:

Active/Guard/Reserve:

Rank at Retirement:

Occupational Specialty/Branch:

Last/Most Senior Army Leadership Position:

Are you available between XX October and XX November 2023 to conduct a video interview of no more than 60 minutes regarding your spirituality and how it has shaped and impacted your leadership?

Final Interview Participant Guide

Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Research Project, Vanderbilt Divinity School
Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders

Researcher:

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Andrea Baker
DMin Candidate, Vanderbilt Divinity School
[email, phone](#)

[Human Research Protections Program \(HRPP\) Contact:](#)

[Name](#)

[Manager, HRPP Regulatory Compliance](#)

[Vanderbilt Human Research Protections Program](#)

[email, phone](#)

Thank you for serving as an interviewee for my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Integrative Chaplaincy project. The project involves academic research approved by Vanderbilt University's Human Research Protections Program and under the supervision of Vanderbilt Divinity School faculty. Your participation is voluntary. Please let me know **by XX October 2023** which of the following days/times you are available for a video interview of no more than 60 minutes. I provided 3 interview questions at the end of this guide to use as prompts for the interview.

Day/Time (EST) Day/Time (EST)

Day/Time (EST) Day/Time (EST)

Day/Time (EST) Day/Time (EST)

Day/Time (EST) Day/Time (EST)

Day/Time (EST) Day/Time (EST)

Project Abstract: I am a 1984 graduate of West Point, Signal Corps officer 1984-91, Chaplain Corps 2011-present. My project addresses *Developing and Sustaining Spiritual Readiness in Army Leaders*, with a focus in one section of the project on exploring the spiritual resilience of retired women Army leaders who are West Point graduates. West Point's mission is to develop "leader[s] of character...for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army" (westpoint.edu). The Army's mission is to "deploy, fight and win our nation's wars" (army.mil). Today's Army leaders face the harrowing possibility of leading Soldiers during Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) with near-peer competitors.

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Study Participants: Five women graduates of West Point who are retired from the Army (Active/Guard/Reserve) in the rank of lieutenant colonel, colonel, general officer. They are leaders who served as commanders at battalion level or higher and/or held another senior leadership position of significant responsibility. Additionally, they are leaders who served overseas during a combat deployment or who served in a senior level position that took them to an area of hostile or potentially hostile operations. They represent a diverse a group (racial/ethnic background, spiritual background – religious/non-religious, married/single/partnered/divorced, children/no children, sexual orientation, branch/occupational specialty). For participant selection, I reviewed the responses from the first 10 potential interviewees who responded via email with a completed initial survey. I then selected 5 interview participants who represent as much diversity as possible regarding the aforementioned categories.

Study Procedures: To protect privacy and confidentiality, I will code each interviewee as Subject 1, Subject 2, Subject 3, Subject 4, Subject 5. I will have sole access to the coding of the interview subjects. I will interview each subject individually via my Vanderbilt Zoom account and Otter.ai or via Nvivo (all audio/video recorded on password protected platforms). I will give each subject a copy of the interview questions in advance in this guide and again via email and use the questions during the interviews as prompts to explore their spirituality and how it has influenced their moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity.

I will code the interviews listening for words, patterns, and recurring responses. I will then conduct qualitative analysis of the coded data, looking for themes that emerge to inform my research.

Data Security: I will download all video recordings, audio recordings, digital transcripts, and digital notes to my personal computer, which is password protected. I am the only person with access to the passwords. I will then backup these audio recordings and digital files on a thumb drive. I will store the thumb drive and all handwritten notes regarding interviews in a locked cabinet with access under my sole control.

Interview Questions/Prompts:

- 1) How do you describe your spirituality? Describe any practices, activities, rituals, communities that have supported the development and sustainment of your spiritual core.
- 2) Reflect on 1 or 2 challenging times in your personal and professional life. How has your spirituality guided and sustained your resilience and moral and ethical character, especially in times of stress, hardship, tragedy, and moral complexity?
- 3) What advice do you have for Army leaders in developing and sustaining a strong spiritual core, particularly in light of preparing for the prospect of Large-Scale Combat Operations?

