

Military Chaplains and Interfaith Harmony

Authors: Vance P. Theodore, and Kenneth L. Alford

*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 upon and will
fail himself and his commander and his country in the end.*

-General of the Army George C. Marshall¹

Chaplains are a select group of men and women in the United States military who are endorsed by their faith traditions to perform or provide religious support to military service members and their families. This diverse group comes from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, and faith traditions, and they serve an equally diverse religious population.²

Military chaplains are the protectors of free exercise, ensuring service-members have the right to practice their religion.³ This notion of free exercise historically was first stressed in a letter from George Washington, Commander and Chief of the Continental Army, to Colonel Benedict Arnold in September 14, 1775. Washington instructed Arnold that “as far as lays in your power, you are to protect and support the free exercise of the Religion of the Country and the undisturbed Enjoyment of the rights of Conscience in religious Matters, with your utmost influence and Authority.”⁴ The right to free exercise of religion, later were explicitly included in the First Amendment of the Constitution, and is an important responsibility of military chaplains. They should protect and support it. The ideal of free exercise of religion provides the legal basis for the chaplaincy,⁵ along with Title 10 duties of “holding appropriate religious services...for the command”⁶

The American military chaplaincy began in the Continental Army. On 29 July 1775, the Continental Congress first recognized chaplains by agreeing to pay them twenty dollars a month. The same amount paid to Captains and Judge Advocates (lawyers), and thus the first official recognition of chaplaincy by the government.⁷ Today the army chaplaincy recognizes and honors this day as their celebratory beginnings. The Navy's chaplaincy was created on 28 November

¹ As cited in Robert L. Gushwa, *The Best and Worst of Time: The United State Army Chaplaincy* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1977), 186.

² Religious diversity in the military is generally is representative of the population of the United States. According to a 2014 PEW research survey, “70% of the U.S. population consider themselves to be affiliated with a Christian denomination. Of the unaffiliated 22.8% consider themselves to be Atheist, Agnostic, or not anything. Other faith groups were Jewish 1.9%, Muslim, 0.9%, Buddhist, 0.7% and other faiths, 1.8% make up the rest.” See “Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, Washington, accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/about-the-religious-landscape-study/>.

³ Free exercise of religion is a First Amendment right in the Constitution's Bill of Rights.

⁴ Letter of instruction from George Washington to Colonel Benedict Arnold, 14 September 1775, quoted in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), 495-496.

⁵ Israel Drazin and Cecil B. Currey, *For God and Country: The History of a Constitutional Challenge to the Army Chaplaincy* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1995), 205.

⁶ Findlaw, “10 U.S.C. § 3547 – U.S. Code – Unannotated Title 10. Armed Forces § 3457. Duties: Chaplains,” accessed March 3, 2020, [https://codes.findlaw.com/us/title-10-armed-forces/10-usc-sect-3547.html#:~:text=\(a\)%20Each%20chaplain%20shall%2C,die%20while%20in%20that%20command.](https://codes.findlaw.com/us/title-10-armed-forces/10-usc-sect-3547.html#:~:text=(a)%20Each%20chaplain%20shall%2C,die%20while%20in%20that%20command.)

⁷ Worthington Chancery Ford, ed. Library of Congress, *Journal of The Continental Congress, 1774-1789*. 34 vols. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1905), II, 220.

1775 when divine services and a place for a chaplain was stipulated in the second article of Navy Regulations which states: “The Commanders of the ships of the thirteen United Colonies are to take care that divine service be performed twice a day on board, and a sermon preached on Sundays, unless bad weather or other extraordinary accidents prevent.”⁸ While, the Air Force became a separate military department in September 1947. The Air Force chaplaincy did not separate from the Army until July 1949.⁹ Today, the United State Armed Forces chaplaincy includes the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

The armed forces chaplaincy mission statements explain their vision and values. “The Air Force Chaplain Corps provides for religious support and spiritual care. It ensures all Airmen and their authorized dependents have opportunities to exercise their constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.”¹⁰ “The Army Chaplain Corps cares for the soul of the Army, by ensuring the constitutionally-mandated free exercise of religion, by delivering spiritual and religious care directly to Soldiers, their families, and army contracted civilians.”¹¹ The Navy chaplaincy’s vision is to “minister across the Sea Services in every echelon of command and in every domain to build personal, unit, and family readiness and strengthen spirit, moral character, and toughness.” It also “supports the free exercise of religion for the well-being of all, encouraged and equipped to fulfill their honorable commitments in war and peace.”¹² All three military branches of the chaplaincy have a similar vision that of providing religious support, encouraging free exercise, and in facilitating spiritual and religious care.

