Practice of Ministry

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CD602: Introduction to Chaplaincy

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The practice of ministry in military chaplaincy is a unique and outward-focused aspect of Christian service. As we have learned in this class, this form of ministry is particularly challenging because it reaches out to individuals who may not have regular access to a church community. The military chaplain is called to be intentional about building connections and relationships that may have a lasting impact on the eternal well-being of those they serve. In this sense, the military chaplaincy embodies the Great Commission that Jesus gave to his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that he had commanded. Beyond the military, chaplaincy is a ministry that can take place in a variety of institutions, such as hospitals and organizations. The chaplain seeks to be a representative of God, collaborating with Jesus Christ to carry on the ministry of reconciliation and to cultivate the fruits that accompany such a ministry.

In this paper, I aim to reflect on the practice of military chaplaincy and chaplaincy in general. I will discuss my personal vision for my calling to this ministry, as well as some of the dynamics and challenges of this unique form of service. Topics that I will cover include ministering in a pluralistic environment, collaborating with chaplains of other faith groups, maintaining holistic fitness, and other important considerations.

Baker, in his book Foundations of Chaplaincy: A Practical Guide, talked about how in a perfect world, everyone would get to bask in the joys of embracing their vocation and flourishing in it.[1] This idea was based on the picture the story of Adam and Eve displayed before the fall into

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[1] Alan T. Baker, Foundations of Chaplaincy: A Practical Guide (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 18.

sin and death. Indeed, God did not create humans to be idle and without work; rather, God gave Adam the mandate to work the garden and enforce the dominion of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. But God knew that for humans to be able to carry out this great responsibility, they had to be made in His image and likeness. By being in union with the divine, Adam and his lineage were to be keepers of the earth, doing and enjoying the work God gave them to do.

As I reflect on my own calling to do God's work and the chaplaincy form of ministry in general, I can say that the vision is not as clear as it must have been to Adam. I have a broad vision of what my calling and ministry are, but the very details of it are still being unfolded. Perhaps this is in line with what Baker was hinting at; that the fall into sin blurred many aspects of humans discerning their vocation according to God's perfect will for their lives. No doubt, to a significant extent, the entrance of sin marred human's ability to have dominion and subdue the earth, and thus the difficulty that may be experienced in discerning one's purpose or vocation.

However, through the love of God, with the redemptive power of Jesus and the fellowship of the Spirit, I am able to discern that I am called to the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the chaplaincy is a possibility within that call, especially having completed this class. I was initially a science student who wanted to go into the field of mechanical engineering, but the Lord made it clear to me that that was not His calling for my life. The giving up of my dream career and personal ambition was no small sacrifice, yet it was a sacrifice that brought me closer to the Lord and deepened my reliance upon His Lordship. If I call Him Lord, then it should be no strange thing if He directs any aspect of my life. The Lord spoke to me and expressed His desire for me to be His voice, hands, and feet - an extension of Himself to a world in desperate need of a loving Savior. As I discerned His calling to vocational ministry, the Lord confirmed His call through prophetic words from other people and direct communication with

me. These affirmations strengthened my faith and emboldened my determination to do God's will. Additionally, I experienced many signs and supernatural manifestations, such as a surge of electrical power permeating my entire being. Although it was intense, it was not painful and was filled with love and peace.

Moreover, the Lord opened doors for ministry, and I had the privilege of pastoring teenagers and leading a campus ministry during my undergraduate studies. Through these opportunities, I witnessed many people commit their lives to Jesus Christ. Pursuing this call led me to study for my master's degree in Divinity at the Alliance Theological Seminary (ATS). ATS equipped me with the tools and experiences needed for ministry and aligned me with the Alliance denomination, which I believe is relevant in the pursuit of the ministry of a chaplain.

I began the accreditation process with CMA but could not proceed due to changes that required a certain type of documentation that I did not possess at the time. However, I am now ready to begin the process of accreditation and ordination. As we discussed in class, being part of a denomination like the Alliance provides credibility, support, and clear boundaries for the chaplain's ministry. Being part of a denomination helps protect from engaging in activities that are not condoned by the denomination

Also, it has been ingrained in me during the time of this class that the ministry of the chaplain is supported by the fact that American law allows for the free exercise of religion. Personally, I believe that this should not be a law but rather a matter of common sense for democratic nations. The free exercise of religion means that people have the right to practice their religious beliefs without being punished or persecuted for it. It also means that I do not have

the right to persecute other people for their beliefs. I hope to leverage this principle of free societies in pursuit of my mission to take the whole gospel to all the world.

In summary, I understand that I have been called to carry on the great commission that Jesus gave, and this chaplaincy course has further enlightened me about other avenues or ministry doors that the Lord may be opening for me to fulfill this great commission. One of these doors is military chaplaincy, which was a major focus of the class, although significant consideration was given to chaplaincy for other institutions. Nonetheless, military chaplaincy is unique in its own right. It provides an excellent opportunity to offer spiritual guidance, support, and leadership to military personnel and their families. Many Christians and non-Christians serve in the military, but due to the demands of their job, they may not have the chance to attend a local church regularly or receive consistent pastoral care. Therefore, I appreciate the opportunity to serve as a chaplain/pastor in their unique context. Additionally, chaplains are typically well-trained and ordained clergy members with a wealth of knowledge and experience that they often draw upon in their ministry. Their ministry may involve preaching the truths of the Bible, conducting Christian ceremonies like baptisms, weddings, funerals, and more. In my opinion, upholding fidelity to God's word is the defining feature of this form of pastoral care in this context.