Thank you again!

Andrea

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Andrea Baker
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Vanderbilt Divinity School

Appendix C – Spiritual Wisdom from Leaders for Chaplains and Leaders

The eight retired West Point women leaders whom I interviewed offered insightful replies when I asked question: *What advice do you have for Army leaders in developing and sustaining a strong spiritual core, particularly in light of preparing for the prospect of Large-Scale Combat Operations?* I will highlight the wisdom they shared. The interviews were informal and I encouraged space for their reflections and free-flowing thoughts. I edited, and in some places, reordered their responses for clarity, brevity and readability.

Subject #1: Humanist/Stoic Perspective

Thinking back on my times in combat were really the only times that I ever consistently journaled and meditated. Maybe it was because if you're in an austere environment. Maybe there's not as many distractions. I think it takes me back being more of a humanist and just trusting these beautiful creations, whether you think are from God or evolution or whatever. We have more within ourselves than we even know, like trust in yourselves and your capabilities and of those of the people around you. That's still where I would gain my strength, and through the goodness in people that inherent goodness that exists even in me.

[I inquired about advice for leaders facing the prospect of Large-Scale Combat Operations with near-peers.]

Look at what China has to do to overcome that, this incredible indoctrination. It's interesting they have stripped God out. God can't be a power [because they] don't want people thinking that there is anything but the party leader out there. But there's still a great human spirit amongst the Chinese. That's why I think we would win, because we cultivate spirituality. We encourage it. We allow people to be free thinkers and have autonomy. And I think that wins at the end of the day, all the time. And I think it does help to have some sort of grounding and connectedness, and religion does that for a lot of people. Not necessarily for me. I value values and people, those sorts of things.

My spiritual core is my cynicism and stoicism. I'm just very thoughtful about things. I don't pray to anything. I don't think there's a guiding hand or some sort of higher power that I don't see or understand. I think there's a connectedness in humanity.

[Talking about her values] I don't think anyone or should be dehumanized, no matter what they've done, because that strips away from your own humanity. If you treat somebody like they're less than, all it does is just drag you down and break down your own moral core values. I value human dignity.

I think what's been off putting to me [about religion] is [people saying] just give it to God. So, stop thinking, stop analyzing, stop trying? No, I'm not gonna give it to God. I think if you put yourself out into the world, you tend to get a lot back. That's the strength of humanity. That's people being out there using [their] gifts. Some people may think that God gave us these big brains to work with, and I don't. I think it's just how evolution is. I think there is an energy in the world there's a connectedness that I can't explain, and I really don't understand.

[Regarding meditation practices in combat zones] When you are in a very stressful environment, you can shut out the noise, the literal or metaphorical noise. And then you're more apt to make a right decision and make a morally grounded decision, a values-based decision. That's always been my goal with [meditation].

[Regarding stoicism and personal growth] I feel like my whole military career was like a practice and stoicism. I kept doing [difficult] things [and thought] I shouldn't be here. I shouldn't be doing this. I'm not trained to do this. I don't know how I'm gonna do [it] and then I did it, and I did it very well. And I came out the other side with a whole new set of you know, skills and resilience and just knowledge about myself of what I was capable of.

[About working with chaplains] I always got along with my chaplains, because they tend to be very deep thinkers and philosophers and most of them are pretty accepting. I never had problems with the chaplains per se. I was definitely not a spiritual person but I would still go to the chaplains' lunches from time to time to gather and talk and hear scripture. I like the Bible. It's a good book. It was always interesting to hear, the chaplains' take of whatever passage they were reading and what they were pulling from it. I enjoy the conversation and the thought experiment of it all. I would probably continue to do that [if I was an Army leader today]. I always felt uncomfortable asking soldiers about their spirituality just because I felt like I didn't have any right to ask, but I think you can have a conversation about it to cultivate that side of things.

[On chaplains fostering a pluralistic environment] Maybe your work and can help shed some light on how you can make it feel like a more welcoming environment where everyone can feel heard and seen and acknowledged and whatever sort of spiritual path that they're on.