Chaplains perform a variety of functions and duties. Here is a sampling:

- Advise commanders or supervisors on moral, ethical, and spiritual matters
- Advise commanders or supervisors regarding the impact of religion on military operations
- Perform or facilitate worship services
- Conduct memorial ceremonies and funeral services
- Provide pastoral care and counseling
- Conduct crisis intervention
- Facilitate religious needs with other chaplains or local religious leaders
- Conduct suicide awareness, and other prevention-oriented programs
- Provide confidentiality—

⁸ Clifford M. Drury, *The History of the Chaplain Corps United States Navy 1778-1939*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 1.

⁹ Daniel B. Jorgensen, *Air Force Chaplains 1946-1960*, vol. II, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 8-9.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Air Force, “Planning and Organization,” Air Force Instruction (AFI) 52-101, 15 July 2019, 5, accessed May 20, 2020, https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_hc/publication/afi52-101/afi52-101.pdf.

¹¹ “The Army Chaplain Corps Vision,” accessed March 13, 2020, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/chaplain_corps_vision_2029.pdf.

¹² U.S. Department of the Navy, “Strategic Plan for Religious Ministry,” 2, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/seniorleadership/chaplain/DoN-Strategic-Plan-for-Religious-Mnistry-v-2-2020-02-07.pdf?ver=2020-02-21-105717-823>.

Concerning confidentiality and privileged communication, it is a sacred trust that chaplains have with servicemembers and families.¹³ Chaplains realize that confidentiality “...includes acts of religion, matters of conscience, and any other information conveyed to a...chaplain in the chaplain's role as a spiritual advisor.”¹⁴ If confidentiality is lost their effectiveness to serve is severely limited.

The chaplaincy is as diverse as the religious population they serve. Armed forces chaplains are accessioned into the military from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith traditions. Their endorsing agencies screen them and prepare them to be accessioned into the armed forces. All chaplains agree to a shared code of ethics. The covenant and code of ethics developed by the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces represents over 150 religious denominations and faith groups. It defines how chaplains should work with one another, support each other, and be held accountable.¹⁵ This code of conduct in response to American religious diversity is instrumental as chaplains engage with other faith groups or other religious minorities.

However, in the chaplaincy's early stages of religious growth Ronit Y. Stahl notes that prior to World War I the chaplaincy was primarily staffed by Protestants and Catholics. Today it represents all major faith groups: Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Latter-day Saints, Muslims, Christian Scientists, Buddhists, Seventh-day Adventist, Hindus, Evangelicals, and others.¹⁶

The evolution and history of the military chaplaincy as to religious diversity, gender and race tends to mirror the shifting American social and religious landscape. The following examples illustrate some of these changes.

¹³ Numerous regulations, policies, and instruction explain chaplain and servicemembers confidential and privileged communications. See for example, (a) U.S. Department of the Army, “Army Chaplain Corps Activities,” AR165-1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 16-2; Air Force Instruction, “Chaplain Planning and Organization,” Spiritual Care, 5 December 2013, and SECNAVINST 1730.9 07, Confidential Communications for Chaplains, February 2008..

¹⁴ U.S. Department of the Navy, “Privileged and Confidential Communications to Chaplains,” SECNAVINST 1790.9A, 5, a-e, accessed May 27 2020, <https://www.secnnav.navy.mil/doni/Directives/01000%20Military%20Personnel%20Support/01-700%20Morale,%20Community%20and%20Religious%20Services/1730.9A.pdf>

¹⁵ The National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces code states that as a chaplain: “...I will function in a pluralistic environment with chaplains of other religious bodies to provide for ministry to all military personnel and their families entrusted to my care; I will seek to provide for pastoral care and ministry to persons of religious bodies other than my own within my area of responsibility with the same investment of myself as I give to members of my own religious body. I will work collegially with chaplains of religious bodies other than my own as together we seek to provide as full a ministry as possible to our people. I will respect the beliefs and traditions of my colleagues and those to whom I minister. When conducting services of worships that include personas of other than my religious body, I will draw upon those beliefs, principles, and practices that we have in common; I will...respect the practices and beliefs of each chaplain I supervise, and exercise care not to require of them any service or practice that would be in violation of the faith practices of their particular religious body; and I will seek to support all colleagues in ministry by building consecutive relationships wherever I serve, both with the staff where I work and with colleagues throughout the military environment.”