In addition, I have come to understand that as a Christian, my life and the practice of my ministry must be directed and governed by the Word of God. Therefore, as I reflect on the chaplaincy form of ministry, I have needed to establish a theological framework that supports it. Baker has been a valuable resource in helping me think through this area. He noted that there is evidence of chaplaincy in the Old Testament, reflected in the theocratic nature of the Jewish government. A relevant case study can be found in Deuteronomy 20:2-4, where priests are

depicted as having gone into battle with the Jewish army. According to the text: “When you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people, and shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.’” Baker asserted that these were powerfully encouraging words proclaimed by a chaplain against the enemy.[2]

I think it was quite evident from the Deuteronomy text that the soldiers of Israel needed the encouragement of a man or woman of God. War can be a very scary thing, and having to deal with the loss of life and losing the chance to ever see one's family can be a daunting thing to wrestle with. But the love for God and country compels many to take up this calling and then to be willing to accept making the ultimate sacrifice if it be something given to them. Hence, the chaplain is there to minister courage, faith, and trust in God who is able to protect them from the dangers of war and to also give them the victory over their enemies. I also remember the ministry of the priests during the time of Joshua's campaign against the city of Jericho. The priests had to be part of the seven times march around the city, and by their presence, they symbolized the presence of God with them. By the blowing of their trumpets and the shouting of the people, the walls fell. There are many other examples in scripture that show that a priest or messenger of God in the army is a great blessing and is of great usefulness. It is therefore right to say that there is theological evidence for the place of a chaplain within an army.

The usefulness of the chaplain in the army, however, transcends providing encouragement and other forms of ministry to the soldiers and their families, but it can also be a

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[2] Alan T. Baker, Foundations of Chaplaincy: A Practical Guide (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 25-26.

great ministry to the whole course of a war and the destiny of the nation. This further amplifies the role of military chaplains. Jesus prophesied that as this age comes to an end, part of the signs preceding it would be wars and rumors of wars. History has shown that many wars are as a result of leaders and nations taking the side of injustice and oppression. The wars and rumors of war Jesus spoke of also happen because people hate peace, and it therefore behooves governments of peace to defend their land and stop the oppression of those who oppress. This might be a hard truth for Christian pacifists to swallow, but peaceful nations cannot just fold their hands and allow their freedoms to be taken away from them. Therefore, it is well within the rights of peaceful nations to defend their freedoms even if it means going to war. Consequently, chaplains on the right side of the conflict can minister encouragement and boldness to those fighting a just cause.

In light of the opportunity to serve as a military chaplain, I have assessed my strengths and weaknesses in this area. I understand the unique challenges of this form of ministry, including the risk of life and the long-term separation from family members that can result from military deployment in a foreign country. Thus, I consider my desire to be close to my family a weakness in serving in this ministry. I do not want my family members to be anxious about my well-being. Another potential weakness is my lack of experience in rigorous physical training and recruitment, which is necessary for this role.

However, I believe that my strengths outweigh my weaknesses. One of my major strengths is my deep faith and strong relationship with the Lord, which has been enriched by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, I have received training and gained experience at Alliance University, where the chaplaincy class has provided me with a unique understanding of the military chaplaincy. I also possess the ability to love and care for people of diverse cultures

and backgrounds, as well as the emotional resilience to endure the challenges and hardships of military service.

Furthermore, I have begun contemplating chaplaincy in other institutions besides the military. Chaplains have the ability to serve in hospitals, prisons, schools, universities, sports teams, police and fire departments, corporate organizations, hospice and palliative care facilities, retirement communities, and many other places of ministry. However, the area of hospital chaplaincy stands out to me the most. One reason for my inclination to this area of chaplaincy is because hospitals have traditionally understood and valued the need for chaplains, as evidenced by job postings for this area of employment. Additionally, my desire is to bring the healing ministry of Jesus to where there is brokenness. Jesus was known for going about doing good and healing those who were sick and oppressed by the devil. He even said that we would not only do the same works that He did but also do greater works than He did because He was going to be with the Father. All we need to do is believe.

Therefore, I value modeling the life of Jesus by going into areas of illness to be His healing hands. Furthermore, healing is often more than just bodily healing. It is equally important, if not more important, to have healing of the soul. I recall the story of Jesus healing the paralyzed man who was carried by four men through the roof and into the house where Jesus was ministering. Jesus did not immediately heal the man but first healed his soul by forgiving his sins, even though He knew this would enrage the religious folks in the house. It was important that the man be whole inside before he was made whole on the outside. I see hospital chaplaincy ministry as an opportunity to minister holistic wholeness to those who are sick, bereaved, or suffering in some way.