Subject #2: Self-Knowledge & Effective Moral Leadership

[Leaders] have to know themselves. In knowing themselves, they've got to understand how they fit in the world. So many times, as a battalion commander, I could control some things. But I couldn't control everything. And believing that I could control everything is not a good thing. Leaders have to be self-aware.

[Regarding A leadership Presentation she has done] It's called "a passion for leadership." And I use the word "passion" – people, attitude, self-responsibility, self-esteem, integrity, obligation, no excuse. So I go through those words, and talk about how my experiences were formed. And I talked about effective leadership. To me, effective leadership is simple. It's just not easy. It's simple because as a leader, you lead because of those who are under your command. But it's not easy, because it takes a constant conscious commitment. It's a realization of who you are. And then understanding and meeting your soldiers where they are.

And I think spirituality is big [when] you're going into combat operations. It's an allowance and a realization that you don't control everything. And the only thing you control is you. And you have to be the standard. You have to be the standard where your soldiers can look to you for advice. And your advice may be, how do you feel? Do you want to speak to the chaplain? Creating those resources, so that your soldiers can get the answers that they need. And you're not

the do all, we all have all the answers kind of thing. It's more of an openness that a commander has to be. And unfortunately, as you get up higher, you lose that relationship with the everyday soldier. So, the relationship a division commander has with his or her brigade commanders and battalion commanders and down to the tank demand. That's where division commanders can make the difference in terms of creating an environment where it's okay to ask questions, it's okay to be unsure. And allowing leaders to lead and not force them to do what you think is right.

I witnessed a lot of moral drift in Germany in my first tour. I could have been easily a part of that. It actually kind of took a conscious decision not to be part of that because it was like, everybody's doing it kind of thing. You have to get to the point where you've got your code of ethics, or how you live. But they're not black and white. They're never black and white. It's taking account for all situations. You can't treat people the same, you have to treat them based upon the situation that they're put in. And that comes from knowing your soldiers. As I went through the ranks, knowing their strengths and weaknesses, and then helping them with their weaknesses, and getting them with their strengths to help other soldiers with their weaknesses. If I could, I identified a soldier who had that kind of moral character that I was looking for. I would reinforce that with them, and create a situation for them to be able to spread that to soldiers who were looking for something. Let them be the example.

Subject #3: Spiritual Base & Compassion

[Reflecting on what she might tell her younger self as a leader] I might tell myself to put [my faith] more in the forefront of my life. Not just the hard times because I think I am guilty of that to an extent. Praying to God before we crossed into Iraq or praying at the times that you need him or you think you need him most. Rather, [I think] recognizing as I wrote today [in my spiritual journal] that he's always with you. He's always there. This life, it's the stepping stone to eternal life and it needs to be in the more in the forefront.

I think more of our leaders need a strong spiritual base. In terms of your physical fitness, you [know] that's important. Your mental fitness, pitch or spiritual fitness, I think that's one of those things that people could often decide, if I have time, I'll pray. If I have time, I'll go to church. I know that I drew strength from each and every [church] service and especially in Iraq. I'll never forget Easter service because [some of] my soldiers had already died [in combat]. Palm Sunday and the Easter sunrise service that we had on our site in Baghdad, is totally ingrained in my in my mind forever, and I do hope that you know, that these that these leaders know, I know.

The short answer to your question is [leaders] should be in touch with that part [spirituality]. And not just, it's kind of there. It needs to be important. What do you think keeps us from keeping that front and center like we do our physical health? People think doing push-ups and bench pressing a gazillion pounds and running a marathon is being tough. And being spiritual is weak. I think we just don't get it.

I think female soldiers get it more so than male soldiers. I know when we lost our soldiers in Iraq, the battalion commander was a very emotional guy. And when I saw him, the first time after we found out, standing on a knoll, we embraced. And we prayed for our soldiers, and for their families, and at that time for our missing because we didn't know the fate of everybody. I

think people look at people like [him] as being weak. And yet, I think from a spiritual moral side of things, I think he's stronger than most people I've met in the military. But I think others see that it's a weakness.