¹⁶ Ronit Y. Stahl, *Enlisting Faith: How the Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), booklet cover.

Religious Diversity

- One hundred and eleven chaplains served during the American Revolution. “The lion's share of chaplains were Congregationalists, some 90. Following in number were the Presbyterians with 41, the Anglicans, 20, Baptists, 12, Reformed Church, both German, Dutch and French, 6, Lutheran, 2, Roman Catholic and Universalist Churches, one each.”¹⁷ “The Baptists, who as a people were persecuted in both New England and the South, struggled strenuously for religious freedom.”¹⁸ Chaplains who served during the Revolution were exclusively Christian.
- The first and only Catholic chaplain in the Revolutionary war was Father Louis Eustace Lotbiniere—chaplain in 1776 to Colonel Livingston’s Regiment. He served from 1776 until the war’s end in 1781.¹⁹
- Civil War, Union chaplains were required to be ordained Christian clergy. They were appointed by a regimental commander and approved by that state’s governor. After being commissioned by the War Department, chaplains received the pay and allowances of a calvary captain (\$1,700).²⁰
- The first endorsing process for accession chaplains into the military was enacted in July 1862. It stated, “The chaplain so appointed must be a regular ordained minister of a Christian denomination.”²¹ Later, it was amended to “no person shall be appointed a chaplain in the United States Army who is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination.”²² This was the first time that individual religious denominations gained some control regarding who served as chaplains, not just by being appointed by commanders or friends of influence. Also, the provision that only allowed Christian chaplains was dropped. This left the door open for the appointment of a Jewish chaplain.
- Jacob Frankel was the first rabbi commissioned as a chaplain during the Civil War on September 18, 1862.²³
- “Two other minority chaplain groups, one religious and the other racial, received recognition at this time. Some Catholic priests officially received commissions as chaplains, and the Civil War became the first in which black clergymen served as chaplains.”²⁴

¹⁷ Parker C. Thomas, *From its European Antecedents to 1791: The United States Army Chaplaincy* vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977), xix.

¹⁸ Thomas, *From its European Antecedents to 1791*, xx.

¹⁹ Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution: April 1775 to December 1783* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 2003), 357.

²⁰ Herman A. Norton, *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy: 1791-1865* vol. II (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains Department of the Army, 1977), 83.

²¹ 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Sec. 7: 268, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/37th-congress/c37.pdf>.

²² 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Sec. 8: 595, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/37th-congress/c37.pdf>.

²³ Betram W. Korn, “Jewish Chaplains during the Civil War,” in Johnathan D. Sarna and Adam D. Mendelsohn, eds., *Jews and the Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 243.

²⁴ Heitman, *Struggling for Recognition*, 93.

- “Of the 938 Confederate chaplains whose denominations are known, 47 percent were Methodist, 18 percent Presbyterian, 16 per cent Baptist, 10 percent Episcopalian, 3 percent Roman Catholic, and less than 1 percent each from the other five denominations.”²⁵
- Over 2,213 clergy men were commissioned as chaplains during the First World War. A Congressional Act of 25 May 1918 authorized one chaplain for every 1,200 men although it did not become law until thirteen months after war had been declared by the United States.²⁶
- A chaplain at large bill passed in October 1917, allowed for Jewish, Christian Science, Eastern Catholic, Latter-day Saint, and Salvation Army chaplains. The bill recommended that they be assigned as chaplains at large meaning they were to care primarily for members of their denomination within their division or unit.²⁷
- Chaplain Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad, U.S. Army, became the first Muslim chaplain in 1994.²⁸ Two years later, the Navy commissioned their first Muslim chaplain. The Air Force commissioned its first female Muslim chaplain in December 2019.²⁹
- In 2011, Chaplain Pratima Dharm became the first Hindu chaplain in the U.S. military.³⁰ Chaplain Morh is currently serving in the U.S. Army as one of three Buddhist chaplains.³¹ Chaplain Aroon Seeda is a Buddhist chaplain in the Navy, the Air Force has two Buddhist chaplains.

Chaplains started to break the race and gender religious diversity areas following the WW II and post-Vietnam conflicts. Gender and non-Christian faith traditions began to reflect the fabric of religion in America: Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim faith groups became part of the chaplaincy.

Gender Diversity

- The first female Navy chaplain was Dianna P. Bell, was commissioned in 1973. Today women are endorsed into the armed forces chaplaincy from four major faith groups: Jewish, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist.³²

²⁵ John W. Brinsfield, William C. Davis, Benedict Maryniak, and James L. Robertson, Jr., *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 61.

