Life of the World

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Kneeling in the Mud

Dr. Daniel Gard

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Lt Richard Malmstrom

Spiritual & Physical Wellness

Rev. Albert Wingfield

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Volume Eleven, Number Three



For the Life of the World

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by Dr. Daniel Gard

Since September 11, 2001, the lives of our citizens and especially those citizens in uniform have radically changed. Christians may differ on the political issues of the war in Iraq, but what cannot be debated is that those who serve in the armed forces are more than cogs in a military machine. They are human beings that need the great Good News of Jesus Christ. The Son of God comes into our world right in the midst of the muck and mire of our own making. Yet He comes not to condemn us, but to bring His own righteousness and peace to those who know only sin and warfare.

18 Bringing the Word to God's People by Pam Knepper

Rev. Kavouras serves as the chaplain for the Cleveland EMS, the police department, as well as the FBI helping to provide great comfort and light in the middle of so much darkness by bringing the people who work in those departments the Word of God. The sacramental understanding of the ministry became even more important on September 11, 2001.

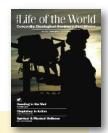
23 Chaplaincy in Action

by Lt. Richard Malmstrom

Without a doubt, military chaplaincy is incredibly physically, spiritually, and emotionally demanding. Spiritually, it is demanding to be the voice of reason and hope in the midst of chaos. At the same time, military chaplaincy affords rewards beyond measure. As God carried Lt. Malmstrom and his Marines through the worst they could imagine, he saw faith grow. Every church has its own unique challenges and opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. The military chaplaincy is indeed unique. It is like no other.

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JULY 2007

Kneeling in the Ministry of a Miss

To twas a chilly and damp Easter morning in North Carolina. The sailors of a Reserve Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (Seabees) were far from their Midwestern homes and families for combat training. Their mission was to carry out construction projects while simultaneously defending against a Marine aggressor force, but for three hours on Easter morning, the war came to a stop. As the battalion chaplain, I gathered all who would come to an Easter sunrise service where the glorious news of a risen Lord was proclaimed.

For some, it was the first time that they had heard what Christians sometimes take for granted. They heard that because Jesus

died and rose again, we are at peace with God, and forgiveness and

life are given to all the children of Adam.

After the sunrise service had concluded, the Lutherans gathered around a makeshift altar. The spring rain had flooded the dirt floor of the tent, yet one by one they came to receive the body and blood of the Lord, kneeling in the mud. One Chief Petty Officer, a veteran of combat, came to me after the Benediction and said, "Pastor, you cannot understand the Eucharist until you kneel in the mud." What a simple but powerful thought. The fact is that the Son of God comes into our world right in the midst of the muck and mire of our own making. Yet He comes not to condemn us but to bring His own righteousness and peace to those who know only sin and warfare.

Of course, that trip to the field with my Seabees was only a training exercise. Since September 11, 2001, the lives of our citizens and especially those citizens in uniform have radically changed. Training exercises continue to occur but now focus on the hard and cold fact that our armed forces are engaged in a global war on terrorism. Christians may differ on the political issues of that war. But what cannot be debated is that those who serve in the armed forces are more than cogs in a military machine. Instead, they are human beings that need the great Good News of Jesus Christ.

To answer that human need, our Synod sends pastors to serve as missionaries to the military. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has a long and honorable

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tradition of providing pastors to care for those who serve in the armed forces, a tradition that extends back to the Civil War and continues today. But what exactly is a Missouri Synod chaplain? He is first and foremost an ordained minister who has served in parish ministry and whose first identity is that of a Missouri Synod pastor. He meets and maintains all commissioning requirements just as any other military officer. Additionally, he is endorsed by the Synod's Ministry to the Armed Forces to serve as a missionary in

either the active duty or reserve components of the Navy, Army,

or Air Force.

This immediately places a unique tension upon a pastor who wears the uniform of his country. On one hand, he is completely identified with the Church as a called and ordained servant of the

Word. Thus, his life is to be one of dedicated service to the preaching of the Gospel in its purity and the administration of the Sacraments as Christ has instituted them. These things do not change whether a pastor serves in the parish or in the military.

But he is also a commissioned officer who lives and works in the environment of the military. As such, he also is identified completely with a secular institution whose purpose is to defend and protect the American people. While deterrence is always preferable to war, it is the duty

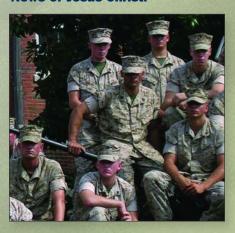
of elected civilian leaders to determine when the use of force is necessary. And it is the duty of the members of the armed forces to obey the orders of those elected by the American people.

