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Reflections on the Military Chaplaincy

While reflecting upon what I have learned about the ministry of a military chaplain thus far, I must say this field is highly untapped in the C&MA and Christianity as a whole. Before February 2023, when I thought of a chaplain, it would be an obscure figure placed in the military to blend religions and iron out the creases of interfaith relations. Additionally, I knew even less about chaplains outside of the military. Little did I know what indeed lay beyond my uninformed imagination. During this paper, I will seek to incorporate various aspects of my "Introduction to Chaplaincy" course at Alliance University by sharing reflections on my course lectures, spearheaded by Chaplain Bolus, in partnership with Chaplain Pies and various guests. I will also refer to discussions that I had with my peers during our time together. Also, I will incorporate an exquisite interview that I was able to have with Chaplain Robert Wido. As this paper unfolds, I will be combining the above references, which will allow me to address a few questions on which I recently gained valuable insight. All this is in preparation for my possible entrance into the vocation of a chaplain. Questions will include, What unique opportunities does the chaplaincy provide for ministry? What challenges do I perceive? How do my experiences, calling, and ministry gifts fit with the remarkable ministry of the chaplain? I will also address developments I may need to in order to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and attributes to effectively serve as a chaplain. Finally, I will list short to mid-term steps that I have identified as paramount in achieving this goal.

It is with great certainty that chaplaincy provides a plethora of ministry opportunities. Amongst many other titles, a chaplain is a "Fully-qualified clergy member, fully-recognized member of their institution, spiritual counselor, and a champion for religious freedom and care for all people groups regardless of religious affiliation" (Bolus). The advantage I found most physically intriguing was losing the element of artificiality. "Chaplains habitually see their parishioners at their least presentable times. They live with their people, not only on Sunday but also on every other day" (28, Baker). This aspect of ministry will serve a pluralistic community well, by removing the idea that Christians have to be perfect. This constant interaction will allow others to see how normal and human Christians really are. It reminds me of a line I once heard, "They Smell Like Sheep" (Not sure where I heard it). Living daily with your flock allows a chaplain to not only know the sheep better, but also enables the sheep to know the chaplain better. I remember Chaplain Bolus stating, "In the military, everyone knows how much each other makes, depending on one's rank. As a result, this removes money from the minds of the people you minister to, which may be an obstacle for some with prosperity-gospel issues." Without petitioning for funds, this will be a removed burden, allowing me to concentrate on more important aspects of ministry, such as forming genuine relationships and cultivating souls for the kingdom. In terms of marketplace chaplaincy, "Since Chaplains are usually employed by total institutions, identifying the characteristics of such institutions will orient prospective chaplains to the advantages and challenges of institutional ministry" (25, Baker).

"While benefits outweigh challenges, it is helpful to know what confronts chaplains" (27, Baker). In terms of challenges, the vocation of a chaplain is short of none. Challenges range from intrinsic to extrinsic and are further complicated by various mandatory restrictions which already exist in the government. To be clear, "The duality of being in two institutions simultaneously is one of the

most unique and challenging aspects of chaplaincy" (22, Baker). Although Baker outlines a few challenges from being a "turnstile ministry" to being a ministry "without a church office" (31-32), I honestly do not perceive those as a challenge. From my current perspective, my challenge would most likely fall under the restrictions of "proselytizing." I just love introducing people to Jesus. I'm wrestling with not being able to tell people they need Jesus, ending a prayer in Jesus' name, or being able to invite others into my faith group (155-158, Baker). Furthermore, just from being alive, I am unable to be commissioned the the military by the cutoff age. I double-checked with the space force, who referred me to the air force, who then confirmed. Although military chaplaincy is currently off the table, I may be able to assist in what Robert Wido refers to as "Marketplace Ministry."

"Caring for everyone within the institution, no matter their position of authority or contribution to the organizational mission remains the preeminent capability of Chaplins" (47, Baker). With the previous quote in mind, my experiences, calling, and ministry gifts fit well within the unique ministry of the chaplain. In terms of experience, I have done jobs from the bottom of the food chain, as an illegal immigrant, to the top of the line, as a college graduate. I am currently a director of technology for a network of charter-schools. This role assists with a horizontal understanding of the nuances within the c-suite level of organizational leadership. Although God looks at our hearts, men often prefer to look at titles. Once the title of Director is added to the front of your last name, others tend to pay more attention to what comes out of your mouth, even if it is specifically about Jesus. Even as one relates to the c-suite, it is important to keep in mind, "The CFO may just see you as an expense. They are always thinking of the bottomline. So, be sure to show them your value. Even if its just explaining how having a chaplain to speak to helps with employee retention and that saves time and money in training new hires" (Wido)

Additionally, my experience as an international DJ often gives me a point of entry into conversations.