²⁶ As cited in Earl F. Stover, *Up From Handymen: The United States Army Chaplaincy: 1865-1920* vol. III (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977), 188-189.

²⁷ *Christian Science War Time Activities: A Report* (Boston: USA: The Christian Science Publishing Society, 1922), 297-298, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/christianscience00firs/page/296/mode/2up>,

²⁸ Susan Kappler, “Chaplain Recalls Path to Making History,” accessed February 21, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/22584/chaplain_recalls_path_to_making_history.

²⁹ Armado A. Schwier-Morales, “Air Force Commissions First Female Muslim Chaplain,” accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2054311/air-force-commissions-first-female-muslim-chaplain/>.

³⁰ Lavina Melwani, “Meet the Army’s First Hindu Chaplain,” *Hinduism*, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5234>.

³¹ Don Wagner, “Buddhist Chaplains Serve Spiritual Needs,” accessed February 20, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/191733/buddhist_chaplain_serves_all_spiritual_needs.

³² Jennifer C. Johnson, “40 years of Women Chaplain Celebrated,” accessed February 18, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/98096/40_years_of_women_chaplains_celebrated.

- Lorraine Potter became the first woman commissioned as an Air Force chaplain in 1973 and the first female U.S. Air Force Chief of Chaplains in 2001³³ Chaplain Margaret Grun Kibbin followed as U.S. Navy Chief of Chaplains in 2014.³⁴

Racial Diversity

- The first black chaplains, who served only black soldiers, were commissioned during the middle of the Civil War.³⁵
- After President Truman's 1948 Executive Order 981 integrated the American military, Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Elmer Gibson became the first African American post chaplain at Fort Dix in 1951.³⁶
- Chaplain Matthew A. Zimmerman served as the first black U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains from 1990-1993.³⁷ He was followed by Barry Black, an African American who became the first Seventh-day Adventist chaplain serve as the U.S. Navy's Chief of Chaplains.³⁸

The armed forces chaplaincy mirrors the changing American social and religious landscape. The chaplaincy reflects the American religious culture. Its chaplains have served in all major conflicts since the revolution. Much of their work has been exemplary.

Exemplary Chaplains

Writing of his service as a chaplain during the American Civil War, Father B. F. Christy, declared "a few years in the army did more to combat bigotry than a half century of civil life."³⁹ Though not perfect, the military chaplaincy has responded to turbulent times and adapted well to changing social conditions. The armed forces chaplaincy mirrors the political, social and religious landscape of the United States. With such diversity in the chaplaincy, how do chaplains support one another? How well have they achieved interfaith harmony? How have chaplains ministered to one another and military servicemembers. How do they interact in an interreligious manner?

³³ "Chaplain MG Lorraine Potter Urges Keuka College Students to be the Best," access February 19, 2020, <https://www.keuka.edu/news/maj-gen-lorraine-potter-%E2%80%99968-urges-keuka-college-students-%E2%80%998be-best-you%E2%80%9999>.

³⁴ "Rear Admiral Margaret Grun Kibbin Retired," *United States Navy Biography*, accessed February 21, 2020, https://www.navy.mil/navydata/bios/navybio_ret.asp?bioID=599.

³⁵ Herman A. Norton, *Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplain—1791-1865* vol. II (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977), 95.

³⁶ "Pioneering African American Army Chaplain's Collection Available," *Humanities and Social Sciences Online*, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/12840/discussions/4386113/pioneering-african-american-army-chaplains-collection-available>.

³⁷ John W. Brinsfield, Jr., *Encouraging Faith, Supporting Soldiers: The United States Army Chaplain—1975-1995* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1997), 303.

³⁸ "Barry C. Black (1948-)," *BlackPast*, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-barry-c-1948/>.

³⁹ Roy Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1958), 134.

