

For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

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To be a chaplain means to know the joys and sorrows, the pleasures and suffering, the courage and fears of warriors. If they are deployed to a forward position, he is deployed with them. If they face imminent attack, he faces it with them. If their lives are in danger, his life is in danger. To a chaplain who truly serves Christ, there is no being "in the rear with the gear." Where his people are, there he must be. Why? Christ must be there with them.

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Featuring the Rev. Brian Hamer, Pastor at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Riverview, Fla.

Cover Photo: Rev Pavel Zayakin (with deacon's stole) conducting the Lutheran liturgy on St. John the Baptist Day in a cemetery in the village of Verkhni Suetuk, East Siberia. Assisting is Seminarian Alexey Vinogradov (black robe) who attends Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk.

# PEACE FOR T

By the Rev. Dr. Daniel L. Gard



**To be a chaplain means to know the joys and sorrows, the pleasures and suffering, the courage and fears of warriors. If they are deployed to a forward position, he is deployed with them. If they face imminent attack, he faces it with them. If their lives are in danger, his life is in danger. To a chaplain who truly serves Christ, there is no being “in the rear with the gear”—where his people are, there he must be. Why? Christ must be there with them.**

It was March of 1862. The United States, engaged in a bitter civil war that touched every home and parish in the nation, looked for pastors to serve the young men who marched into harm's way. The Lutherans in America heard the call and responded. The nascent Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, through the office of its first president, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, endorsed the Rev. Friedrich Wilhelm Richman to serve as chaplain to the 58th Regiment of the Ohio Volunteers of the U.S. Army. From that day on, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors have heard the call, donned the uniform, and stood beside young people in war and peace.

The great paradox of military chaplaincy is that a pastor (a man who is ordained to speak for the Prince of Peace!) should live and work in an environment dedicated to warfare. To some this is a disturbing image, and rightly so. The armed forces of a nation exist to deter aggression against that nation and, should deterrence fail, to engage the enemy and win a quick and decisive victory. In more contemporary language, the mission of the military is to “kill people and break things.” No amount of politically correct double-speak can ever alleviate the apparent inconsistency of a minister of the Gospel within an institution dedicated to waging war.

In fact, the horror of war is very much in the conscience of the community of faith. The Church prays in the General Prayer that the Lord would preserve us from all evil things, with “war and bloodshed” named second only to “pernicious doctrine” (*TLH* 24). It is in the gathered worshipping community—from the veteran who now sits in a parish pew, to the mother who can still hear the sound of taps at her son's military funeral, to the young person contemplating enlistment after high school—that the reality of war is given a human face. The military may have geo-political concerns, but its members are flesh and blood human beings. They are (mostly) young and incredibly wonderful people who have hopes and dreams, families and friends, and the shared human need for a relationship with God. It is to this human face of a terrifying institution that the Church sends her pastors as missionaries.

We send as chaplains/missionaries pastors who love the sheep of Christ more than their own lives. The chaplain is an unarmed non-combatant who goes wherever his people go. To be a chaplain means to know the joys and sorrows, the pleasures and suffering, the courage and fears of warriors. If they are deployed to a forward position, he is deployed with them. If they face imminent attack, he faces it with them. If their lives are in danger, his life is in danger. To a chaplain who truly serves Christ, there is no being “in the rear with the gear”—where his people are, there he must be. Why? Christ must be there with them.

We send as chaplains/missionaries pastors those whose hearts are filled with compassion for those whom the world does not love. The military is composed of young

# THE WARRIOR

people who are searching for purpose and meaning, and more often than not, without any true knowledge of their Creator and Redeemer. They are “like sheep without a shepherd.” Few “religious people” will gain their respect and ear, since they do not share their lives. Their chaplain is different, however, because he knows them, loves them, accepts them, and is one of them. He understands what Jesus understood when He ate with publicans and sinners; that is, this is where he belongs, with fellow sinners for whom the sinless Christ died and rose.

We send pastors as missionaries/chaplains to bring life into a culture of death. If our general culture is theologically and ethically relativistic, the military is even more so. Immense pressure can be placed upon the chaplain to compromise his faith. His colleagues in the chaplain corps may view the confessional Lutheran chaplain as an oddity. To maintain his integrity and commitment to the Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the chaplain must resist the temptation to capitulate and engage in actions that would counteract his vows of ordination. He will gladly proclaim the Gospel to whoever will listen and he will call all to the water of Holy Baptism. But he will also love others enough to exercise careful pastoral discretion in his stewardship of the Blessed Sacrament that others might receive the Body and Blood of Jesus only to their benefit. The chaplain is a pastor who serves not only as an ambassador of the Church, but as an ambassador of Christ.

We send pastors as chaplains/missionaries who above all are faithful to their calling. Perhaps the American naval chaplain's uniform best symbolizes the dangers and blessings of being both a minister and a military officer. On one collar is an insignia of rank—the mark of an

officer. On the other collar is a cross—the mark of a servant of Christ. Which means more to the chaplain? If it is the military rank and all the career-building weight that it bears, he has ceased to be a pastor and has become just another officer. That loss is his own, but it is also the loss of every young warrior who needs someone to embrace him or her with the arms of a shepherd and to speak the Word of Life. But if it is the cross which defines his life, that chaplain is living what he was ordained to be—an undershepherd of the One who has called him into the Ministry of His Word and Sacrament.

Where are missionaries to be found? Wherever human beings are found and thus, wherever Christ would be present. Through His servant, Christ comes to the lonely and frightened sailor sitting in a cell in the brig. He comes to the young wife who anxiously awaits word about a husband missing in action. He comes to the teenage son who cannot understand why his soldier-father is halfway around the world in a country whose name no one seems able to pronounce. He comes to all these—those who are loved by the Savior. And in His name, the called and ordained servant speaks words of forgiveness, life, and hope. Through His servant, the Savior Himself reaches to human beings with His life-giving Sacraments. Perhaps there—in the midst of the profession of war—the message of peace becomes the clearest in the midst of a paradox: peace for the warrior.

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