[I inquired what difference she thought gender makes] I think we [women] realized that being compassionate is not weakness, but it's actually strength and that faith is not weakness. I've met more compassionate female leaders than I have male for sure, even though I served in a male dominated branch. I just I think that we're more in touch with it. I don't want to be a sexist person that thinks, "Well, we're the we're the fairer sex and are softer and all that." But I do think we get it. Senior leaders of the military are still predominantly male, most certainly in the Army. And I know it's not fair of me to generalize that they're not in touch with their spiritual selves, but I would imagine they probably aren't. There's probably a higher percentage of senior leaders that aren't is my guess. And I don't wonder if part of it is just societal. Better best to be tough. Boys are raised to be tough and not be in touch with that compassionate, sensitive side that they innately have as well.

Subject #4: Practice Your Faith & Foster a Culture that Encourages Spirituality

I advise on a two-prong approach. The first one, individually as a leader, [is] really identifying what is your faith? How do you practice it? And how do you get support to perpetuate your faith, whatever practice that happens to be, whether it's going to a chaplain, whatever it is. I think that's super important for leaders, because it's a very isolating position. And I know one of my bosses had some PTSD. Ultimately, he was able to leverage the chaplain, his own faith, and could manage. I think, particularly for the senior leader, commander, that's of ultimate importance. And then when you're in the stressful combat situation, ensuring that there's no stigma, to be able to talk about it. I've seen senior leaders today, general officers, who are upfront and open, and we'll talk about mental health aspects, which I think can be tied to a level of faith. I would bind that together with regard to being able to get help seek support, during stressful situations, combat or not.

The second one is knowing that spirituality can be really diverse for an organization and a unit. It's so important to foster a culture that encourages spirituality, whatever it is, and then being able to afford opportunities for that. So [I would recommend] more education about how you really can help subordinates foster their spirituality. I'm sure there's a lot of tools, techniques, practices that can be employed. So really enabling leaders to be able to do that, for their subordinates would be, the second piece of advice. What is that, that they can do, [in] creating a positive culture for spirituality?

Subject #5: Values & Resiliency

One of the things that we taught at the pre-command course that I think the chaplains might be picking up was, it was called a true growth model. And it was something where we went through a day and a half of sitting down and determining what are your values? What are those core beliefs and things that guide you and have guided you and are important to you? And you go through a little exercise to determine what those are. You get a great big stack of paper that have words on them, and narrow that down to five things. Once you have those four or five values,

you define what it means. What does it mean if family is a value that's important to you, if integrity is important to you, if faith is important. Define what that value means because your faith may be different than [others']. It's what's important to you. Because you're going to then say okay, here are my values. This is this is what they mean. And all of that leads to what is my purpose? Why? Why am I doing what am I what I'm doing? And that purpose probably generally shouldn't change so much, but maybe it does. Maybe it does a little bit, but the why and if this value is important to me, and these behaviors go with it, then what is it? Why am I doing what I'm doing? And what is it that I'm striving [for]? What's that bullseye, what am I striving to be? The best leader, [the best] family member, whatever it is, so that I can provide hope to others.

I think if they have that kind of a touchstone and they know what's important to them, that in times of crisis, and maybe what's important to them is their faith in God, that in times of crisis, they have that to rely on, they have a foundation that they can rely on. In all of these situations [of challenge and hardship], what kept me resilient, even though I might have been punched down initially, what got me back up was my resiliency and realizing that I have God, I have Jesus Christ who's going to protect me and he's going to guide me. I'm sometimes in lockstep and I don't even know that I continue to go in the right direction and I have trust that I'm going to go in the right direction or if I don't, God is going to give me someone to course correct me. Something's going to happen to course correct me so that I go in the right direction, and maybe I go, maybe I do step over that guardrail. And maybe I make mistake because certainly my path has not been perfect. And we do make mistakes. But you learn from that mistake, and course correct and get back on.