The Four Chaplains

One of the most iconic narratives that summarizes the spirit of the armed forces chaplaincy about interfaith harmony and respect for one another is the story of the four chaplains. During WWII, humanity was being divided by war. The country needed a boost in morale. On February 3, 1943, the USS *Dorchester*, a crowded transport ship in route from St. John's Newfoundland to Greenland, was struck by a torpedo from a German U boat. The ship was ripped apart and sunk in the Labrador Sea. Of the 902 men on board, 672 were reported "lost in action." Survivors testified that four chaplains gave their life preservers to four enlisted men. The four chaplains spent the last moments of their lives singing and praying together with their arms linked as they went down with the ship. John Ladd, said, "It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven."⁴⁰

The four chaplains, all first lieutenants: Clark Vandersall Poling (Dutch Reformed), George Lansing Fox (Methodist), John Patrick Washington (Catholic), and Alexander D. Good (Jewish)—sacrificed their lives so that others could live. In 19 December 1944, they were posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart. In 1961, they posthumously received the Medal for Heroism. Their heroic deeds caught the imagination of the American public, and a commemorative stamp was issued by the US Postal Service. They epitomized the ideal of interreligious interaction and religious pluralism.⁴¹ The selfless sacrifice of those four chaplains encapsulates the spirit of the armed forces chaplaincy.

Father Francis P. Duffy

Another example of interfaith harmony was Father Francis Duffy. Chaplain Duffy was an Irish Catholic priest who served during WW I, and was a chaplain for the 69th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard, known as the "Fighting 69th." The unit consisted primarily of New York City's Irish Americans. Father Duffy served in France on the Western Front from 1917 to 1918. His men loved him because he shared their hardships. He was one of the most highly decorated chaplains during WWI—receiving the Distinguished Service Cross and Distinguished Service Medal.⁴² Father Duffy was very fond of the chaplains he served with. After he was appointed as the Senior chaplain of his Division, he stated:

We discussed a number of matters of common interest and every single topic was decided by unanimous vote. The clergy discover in circumstances like these that their fundamental interests are absolutely in common. I do not mean that there is any tendency to give up their own special creeds; in fact they all make an effort to supply the special religious needs of men of various denominations in their own regiments by getting the other chaplains to have occasional services or by announcing such services to the men. I

⁴⁰ Eizehu Gibor, *Living Jewish Values* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2009), 27.

⁴¹ "The Story," *The Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation*, accessed February 21, 2020, <http://www.fourchaplains.org/the-saga-of-the-four-chaplains/>.

⁴² "69th Regiment," accessed February 19, 2020, <http://www.sixtyninth.net/duffy.html>.

told Bishop Brent that the day the Clergy of different churches got along together in peace and harmony in the Division would be a scandal to the pious mind.⁴³

Father Duffy suggested that it would be a good idea for representatives of different faiths to get together once a year in bathing suits, where no one could tell if he was talking to a “Benedictine Abbot, a Methodist Sunday School Superintendent, or a Mormon Elder. They would find out how many things of interest they have in common, and without any disloyalty to their own church, would get together to put them over.”⁴⁴ Father Duffy fostered companionship and camaraderie with other chaplains in his Division, and was not threatened by collaborating with them.

*Chaplain James Seawood*⁴⁵

Chaplain James Seawood served as an active duty chaplain at Fort Ord, California from 1984 to 1988 with the 7th Infantry Division. After leaving active duty, he served in the Army reserves and deployed during Desert Storm and the Afghanistan conflict. The following account depicts Chaplain Seawood’s ability to work with chaplains from different faith traditions.

Part of Chaplain Seawood’s duties as a chaplain was to pastor an on-post gospel congregation. We lived in the same block of housing at Fort Ord, California and were both infantry battalion chaplains with the 7th Infantry Division. We became great friends sharing stories, laughing, eating lunch together, and talking about how we could better serve our soldiers and their families. Many times, I passed by his house and knocked on the big framed window of his living room where I could hear him loudly practicing his Sunday sermon. I would laughingly tell him to “tone it down.” One Sunday, he asked me—a Latter-day Saint chaplain to preach during his worship service, inviting me to “bring the word” to his congregation. What I remember most during my sermon was Chaplain Seawood smiling. At one point, he said, in a loud voice “Bring it on home, Vance.” At first, I was startled. I had never had anyone talk to me while I was giving a sermon. It was his way of supporting me. During that moment, I felt a deep love for that man with whom I shared the ministry.⁴⁶

These short exemplary vignettes of chaplains demonstrate the importance of religious pluralism a necessity where chaplains work one with another to provide religious support. However, religious pluralism can, at times, be challenging.

Interreligious Interaction/Pluralism

On October 20, 2010, the United Nations adopted a resolution by the general assembly to acknowledge the need for “dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual

⁴³ Francis P. Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1919), 100.

⁴⁴ Duffy, *Father Duffy’s Story*, 100.

⁴⁵ Reverend James Seawood served as dean of students and director of student services at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Jersey. He was elected president of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in American in 2008. He also retired as a U.S. Army chaplain.