Considering all these avenues for ministry as a chaplain brings another serious consideration to light, and that is the religious diversity of their environments. Unlike the pastor in his church who is expected to shepherd other Christians in the path of righteousness and only have to give audience to leaders and folks from other faith groups, the chaplain in a secular institution experiences a different type of structure and institutional expectations. One of which is that he is expected to work side by side with chaplains who are imams, rabbis, and so forth. Not only that, he is also going to encounter soldiers, patients, etc. who might expect ministry or some type of help from him, even though they are not necessarily part of the Christian faith. How is the chaplain to conduct himself and ministry in this type of environment?

Firstly, I believe the Christian chaplain is to honor and respect the dignity of a human being regardless of their religious persuasions and to provide as much help to them as possible, even if they do not agree with his faith. God made humans in his image and likeness, and so every human to some extent is a bearer of the image of God and is deserving of the respect that comes with such a history with God. Jesus even taught his disciples to not only love each other but to also love their enemies. Jesus illustrated this point by showing how God is good to all, even to those who do not regard him. For instance, he gives breath and sunshine to all, and in him, all humanity lives, moves, and has their being. This kind of God's love thus compels the chaplain to respectfully minister to all people.

Secondly, the ministry of the chaplain is not one in which the chaplain is to violate his conscience or compromise his faith. He may work with imams and rabbis to the extent that he does not deny the fact that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one can come to the Father except through Jesus. The chaplain may not deny his Lord either by words or actions. It breaks my heart that people are exposed to other religions that deny the Lordship of Christ, for

that is of darkness and the spirit of the Antichrist. I know that I would in no way refer anyone to someone who is against the way of Christ and His kingdom. A colleague from the class confirmed this resolution when he shared about experiencing an imam trying to get a military service member to denounce Christ. I told him this was why I was passionate about this. I know that they are blinded by Satan and speak the things of their father, Satan. After all, I am to live by the "What would Jesus do" principle. There is no way my mind is able to conceive Jesus referring someone to a false religious teacher for help. Jesus rather said that all who came through the window and not the door were thieves and that their mission was to steal, kill, and destroy. He alone was the door. I hate the idea of giving any hint of support for the falsehood that "we all serve the same God."

Nonetheless, the call to being a chaplain is to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in a world that is not only religiously diverse but pluralistic in terms of ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, social class, gender identity, political affiliation, and so forth. The call of the chaplain is to bring the light of Jesus to all people and, therefore, like the Apostle Paul, be willing to be all things to all people without compromising the will of God. This calls for great discernment, compassion, and an overall spirit of love. The same principle of respecting and honoring the image of God in everyone also applies here. The message of God's redemption through Jesus Christ is for everyone, and then that message can heal their sexual brokenness and so forth.

Given the demanding nature of the military environment, it is necessary for me to have a solid plan to maintain my overall personal fitness (physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional) in the military. When it comes to spiritual fitness, I admire the work of Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. In this book, he provides a detailed

explanation of various disciplines that can aid one in their journey towards spiritual growth.[3] I strongly believe that spiritual disciplines are a necessary ingredient for maintaining spiritual health, and hence, I intend to apply them as a vital part of my plan to achieve that aim. Some of the major disciplines I intend to apply include regular private prayer times, the study of scripture, solitude, and meditation. I believe this will aid in going deeper in intimacy with God, and it is in His presence that I would find the grace to deal with the unique challenges of the military environment, should God confirm that this is an area of ministry He would have me pursue.

For emotional and mental health, I admire the work of Peter Scazzero in his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. In the book, he linked emotional maturity as a test for spiritual maturity. He challenged readers to pay attention to their emotions and ensure that they align themselves with being in a frame of mind that honors God.[4] It is my plan to continue engaging in resources like this that build mental toughness and help in dealing with the difficult emotional situations that come with military life.

Finally, it is my plan to continue eating healthy, exercising more, and avoiding situations that could compromise my physical health. I believe that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and a necessary part of my service to Him, wherever He places me. Having a healthy body is a gift I could give to the rigorous nature of military service.

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3 Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition (New York: HarperOne, 2018), 1.

4 Peter Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 1.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the military chaplaincy faces many challenges, which can simply be a matter of balancing the roles of a minister and a staff officer. This is an area where professionalism, wisdom, and dependence on the Holy Spirit are valuable. It requires the ability to effectively prioritize the needs of the staff position and the organization while providing spiritual care to those in need. Other challenges include the threat to life, long deployments, dealing with the death of service members, and so forth. However, my personal vision of ministry opportunities outweighs these challenges. In his book, *A Table in the Presence*, Lt. Carey Cash discussed the numerous conversions and baptisms he encountered during his time as a chaplain.[5] These conversions, opportunities for repentance and discipleship, honor for God and country, and more, capture my personal vision for ministry opportunities. I am confident that with God, all things are possible.

References

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[5] Lt. Carey H. Cash, A Table in His Presence: The Inspiring Account of a Battalion of Women and the Power of Their Cooking to Bless Others (Washington, D.C.: Presidio Press, 2002), 25.

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