I think it's resiliency and a foundation. I think Christianity or your faith certainly is a very strong foundation and maybe your foundation is family. Bu to have that knowledge that everything's going to be okay, I think it's really important, and I know that I've had that since I was a child. You know at West Point we were pushed down. But what was it that got us back up? Faith? The faith that I can do it, faith in myself? Faith I'm supposed to be there? And what is it that will save people in time of war? Faith, resilience, faith and strength. "I can do all thing through Christ Jesus who strengthens me." And I think leaders have to have that. They have to have something. Because it's tough.

I remember in Desert Storm I was the brigade S-1 and they said we were gonna lose tens of thousands of people. And I was sent to go pick up body bags. And when we went there, there were so many transfer cases as hundreds, thousands of them, as far as the eye could see. And there were shelter halves that were supposed to be the makeshift morgue. When we left, we picked up the body bags that were in boxes. And I said to the soldiers, "I think it's very important we don't tell anyone what we saw here." Because it was staggering and we would not have been prepared for that. We thought we were going to get the chemicals, that's what we expected, and thank the good Lord, we did not.

So, resiliency I think is important, some sort of strength, something that you can rely on when you are torn down. What do you do? Because we're human, we're going to respond. How do you respond? I know that that chaplains have a program that they're doing. And I think it's I think it's super important and, and it ought it ought to be mandatory [for leaders]. Just to let people know this is what's available to soldiers.

Subject #6: Something Bigger than Yourself, Connection & Asking for Help

The two things that I was thinking about in preparation for this conversation, one of them is that sense of being a part of something bigger than ourselves. And by that I don't mean the Army. Obviously, that's a part of every day when you're serving in uniform, you have that sense of being a part of our Army and our great nation. But beyond that, even bigger picture than that, recognize where we are in the big picture of life and of creation. In my case, if that's your faith, knowing that you're a beloved child of God. [If] someone has a different faith, whatever that means, in terms of where they fit into the big picture, not just the Army. Knowing that I matter in that sense, and that my identity is not solely defined by the Army or what I do or don't do. In the Army, I think that is huge, grounded in in that way, to that's something bigger.

A second thing would be connection. Connections are deep, connections are huge. It's the people. You draw strength from each other. Obviously, that happens in your unit. You have each other's backs, you have a team, but they're not necessarily the folks that you bear your soul with either. Are there people that really you can trust in times conflict? That could be in large scale conflict, or it could be in personal trials. Who are the people that you trust and you can reach out to? To some degree, you form some of those really strong bonds through the heart experiences you go through, like we all remember our friends from the academy. And because of that experience, we had going through Beast together, being plebes together. Those are some uniquely strong bonds that are deeper than just casual relationships. And I think that that also can be elaborated on with your faith community and the bonds that you form the people that experience other things with.

The other thing I would say that kind of comes to mind, is when you think about H2F and how we're whole people, we're not just the mental and physical, but there's that spiritual dimension with H2F too. Whatever that means to different people, because they may have different faiths, but whatever it is outside of those physical and mental. You could say the career and those dimensions. What are the purpose, the passions, the things that that really drive me and get me going? What are those? And having a strong connection to those as well.

[I inquired if she had sought mental health support for some particularly difficult career challenges she shared.] That's, that's hard to do. Yeah. And actually, that's a great point, to bring that up for your number three question about things that senior leaders can do. To ask for help, when you need it, and to be transparent when you're suffering or going through, something are things that other people may not be familiar with.

[She then shared a story about an Army senior leader who spoke of seeing another senior leader shortly before he died by suicide.] He shared what I thought was one of the most transparent and self-aware [things]. He shared an observation that I thought was huge. He said, "You know, I had just seen [the deceased senior leader] in the halls of the Pentagon and I had no idea. I asked him how it was going and he was like, everything's fine, and I had no idea that there was trouble under the waters there." Here's what he said that really got me. He said, "But even if I had realized, would I have said and done the right things to help him? Because if he'd have said, you know, I'm not really sure I'm up to this new assignment commanding, would I really have

listened and given him an opportunity to bare that part of his soul and to connect, as opposed to just cheering for him and saying, “Oh, come on, you got this. We all know you can do this.”