⁴⁶ Personal recollection from Vance P. Theodore of Chaplain James Seawood during their time together when they served as infantry chaplains in the 7th Infantry Division at Fort Ord, California, 1984-1988.

understanding, harmony and cooperation among people.” It also reaffirmed, “that mutual understanding, and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace.”⁴⁷ This resolution speaks to the importance of interfaith dialogue and interreligious interaction. Harmony does not necessarily mean unity of practice, but it does imply the importance of working together and in accommodating beliefs, practices and religious support or understanding.

Whether it is called interreligious interaction, interfaith dialogue, or interfaith harmony, it is significant that the chaplaincy is a unique corps comprised of individuals who represent different faith traditions who come together in harmony to support religious programs, advise the command, and work with families and individuals in the military. In this religious landscape you find chaplains of many beliefs, faith groups, and traditions sitting down and planning out religious support together for soldiers, marines, sailors, airmen and coast guardsmen. This is truly an amazing spectacle since religion, at times, can be a divisive factor in society. It can also be an element of reconciliation and harmony.

In 1985, Krister Stendhal—a Lutheran cleric and former dean of the Harvard Divinity School was serving as the bishop of Stockholm when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sought to build a temple in Sweden. Opposition was great and community feelings heated. Bishop Stendhal tried to lessen the tension by proposing three rules of religious understanding. He suggested: “(1) When trying to understand another religion, you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies. (2) Don’t compare your best to their worst. [and] (3) Leave room for holy envy.”⁴⁸

Stendahl described holy envy as an experience “when we recognize something in another tradition that is beautiful but is not in ours, nor should we grab it or claim it...Holy envy rejoices in the beauty of others.”⁴⁹ An example of possible holy envy is to appreciate how Muslims pray five times a day. Normally, a Christian may pray at meals or at the end of each day. However, anyone can admire the strength and obedience it takes to pray five times a day. One can appreciate a Muslim’s devotion to prayer. This is an example of holy envy. You may not practice a specific religious belief yourself, but you can still experience holy envy for it.⁵⁰ From this simple yet complex concept, Stendahl helped to lay the groundwork for interfaith dialogue.

By respecting another’s religion, we can improve our own religiosity. Ronit Y. Stahl argued “In this sense the military chaplaincy has generally operated out of a sense of pragmatic pluralism, an imperfect yet optimistic sensibility that it is possible to serve a wide array of faith in the same place.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ U.N. Security Council, 56th session, “Resolution 65/5 (2010) World Interfaith Harmony Week” (A65/L.5 and Add.1) 20 October 2010.

⁴⁸ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* (New York: HarperOne, 2019), 65-66.

⁴⁹ Krister Stendahl, “From God’s Perspective We are All Minorities,” *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 2, 1993. See following link for a copy of the article.

http://www.jcrelations.net/From_God_s_Perspective_we_are_all_Minorities.2224.0.html?L=3&pdf=1

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Holy Envy*, 68.

⁵¹ Stahl, *Enlisting Faith*, 265.

In interreligious interaction, pluralism has become a catch phrase to describe interfaith cooperation. However, as defined by Diana Eck in *The New Religious American*,

Pluralism is not just another word for diversity. It goes beyond mere plurality or diversity to active engagement with that plurality...Pluralism goes beyond mere tolerance to the active attempt to understand others...Pluralism is not simply relativism. It does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments...Pluralism is premised...on the significance of and engagement with real differences...Pluralism is engagement with, not abdication of, differences...Finally, the process of pluralism is never complete but is the ongoing work of each generation.⁵²

A panel of distinguished leaders chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Harvard Kennedy School Professor David Gergen reported on the future of religious pluralism in American. The report determined that religious diversity remains a vibrant factor in our country's health. The report encouraged Americans to:

(1) encourage respect in the public sphere for the religious identity of individuals and groups; (2) foster positive relationships and informed dialogue between people of different spiritual orientations; and (3) forge partnerships among religious and other organizations in service to the common good.⁵³

We should respect the beliefs and faiths of others. Pluralism should remain an important part of our country's agenda. When chaplains are commissioned, they accept religious pluralism. They support the free exercise of religion for others and commit to work in an environment of religious toleration and accommodation. "Military chaplains are not required to believe that all competing truth claims are equally valid, but they must respect the right of others to hold and practice their point of view even if diametrically opposed to their own."⁵⁴ The fact that chaplains retain the right to abstain from performing any ordinance, rite, or sacrament contrary to their faith tradition or conscience is supported by regulation and policies.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there can be

⁵² Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 70-72.