As stated by Baker, "Frequently, conversations start with a relational or vocational problem and suddenly go to a deeper place where spiritual and soul-descriptive words are used" (116). With this in mind, I have been to over 50 countries thus far, and people love to speak about their place of origin, and I'm all ears for it - I'm a huge fan of culture and anthropology. As far as calling, I was called to "make music" by Jesus himself. Likewise, this has been my greatest gift in ministry. One story that I found encouraging from Dr. Bowlus, was the account of him playing his guitar while the soldiers seemed not to be sincerely engaged. However, the day he appeared without his guitar, he realized how important music was to the service members. Likewise, I would love to incorporate my calling and music ministry into my role as a chaplain (if the Lord sees it fit for me to be one). Additionally, integrating my life experience and seminary experience will allow for a more effortless transition into the Five Foundational Competencies of "chaplains as a minister, pastor, intercessor, healer, and teacher" (33-43, Baker). Thus, the previously mentioned competencies perfectly position me to exercise the four chaplain functional capabilities to provide for, facilitate, care for, and advise those entrusted to my care (43-47, Baker).

"The confidence that you are called into ministry starts with a foundation of faithfulness" (109, Baker). Although I am confident in my experiences, calling, and ministry gifts, I sincerely believe in the pursuit of life-long learning. With that in mind, I perceive various developments needed to possess the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary to serve as a worthy chaplain in an adequate capacity. A wise chaplain once said, "Know your limits and refer people to others when you reach the end of those limits." (Bolus). Especially through the lens of helping others through difficult times or delivering less than favorable news, I believe it will be extremely beneficial for me to develop more skills and experience in the realm of pastoral counseling. As stated by Dr. Bolus, "The spiritual care of chaplaincy is meeting and being with people in crisis and connecting with them where they are

emotionally and spiritually." Although developing skills as a counselor is extremely beneficial in the role of a chaplain, one should always keep in mind, "People come to you because you are the chaplain, and most of the time, they have little expectation for therapy or long-term counseling" (109, Baker). As a result, it is a good idea to develop your network with professional counselors and other chaplains. By doing so, one will be prepared with colleagues who hold a bit more experience than you do. In the realm of counseling, I learned that chaplains are not mandated reporters and "The privilege for religious communications covers both formal confessions and confidential communications made to chaplains in their professional role as spiritual advisors, caregivers, and counselors" (Bowlus). Additionally, Military Rule of Evidence 503 prohibits a chaplain or chaplain assistant from divulging a privileged communication without the consent of the military member" (Bowlus).

In addition to training as a counselor, I have identified short to mid-term steps that are paramount in achieving the goal of becoming a chaplain: CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). "CPE offers prospective chaplains a unique experience of theological and professional education for ministry." It provides the professional training needed for a career in chaplaincy" (135, Baker). According to Baker, "students are usually trained in a clinical setting such as a hospital, through intensive involvement with people in crisis, peer students, supervisors, and other professionals" (135). In addition to other requirements, one unit of this endeavor typically includes "four-hundred hours of clinical and instructional work, spread throughout twelve to thirty-six weeks" (136, Baker), which gives me the option of how long or short-term I will like to accomplish this. Also, it is important to note, "Many faith groups require at least two complete units of CPE or specialized ministry training before they will endorse their clergy as chaplains" (136, Baker). Furthermore, if one desires to enter into a full-time health care chaplaincy role, "four completed CPE units and typically board certification through the APC (Association of Professional Chaplains)" (137, Baker), which can easily add multiple

years to the duration of my commitment.

"Chaplains are uniquely qualified to bridge the growing gap in our society, which has pushed back against organized religion yet still strives to find meaning and relevancy as spiritual people" (Evans, Keith. Essential Chaplain Skill Sets. 2017). If I were to sum up, chaplaincy in one sentence, it would be this: "A chaplain's work is to be present with people" (160, Baker). Truly, taking the "Introduction to Chaplaincy" course at Alliance University has opened my eyes to a new reality. One filled with brave military and marketplace men and women who place their lives on the line daily in order to fulfill the great commission by reaching a demographic of individuals that other vocations usually can not. God's speed, chaplains.

Bibliography

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