That caused me to think so much about how we deal with people who are struggling, because it's so ingrained in us either to be those encouragers, which can sometimes get in the way of really listening and being a really helpful resource and giving people the space to really be honest about the things that are hard. So that's two sides, kind of the same coin, of being able to be candid ourselves and open and also allowing other people to [be open], as opposed to trying to do a good job of encouraging them and what they're facing.

[I then asked her what keeps us from being transparent or reaching out if we need help, or from helping somebody dig into their stuff if they need help.] I think it's maybe a reluctance to admit when we don't have the answers, when we aren't in control, when we are feeling not up for the task. In my case, there was a huge element of shame tied to that. Were it other circumstances, I might have more rapidly asked for help. When you're thoroughly ashamed of something that you don't want anybody to know about it, that adds another layer of difficulty to opening up about something and admitting your areas of need.

Subject #7: Bursting Bubbles, Servant Leadership & Embracing Diversity

One of the things that was really interesting to me [in a corporate position] that I think would be interesting if the Army did is a program they called reverse mentoring. If you at the VP level, you would meet with an individual contributor who was within the first couple of years of being on the job. And you were expected to find out from them what's going on and learn your blind spots. Everybody says, “Oh, I talk to people. I see people.” But they're still in their bubble. And it's very hard to pierce your bubble as you go [higher]. Every commander has a bubble. And the bubble gets bigger as you go up in rank, and being able to pierce that bubble gets progressively harder and they've got to be more intentional about doing so. You go all the way back to what we learned at West Point. Napoleon had his group of lieutenants and he had his directed telescope and he sent them down to look at what was going on and come back unfiltered by the command. He knew he had to figure out creative ways to pierce their bubble.

I don't think [Army leaders] do a really good job of it. Even at West Point, the Superintendent would text the quarterback of the football team, to get ready. But they only they talk to the striper dogs, the cadet captains and the people who do the best. They don't talk to the guy or gal who's a cadet sergeant very often. They don't talk to the average Joe; they always talk to the above average and think that they really know what's on cadets' minds.

[She then talked about her admiration for the humble leadership of a general she greatly respected.] You know what General [X] did to burst the bubble? He loves to cut hair. He cut his own hair. He would cut his son's hair. So, when he was in theater during Desert Storm, he cut his soldiers' hair. He would have them lined up, and he would cut their hair. They would tell him all sorts of things while he's cutting their hair, because who doesn't tell their barber all sorts of things. Right? He was the one commander that I can tell you truly understood soldiers. In that kind act of being a servant leader, in cutting a soldier's hair, he also learned so much. He was Christian and he talked about figuring out a way to wash someone's feet. So, for him it was

cutting hair. But I think everybody has to find that way. For me, I do that with my students. I sit there on the keyboard with them, trying to figure stuff out, and they'll tell me stuff while we're working on things. It's trying to find that way to wash their feet, to pierce that bubble to truly understand what's on their mind and what are their concerns. I don't know if [Army leaders] do a good job of that today.

[I asked if is there anything in her Jewish faith that resonates with that image of Jesus washing people's feet and servant leadership.] Our spiritual tradition is always about giving, preparing a feast for someone. You have this stereotype of the Jewish mother and the feasts. That's big, that's part of our culture, finding out what the other person loves and making that for them. Not only just making a meal, but finding out what that person loves and making that meal. That's a cultural as well as a religious thing to understand. Creating that space that everybody can love and enjoying that time when you're having a Passover meal. It's remembering the bitterness of slavery; it's remembering the tears of the enslaved. It's about remembering others. Those are religious and cultural icons and thoughts that that shape how [I] deal with the people I love and the people that I try to impact.

