

Military Chaplaincy

Chaplain (Captain) Edward Grimenstein

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."

Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes.

I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith . . . Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour (Matthew 8:5–10, 13).

The centurion who encountered Jesus was a warrior. He was a fighter. He was a commander of other soldiers. And yet this warrior also knew he desperately needed Jesus. This remains true today. Warriors in our Armed Forces still need Jesus.

As a chaplain serving in one of the branches of our Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines) you will have an opportunity to bring Christ in Word and Sacrament to modern-day warriors who desperately need to hear that liberating Word of Jesus today. Being a chaplain can be challenging—deployments can be long and frequent—but Christ's commission truly covers all people in all nations even when some are asked to invade other nations or to protect their own.

Chaplains are instrumental in bringing Word and Sacrament ministry to so many people in our Armed Forces who are called to sacrifice so much for their country.

Wives, husbands, and children often face uncertain futures when their lives are enmeshed within service to country. But a Lutheran chaplain can make all the difference! Chaplains have the chance to bring spiritual continuity and certainty as they offer distinctively Lutheran services every Sunday to families.

Chaplains, like pastors, don't just work on Sundays. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of being a chaplain occurs from Monday through Saturday. On a daily basis, chaplains are encouraged to be in the workplace, mess halls, motor pools, and offices of everyone they serve in order to provide a constant ministry of Christ's presence to people who so often long to hear a good word. Chaplains truly are with their people day in and day out. Since there is so much contact, it is not uncommon for a chaplain to meet many different religious faiths. Running across a follower of Judaism, Islam, or speaking with a Wiccan or Presbyterian not only happens often, it will sometimes happen all in the same day. As a chaplain, your primary role is to ensure the religious rights of all people—Christian and non-Christian alike. Even though chaplains are not allowed to proselytize to those who already have a religious faith, there are always opportunities to speak about Christ to all people.

Chaplains also offer important counseling and spiritual insight to those who desire it. The Armed Forces train chaplains in marriage counseling, suicide prevention, and a host of other counseling techniques to assist service members on a daily basis. But chaplains aren't just counselors—we are men of the cloth who have ample opportunities to speak God's Law and Gospel when those seasons are right. Chaplaincy is filled with mission opportunities; it is just a matter of taking the time and seizing the moment.

But sometimes mission opportunities actually seize us! Currently the Armed Forces have been involved in many struggles in this world and undoubtedly will for years to come. Chaplains can be valuable assets in distant countries. It is during a deployment that chaplains truly earn their money, so to speak. During a deployment, men and women are suddenly faced with daily life and death situations. They are often confronted with the ugliness inside the sinful hearts of all people. During these moments, Lutheran chaplains can bring a distinctive difference to the table. Lutherans have a keen understanding of the sinful flesh inherent within all people. But it is especially in these moments that Lutheran chaplains can speak about Christ—the only one who can conquer death and bring life even in the middle of war.

But deployments are not the only times chaplains will be called to face down death. One duty chaplains will perform from time to time is to care for those who have died. Not only are chaplains involved in nurturing the living, caring for the wounded, but chaplains are also involved in honoring the dead. This honoring can be shown in providing graveside ceremonies for retirees or chapel services for those who have been killed in war. Chaplains are also entrusted with the sobering and yet honorable task of notifying loved ones when a husband, wife, or child has been killed in war. These tasks are difficult and can be very trying. But there is nothing more important than bringing the presence of Christ to this dying world and being the fragrance of life in the midst of death.

The centurion said, “Lord, just say the Word and my servant will be healed.” God’s Word doesn’t just magically appear on a submarine or air base. The Word of God doesn’t just appear in the middle of an obscure town in Afghanistan. God’s Word comes through you—a military chaplain. Christ is pleased to have Himself dwell in the words of sinful preachers. In order for Him to dwell, there have to be sinful preachers available! If you are considering service in the Armed Forces as a military chaplain please contact the synod for more information—warriors still need to hear a Word from Jesus.

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