

Reflections on the Military Chaplaincy
Introduction to Chaplaincy - ATS Spring 2023
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In military chaplaincy, as well as other types of chaplaincy (Hospice, Hospital, Police Department, etc.), there are many great opportunities and challenges. Before entering chaplaincy ministry, the wise person considers these and prayerfully discerns if this is God's will for him/her and if the person is ready for the commitment.

I will begin with the opportunities as gleaned from our Module 1 class slides and discussion. Chaplaincy is a great opportunity to pastor outside of the local church setting and be with people where they are outside of the church environment. It is truly an incarnational ministry and a ministry of presence with people. The Chaplain goes where the people are and either becomes one of them or spends time in close proximity to them and their world. Compared to the average local church pastor, the Chaplain gets more exposure to nonChristians from multiple faiths as well as those who claim no religious affiliation. Being that many local churches tend to be racially and ethnically homogenous, the Chaplain gets more exposure to a more diverse population of people than the average local church pastor.

The Chaplain has extensive opportunities for counseling many people in crisis and providing spiritual counsel and emotional support to both Christians and nonChristians alike. For nonChristians such a counseling appointment can be a powerful introduction to Christ and His love for them.

The Chaplain has the opportunity to advise secular organizations on issues of religious freedom and accommodations, morals, ethics and leadership. Because the Chaplain is viewed as a respected leader and professional, that creates the potential for very helpful advisement.

Because the Chaplain needs to be an ordained minister with the official chaplaincy endorsement of his/her faith group, with the earned Master of Divinity and oftentimes the Clinical Pastoral Education Units, the Chaplain is legitimized as official clergy, so it is evident that this is a real professional minister and not some random "Billy Bob" with good intentions but lacking the necessary qualifications.

Just as there are many opportunities in Chaplaincy, there are also many challenges which the prospective chaplain needs to be aware of before making the commitment to Chaplaincy, also gleaned from our Module 1 class slides and discussion.

A big challenge is that of the duality of the Chaplaincy - being fully in 2 very different institutions - the Church and the secular organization which employs the Chaplain. These are 2 separate entities which will not always share the same beliefs, values and convictions. This is a unique arrangement where the spiritually mature Chaplain has to learn to be “in the world but not of the world”. (John 17:16) The Chaplain really needs to stay close to the Lord and be in a spiritual community so as to avoid assimilating into worldliness.

With this duality, the Chaplain faces a balancing act - that of balancing serving God, people, their endorsing faith group and the institution that employs them. That is a lot to balance. All 4 parties will not all be in agreement with one another and the Chaplain must remember that God and His ways come first.

Related to duality is the challenge of facilitating the religious needs of those outside the Chaplain's faith group. It's related because the organization employing the Chaplain is secular and pluralistic. Thus, the Chaplain must be firmly rooted in his/her Christian faith but understand and accept the reality that they are still required to serve nonChristians. Facilitation is not the same as performing. A Christian Chaplain will PERFORM the duty of a Christian chapel service, a Bible study, Christian wedding or funeral. But they will be asked to FACILITATE the religious needs of people of other faiths - for example, a Jew who wants his son to have a Bar Mitzvah or a Muslim who wants a Koran. In those cases, the Christian Chaplain will need to refer the person to a Rabbi or Imam among the Chaplain team to serve the Jews and Muslims (and others). Facilitation done properly is to be “cooperation without compromise”. Chaplains of various faith groups cooperate with each other in respectful ways as colleagues but are not expected to compromise what they believe.

For military chaplaincy in particular, deployments and other long periods away from home can pose a significant challenge, as well as exposure to extreme grief, loss and the realities of war. These are no small things and must be seriously considered in preparation for the Chaplaincy.

One of the books I have read for this class is “A Table in the Presence”, by Lt. Carey H. Cash, a Marine Corps Chaplain and veteran of the Iraq war. His book is a personal narrative of his observations of the Iraq war - the horrors and grief of war - but also seeing the power and grace of God at work in the hearts and lives of the Marines he has served. The accounts are terrifying but spiritually inspiring at the same time. It is amazing to see how God still works through the chaos and violence to draw people unto Himself and glorify His name. The Spirit

filled Chaplain has the privilege of being an instrument of the love of God ministering to utter brokenness and pain.

Other challenges to keep in consideration would be being on call 24/7, seeing people come and go, having a chapel ministry without official members like in a local church. For those who are called to Chaplaincy, the opportunities are worth the challenges.

As far as my life experiences, calling and ministry gifts fitting with the unique ministry of the Chaplain, I believe I have potential to be a good Chaplain. I have many years of experience preaching and leading Bible studies, working with local churches and non profit organizations. I have many years of experience working with diverse cultures of people and do not enjoy being in all Caucasian homogenous settings. I also have many years of experience working in secular environments, primarily through working in public schools. This is important to note because a Chaplain is a professional minister working for a secular organization and needs to know how to function and relate to others outside of the Christian bubble.

For the last 8 years I have rekindled a friendship with a college roommate who happens to be a U.S. Army Officer. My friend has been extremely open and honest with me about severe challenges in his spiritual life, marriage and family and Army life. I have basically been encouraging and advising my Army friend on a deeper level and it has helped him to grow. He sees potential in me to be an Army Chaplain as well. So this is encouraging to have this vote of confidence from him. Through walking alongside my friend I have learned alot about the challenges soldiers face, especially when on deployments.