[I asked again about what advice she would offer leaders in preparing their spiritual cores for LSCO with near-peers.] One thing that I know, having been an educator, is that the young people are more fragile mentally. Some of that's COVID, some of the social isolation. Some of that is the technology allowing them to isolate socially. Some of that is, is the technology allowing them to live in these hyper stovepipes where they're not people. Part of the reason that the United States military is getting more extreme and that white extremists, extremism and those kinds of things are flourishing, is because we're not creating a group of young people who break out of these technological stovepipes. And we've got to do some better job of creating a true embracing of diversity. We talk about diversity. But you go into the barracks and they're self-segregating. And that's still happening. And it's happening more and more.

I think I understand what you're trying to say, you know, what can [leaders] do for themselves, but what they need to do for our country is somehow embrace, is get young soldiers and more of the Army to truly embracing diversity right now. It's all bark and I don't know if it's embracing it. And I think it's going to break down the cohesiveness of units. And if we go into large scale operations, I don't know if we're going to be able to be that great crusading diverse Army that we were in in other engagements. We're such a fractured society, and they've got to do something better about getting through those divisions.

Subject #8: Moral Servant Leadership

I would go to servant leadership. And I would say it's a privilege for you to lead your country. And at some point, it's not about you anymore. And it's about your people. And while you may not fundamentally agree with these things, you know, in order to have a moral force, we have to define right and wrong. And you're the one that's going to be the leader, you're going to set the tone. So, the tone you set is the tone that the subordinates are going to pick up on. [I asked her if there is one golden rule that summarizes living moral life.] Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Jesus boiled down all the commandments to love God and love your neighbor.

Appendix D – Resources for Chaplains

Chaplains may find the following resources helpful in developing spiritual readiness training for Army leaders or when counseling one-one with leaders. I suggest using this list as a starting point and adding to it in building a library of Spiritual Readiness resources. To gain a deeper understanding of spirituality beyond Judeo-Christian traditions, chaplains might add resources about Stoicism, Humanism, Norse Pagan and Wiccan studies.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Bridge Psychological and Spiritual Care (Nieuwsma, Walser, Hayes, 2016)

Get Out of Your Mind & Into Your Life: The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Steven Hayes, 2005)

Ethics

“Feminist Virtue Ethics,” (Robin S. Dillon) in *The Rutledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Ann Garry, Serene J. Khader, Alison Stone, eds., 2017)

Forging the Warrior’s Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet Prayer (Don Snider, project director, 2007)

How Spirituality Impacts Ethical Leadership (Mary Rose Johnson, 2019)

Leadership and Virtues: Understanding and Practicing Good Leadership (Toby Newstead & Ronald Riggio, eds., 2023)

The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present (Shannon French, 2017)

The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the Military (Martin Cook, 2004)

Grief and Lament

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament (Mark Vroegop, 2019)

Grieving with Hope: Finding Comfort as You Journey Through Loss (Samuel J.I.V. Hodges, 2011)

The Louder Song: Listening for Hope in the Midst of Lament (Aubrey Samson, 2019)

The Dark Interval: Letters on Loss, Grief, and Transformation (Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Ulrich Baer, 2018)

Human Flourishing

Beyond Well-Being: Spirituality and Human Flourishing (Martin Dowson, Stuart Devenish, Maureen Miner, eds., 2012)

Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life (Miroslav Volf & Justin Crips, eds., 2015)

Mindfulness

Get Out of Your Mind & Into Your Life: The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Chapter 8: Mindfulness (Steven Hayes, 2005)

Practice the Pause: Jesus' Contemplative Practice, New Brain Science, and What It Means to Be Fully Human (Caroline Oakes, 2023)

Moral Drift

Moral Injury: Implications for U.S. SOF and Ethical Resiliency, Chapter 3. SOF Ethos and Ethics, Moral Drift and Moral Injury (<https://jsou.edu/Press/PublicationDashboard/226>, 2023)

Why Do Senior Officers Sometimes Fail in Character? The Leaky Character Reservoir (<https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3190&context=parameters>, 2022)

Understanding ethical drift in professional decision-making: dilemmas in practice (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13603116.2021.1992679#:~:text=Ethical%20drift%20involves%20'an%20incremental,be%20maintaining%20their%20ethical%20boundaries,2021>)