. "What Is Pluralism?" The Pluralism Project. <http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/>. 7 Nov 2018.

⁵³ "Principled Pluralism: Report of the Inclusive American Project," (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute & Justice Society, 2013), 7-8.

⁵⁴ Kenneth W. Bush, "White Paper: Free Exercise of Religions & Civil Discourse in Post-Everything Culture," 5, accessed February 21, 2020, http://www.ncmaf.net/uploads/4/8/5/7/48573933/ncmaf_white_paper_2_-_free_exercise_of_religion_and_civil_discourse_final.pdf.

⁵⁵ The following regulations, policies, and instruction explain chaplain religious roles concerning conscience: (a) U.S. Department of the Army, "Army Chaplain Corps Activities," AR165-1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 3-2, b 5 states the following: Chaplains will not be required to perform a religious role (such as offering a prayer, reading, dedication, or blessing) in worship services, command ceremonies, or other events, if doing so would be in variance with the tenets or practices of their religion."; (b) US Department of the Navy, "Religious Ministry within the Department of the Navy," SEC NAV INSTRUCTION, 1730.7E, 4 a-4: "Chaplains will notify the chain of command, a senior supervisory chaplain, and endorsing agent if, for any reason, they are not free to perform prescribed duties and ministerial functions, in good conscience." (c) US Department of the Air Force, "Chaplain Planning and Organizing," AFI 52-101, (Washington, DC: US Department of the Air Force: July 2019), 2.1. Chaplains will not perform duties incompatible with their endorsing organizations or professional role and will remain in a noncombatant status.

principled differences, if chaplains from different faith-based traditions have issues of conscience or feel tension concerning interfaith harmony.

Case Studies

The following case studies describe how the concept of principled differences can affect interfaith harmony. Despite belief in pluralism, there are times when tension can occur between beliefs and practices. Here are three examples. (Identifying information has been changed.)

Case Study #1

Two chaplains are using a religious building on a large military installation for religious services. Both chaplains come from conservative religious backgrounds. Chaplain Allen is from an evangelical faith tradition. Chaplain Dave is a Rabbi from an Orthodox perspective. One afternoon, they both approach the supervisory chaplain who oversees the religious facility. They are angry. The issue is about placement of Christian religious art and photographs of prominent Jewish religious leaders displayed on the walls in the hallways of the facility. Both congregations have complained that the pictures are insensitive to their manner of worship from a Christian and Jewish viewpoint. Chaplain Allen is outraged because the Rabbi removed the Christian religious art from the walls. The Rabbi is incensed that Chaplain Allen is not more respectful to members of his worship group. The supervisory chaplain tries to lessen the tensions between both chaplains. She reminds them that this worship facility is for service members to exercise their right of worship. She encourages them to find a way to resolve this conflict. However, both are adamant that they have the right to have the items that represents their faith group. Finally, the supervisory chaplain gives them an ultimatum that if the two of them cannot figure out a way to solve this issue that she will neutralize the religious facility of any pictures or items of religious significance. They have until 1400 the next day to resolve the issue. This concerns not only interfaith harmony, but also with unity. Both chaplains feel that they have a right to display the items. What should the supervisor do? Both chaplains feel strongly about this issue as it supports their religious program. The chaplains return at 1400 the next day with their solution. They have talked together about how to solve this impasse. They do not want the religious facility to be neutralized. They agree that certain areas of the building will be designated for them to display their items. They even go so far as to distinguish what doors congregants can enter, at certain times, so as to not offend one another. Though, mutually both feel strongly about the issue, they have compromised together to develop a solution that is acceptable.

Case Study #2

At a small military installation, a conservative brigade chaplain, who represents a minority Christian denomination is advised by his brigade commander that he is going to negatively influence the evaluation reports of three of the five chaplains the brigade chaplain supervises. The brigade chaplain is confused. He has an excellent relationship with the brigade commander and is well-liked by the staff and soldiers. He believed he was also well-liked by the chaplains he supervised.

After the chaplain's inquiry, the commander explained to the brigade chaplain that prior to your arrival, several of the junior chaplains submitted a petition against you because of your religious beliefs. The brigade commander admitted he was concerned, but he decided to accept you because of excellent recommendations he had received from his higher commands. The commander went on to explain that you had exceeded expectations and are a valuable member of my staff. The brigade commander explained he does not want chaplains who are divisive.