If the ultimate purpose of the military is to wage war against the enemies of our nation, then the ultimate purpose of a chaplain is to bring the presence of God to those who serve as our nation's defenders. The chaplain is a noncombatant, and he carries no weapon, even

in a war zone. His ministry is to be a pastor to those who are warriors. He goes with his flock into every place and every circumstance, yet he carries only the spiritual weapons of the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments. He heralds the grace of God to the young men and women who put their very lives at risk to protect the freedom and lives of their fellow citizens.

As I write this and as you read it, our armed forces are engaged in combat operations. Far from our shores, our fellow Americans face an

Christians may differ on the political issues of war. But what cannot be debated is that those who serve in the armed forces are more than cogs in a military machine. Instead, they are human beings that need the great Good News of Jesus Christ.



enemy determined to destroy them. These Americans are young, gifted, and dedicated men and women who conduct themselves with honor, courage, and commitment. They come from every city, town, and countryside across America. They are fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, neighbors, classmates, and friends. They are loved, and their absence is never far from the hearts and minds of those they have left at home.

The military is indeed a huge institution, but it is an institution comprised of unique and precious human beings. It is to that institution that our Synod sends missionaries. In my own military ministry, I have seen the power of the Gospel in places that few other pastors have. Like any Navy family, my loved ones and I have faced long and lonely deployments. I was a part of the recovery and family support operations at the

Pentagon following the September 11 attacks. I have stood at the graves of sailors and Marines and held the hands of nineteen-year-old widows and eighty-year-old grandfathers. I have been privileged to bring the grace and mercy of God in the blessed Sacrament to warriors who have done their duty and now wonder how they will get beyond the things they have seen and done. This ministry is often trying and difficult, but it is one for which I am grateful to the Lord.

The need for chaplains will continue as long as our nation faces threats and young people wear the uniform of their country. Seminarians can enter a chaplain candidate program and complete much of their training while still in seminary. Pastors with ninety semester hours of graduate theological education can apply for a direct commission in the active duty Navy, Army, Air Force, or any reserve or guard component. The Board for Mission Services' Ministry to the Armed Forces (1-800-433-3954, ext. 1337) will assist the seminarian or pastor in obtaining the appropriate endorsement of the Synod and provide guidance on entering the chaplaincy.

The United States is at war, and that warfare is being fought with aircraft, rifles, and tanks. Yet the Church is also at war with a very different enemy and very different weapons. Around us are the forces of an evil far greater than terrorism. It is the old evil foe who seeks to work us woe. The spiritual battle we fight is with weapons that are not of this world but that are given into this world. It was into the midst of this fallen and war torn world that the mighty Lord of heaven entered as the gentle child of the Virgin Mary. It was in the midst of this rebellious and hate-filled humanity that the incarnate Son of God lived. It was in the place of all sinful humanity that He, the great High Priest, offered Himself as the perfect Lamb of God. And it was from the tomb, that ultimate symbol of sin and death, that He rose victorious on Easter morning.

This is the Christ who still comes to our world and seeks out all people through His blessed Gospel and His Holy Sacraments. He has given to His Church these means of grace and within that Church calls men to a lifetime of service in the pastoral vocation. Through the ministry given to redeemed sinners, the Holy Spirit calls and keeps us in the faith. He empowers us to reach out to all humanity, wherever people are found, with the Gospel that is to be preached to the very ends of the earth.

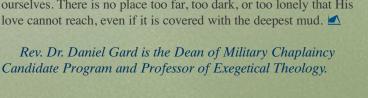
And that is where our chaplains are found. They are at the ends of the earth. In drab and dangerous compounds or city streets in Iraq or Afghanistan, there the Gospel is proclaimed by pastors in uniform. On ships at sea, there God Himself is present, and His presence is made known by pastors in uniform. In hospitals, brigs, and barracks, the eternal Gospel is brought to mortals. In the homes of the families of our fallen heroes,

pastors in uniform bring a message of hope in the darkest hour those families will experience.

That Chief Petty Officer who said, "Pastor, you cannot understand the Eucharist until you kneel in the mud" offered as profound an insight into the heart of theology as I ever have heard, even from those who bear the title theologian. Christ came into the muck and mess of a world that has chosen the way of hate and war. He brought His amazing message of peace as He knelt in the mud of our lives as our brother. And He

still comes to His redeemed creation right in the place where we find ourselves. There is no place too far, too dark, or too lonely that His

Candidate Program and Professor of Exegetical Theology.





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