Moral Injury

Moral Injury: Implications for U.S. SOF and Ethical Resiliency (<https://jsou.edu/Press/PublicationDashboard/226>, 2023)

Military Moral Injury and Spiritual Care (Nancy Ramsay & Carrie Doehring, eds., 2019)

Moral Injury: A Handbook for Military Chaplains (Harold Koenig, Lindsay Carey, Jennifer Wortham, 2022)

Moral Injury Among Returning Veterans: From Thank you for Your Service to a Liberative Solidarity (Joushua Morris, 2021)

War and Moral Injury: A Reader (Rober Meagher & Douglas Pryer, eds., 2018)

Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War (Edward Tick, 2014)

What Have We Done: The Moral Injury of Our Longest Wars (David Wood, 2016)

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change (William Miller & Stephen Rollnick, 2013)

Non-religious Spirituality

7 in 10 U.S. adults consider themselves spiritual
(<https://www.npr.org/2023/12/07/1217855568/7-in-10-u-s-adults-consider-themselves-spiritual>, 2023)

10 Types of Non Religious Spirituality Analyzed
(<https://faithinthedivine.com/types-of-non-religious-spirituality/>)

Waking-Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion (Sam Harris, 2014)

Who are 'spiritual but not religious' Americans?
(<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/12/07/who-are-spiritual-but-not-religious-americans/>, 2023)

Play, Creativity, Nature

Eco-Art Therapy: Creative Activities that let Earth Teach (Theresa Sweeney, 2013)

Ecotherapy: A Field Guide (David Key & Keith Tudor, 2023)

Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind (Linda Buzzell & Craig Chalquist, 2009)

Ecotherapy in Practice: A Buddhist Model (Caroline Brazier, 2017)

Ecotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice (Martin Jordan & Joe Hinds, 2016)

Facilitator Manual for Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (Charlton Hill, 2016)

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook: Second Edition (Charlton Hill, 2021)

Moral Injury: Implications for U.S. SOF and Ethical Resiliency, Chapter 4. Reimagined Professional Military Education and Moral Injury: "Story Design Expression" & "Innovation Play" (<https://jsou.edu/Press/PublicationDashboard/226>, 2023)

Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy (Sally Atkins & Melia Snyder, 2017)

Play-Full Life: Slowing Down & Seeking Peace (Jaco Hammon, 2011)

Play Matters (Miguel Sicart, 2013)

With Nature in Mind: The Ecotherapy Manual for Mental Health Professionals (Andy McGeeney, 2016)

The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative (Florence Williams, 2018)

Trauma and Post-traumatic Growth

Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back (Peters, 2016)

Post-Traumatic Jesus: A Healing Gospel for the Wounded (Peters, 2023)

Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World (Jones, 2019)

Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma (Rambo, 2017)

Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining (Rambo, 2010)

American Psychologist: “Can We Facilitate Growth in Combat Veterans?” (Tedeschi and McNally, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021896>)

The Healing Path: A Memoir and an Invitation (James Finley, 2023)

War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation’s Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (Edward Tick, 2005)

Problem-Solving Therapy

Problem-Solving Therapy: A Treatment Manual (Arthur Nezu, Christine Maguth Nezu, Thomas D’Zurilla, 2012)

Spiritual Care

Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century (Wendy Cadeg & Shelly Rambo, eds., 2022)

Designing & Leading Life-Changing Workshops: Creating the Conditions for Transformation in Your Groups, Trainings, and Retreats (Ken Nelson, David Ronka, Lesli Lang, 2020)

The Interfaith Prayer Book (Ted Brownstein, 2014)

Spiritual Guidance Across Religions: A Sourcebook for Spiritual Directors & Other Professionals Providing Counsel to People of Differing Faith Traditions (John Mabry, 2014)

Spiritual Readiness: Essentials for Military Leaders and Chaplains (Harold Koenig, Lindsay Carey, Faten Al Zaben, 2022)

Welcome them Home Help Them Heal: Pastoral care and ministry with service members returning from war (John Sippola, Amy Blumenshine, Donald Tubesing, Valerie Yancy, 2009)