The brigade chaplain asks the commander to give him some time to see if he can come up with another solution. What should the brigade chaplain do? He realizes his subordinates are young chaplains, and it is his responsibility to mentor them. He also understands their principled differences concerning his faith tradition.

Gathering the three young chaplains together, the brigade chaplain explains the situation regarding their evaluation reports. He explains that they are good chaplains and that their battalion commanders hold them in high esteem. He asks them what they think he should do? They explain how they came from conservative religious backgrounds and were not used to working in a pluralistic religious environment. The brigade chaplain opens a dialogue with his chaplains. He asks them to explain their principled differences. They communicate with one another, and there begins to be an appreciation for each other's perspectives. The brigade chaplain visits with his chaplains in their homes. He invites them to share dinner with his family and develops professional and fellowship conversations. He instructs them about unity and harmony within the chaplain corps. He encourages them to be strong in their religious beliefs, but to honor and respect the beliefs and traditions of others.

The brigade commander decides not to negatively influence the junior chaplains officer evaluation reports. Later in their careers, the young chaplains were able to reach levels of importance within the chaplaincy. But first they needed to learn how to practice and champion interfaith harmony.

In case study #2, one can see that there is fertile ground for disharmony when working closely with individuals from different faith traditions. However, with patience and looking for solutions that are centered on interfaith harmony, difficulties can be solved.

Case Study #3

This last case study is about military chaplains on a small installation overseas. In this situation, there is unity in chaplain doctrine, policies and practices concerning religious support. However, there is tension among the chaplains about principled differences concerning how to provide religious support. The senior chaplain wants the junior chaplains who are assigned to different units to be more involved in providing religious support to the installation. The chaplains are conflicted because their primary duty is to support the commander and the units where they are assigned to serve service and family members. On one hand, the senior chaplain believes that his junior chaplains are not supporting the religious programs of the base. On the other hand, the junior chaplains are involved significantly with their commands. They believe in providing religious support to the community but find it difficult to meet the demands of their senior chaplain. Their commander's primary direction to their chaplains is to take care of the

servicemembers and families in their units. The tension between the senior chaplain and the junior chaplains could cause a division in the team and disharmony amongst colleagues. The senior chaplain decides to hold weekly meetings with his junior chaplains to work through these differences, and to let all express concerns. Concerns are validated but not necessarily given dogmatic answers. The chaplains work through their disharmony.

This situation could be compared to the analogy of a grenade and a medicine ball.⁵⁶ The grenade when thrown towards a target scatters its harmful effects upon detonation. It damages without boundaries or perspective. It is launched and whatever the outcome, harm is accessed as to collateral damage. However, with a medicine ball, there is give and take. The ball is thrown back and forth, the purpose of the medicine ball is to motivate individuals in their physical fitness. It is used to strengthen and to build up muscles and to improve balance and coordination. Though there is tension with the medicine ball, with the back and forth use, there is also growth. The senior chaplain was able to see that the demands to increase participation with religious support for the community was causing tension with the team. Unity does not always mean that there will be harmony, though it implies cooperation.

There will always be a certain amount of tension when working with others whether from different faith traditions or not. However, this can be a healthy tension where chaplains learn from one another. They can appreciate each other's differences and similarities. They can acknowledge holy envy, and they can learn how to cooperate without compromise. Healthy cooperation expressed through trust, and dialogue among colleagues, can nurture and foster interfaith harmony.

Conclusion

Military Chaplains in the armed forces are unique. They provide or perform religious support, conduct religious services, advise commanders, as well as counseling service members and their families on a wide variety of topics. They work in a religiously pluralistic environment where they interact daily with religious diversity. There will always be a certain amount of tension between differing faith traditions, but tension can be healthy in a religious environment where chaplains provide ministry.

The armed force chaplaincy will continue to evolve as our country's landscape changes according to religious, cultural, political, and social change. The chaplaincy is an excellent forum for interfaith harmony. It provides a setting where interfaith harmony can grow and flourish. Perhaps, that is the goal, challenge, and beauty of the armed forces chaplaincy. It provides a unique place and an environment where colleagues can cooperate without compromise, can be nurtured in an environment of trust, and can feel safe, experience holy envy, be authentic and serve all no matter race, creed, or gender.

⁵⁶ The analogy of the grenade and the medicine ball was developed by Dr. Daniel K Judd Dean of Religious Education in a faculty meeting at Brigham Young University, February 2020.