I have a pastoral and missional calling, so I am passionate about bringing God's Word to people and helping them understand how it applies to their daily lives. I am also passionate about crossing cultural boundaries and getting outside of the four walls of the church. Even now, I am a Caucasian who is a member of a mostly Black church and I work at a mostly Black and Hispanic K-8 school. Displacing myself culturally and being the minority has been a regular pattern in my church involvement and schools I have worked in.

The Lord has given me gifts of exhortation, teaching, shepherding, mercy and helps so I think this would work well for a Chaplaincy ministry, whether with the Army, a hospital, hospice care or some other area. I would be able to preach and teach God's Word but also teach various classes. I would also be able to provide a listening ear and counseling to those who are suffering and facing many challenges in their lives.

I think that my taking this course Introduction to Chaplaincy is helpful for discerning and preparation for some possible chaplaincy ministry within the next few years. I am very glad I can add this course to my life experiences, training and preparation.

In terms of my personal growth and development to prepare for becoming an effective Chaplain, it is multifaceted. I have been walking with the Lord for about 31 years yet I know I constantly am in need of more sanctification and godly character in everyday living. I feel that I have a strong relationship with God but in the busyness and distractions of daily living, it's not what it could be. This semester, besides taking Introduction to Chaplaincy, I am also taking Initiation in Spiritual Formation. This class is challenging me to go deeper spiritually and emotionally, through spiritual disciplines. Anyone in any ministry leadership role - local church Pastor or Chaplain alike - needs to be committed to going deeper in spiritual disciplines.

In terms of emotional wellbeing, I am currently in a good place, but I am also recovering from a series of negative experiences I have had with some people in recent years. I have been addressing this through seeing a therapist and it has worked wonders. It is important to be emotionally stable for life in general but especially in ministry and all the more so in chaplaincy because of the unique challenges in chaplaincy as described earlier in this paper.

Educationally, I already have Bible college and seminary degrees, but now I am working on the MDiv through Alliance University, as the MDiv is the required degree for all military chaplaincy and most other chaplaincies. This will take a few more years as I take 2 courses per semester.

I understand that I do need to have an ordination from a recognized denomination or other spiritual covering, which then leads to ecclesiastical endorsement. I am currently involved in both non denominational and Christian & Missionary Alliance ministries, so as the Lord leads over the next few years of seminary, I can see myself going in either direction. Or perhaps God may lead me to be ordained and endorsed by another denomination. Either way, I understand that Chaplains need the spiritual covering and accountability of their faith group in order to be permitted to serve as Chaplains.

I understand that Clinical Pastoral Education units are a necessary component for Chaplaincy. If I understand it correctly, people can become military chaplains before earning CPE units but then they do the CPE units while in the military. But for Hospital and Hospice Chaplaincy, in most cases a person cannot be hired without the organization's required amount (1-4) of CPE units.

I am very aware of the histories, similarities/differences and nuances of theology between various Protestant denominations & cults and the histories and similarities/differences between evangelicalism, mainline Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. I have visited Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches so that gives me some familiarity with these churches. But I have never done any kind of ministry collaboration with clergy from churches outside of the evangelical community. Therefore, working on a Chaplain team of

clergy from different Christian traditions would be a new experience for me. I am ecumenical to an extent - ecumenical enough to not have a fundamentalist mindset towards these groups that automatically casts them all to hell, and understand that there are true born again believers outside of evangelical churches. But being strong in evangelical convictions, I am not fully ecumenical, where I can just be in full fellowship with all of them since there are areas of very strong disagreement. However, can I be respectful and professional towards clergy from other Christian traditions with whom I share strong disagreement? Absolutely.

In terms of other religions, I am aware of the basic histories, similarities/differences and traditions among Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, etc. Through an ATS class I have even visited houses of worship for most of these religions. So, while I believe with all of my heart that Jesus Christ is "The Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6) I also believe in being humble and respectful towards members of other religions and thus the Chaplains representing these religions. Thus, while we cannot worship together and be in spiritual fellowship, we can still be professional towards one another and be friends.

If I do pursue military chaplaincy, it would be in the Army and particularly the Army Reserves, as I am too old (45) for active duty but understand that there are age waivers up to age 52 for Army Reserves Chaplains. A concern I have is being in good enough physical health and conditioning. I do have some hurdles to overcome. I am somewhat overweight (by military standards). I have elevated blood pressure but it is being treated by medication. I have always lacked good hand/eye coordination. However, I do exercise and am trying to improve myself. I take walks, use my stationary bike, elliptical machine and also do cardiovascular and strength building exercises with a personal trainer. I would hope that if I can get into a more intense workout program, lose a good amount of weight and lower my blood pressure that perhaps I will make it in, even in my late 40s, which is the time I would be ready to go to CHBOLC.

I really wish I knew more about various Chaplaincy ministry options many years ago, when I was in Bible college. At that time, I knew a little bit about military chaplaincy, but nothing at all about other chaplaincies, what Clinical Pastoral Education units are or that the MDiv is generally the required degree for Chaplaincy. In my opinion, courses like this one - Introduction to Chaplaincy - need to be offered in undergraduate Bible colleges, as well as Alliance Theological Seminary, so that younger ministers in training know more about what their options are to serve the Lord.

Chaplaincy ministry can broaden the horizons of the ministers who commit to such ministry and expand their personal influence to reach more people for Jesus Christ, who may not have otherwise been reached. Thus, more lives are able to be impacted for eternity.

