

# Military Chaplains and Evangelism in the U.S. Armed Forces

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## Introduction

In the year 2019 there are close to 1.3 million service members in the United States military on active duty. In addition are 800,000 drilling reservists. That means approximately 2.1 million men and women are in the armed forces of the United States.<sup>1</sup> These volunteers are divided between the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Marines. In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard has 38,000 men and women on active duty and 8,000 reservists.<sup>2</sup> Over two million volunteers compose the United States armed forces. The purpose of this paper is to discuss Christian evangelism to these dedicated and sacrificial men and women who serve every day in order to preserve the freedoms we enjoy as Americans.<sup>3</sup>

## The Purpose of the U.S. Military

The armed forces of the United States are assigned the mission of defending the nation and its security interests. All enlistees in the military swear an oath of allegiance. The oath states,

I, [enlistee states name], do solemnly swear [or affirm] that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of

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<sup>1</sup> "United States Military Firepower," [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=united-states-of-america](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=united-states-of-america). Erin Duffin, "Armed Forces of the United States – statistics & facts," *Statista*, <http://www.statista.com/topics/2171/armed-forces-of-the-united-states>, April 29, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> The United States Coast Guard is the only branch of military service that does not fall directly under orders of the Department of Defense. Instead, it is a resource of the Department of Homeland Security. However, the President of the United States can, during times of war or other emergencies, transfer the assets of the Coast Guard to the Navy.

<sup>3</sup> The principles from this paper are directed towards the practice of Christian evangelism, but applications can be made to any religion, such as Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, or other religions that seek outreach opportunities within the U.S. military.

the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

In peacetime and war, the President acts as commander in chief of the military. Service members pledge this oath that may require them to take a life, or have their life taken.

Military operations may include the immediate defense of the homeland, the deployment of troops to secure overseas interests, the assignment of personnel in war zones, or the sending of military personnel on peacekeeping, nation building, or humanitarian crisis missions. The armed forces defend and preserve the nation and its allies from any aggressive force challenging vital security interests and the American way of life. Therefore, the purpose of the armed forces in the United States, is to protect the nation's citizens and territory from attacks. While this is usually defensive and preventive in nature, the government also employs the military in what is known as "preemptive strikes." This means attacking a nation or organization that is intending, threatening, or planning to do the U.S. or its allies harm but has not actually done it yet.<sup>4</sup>

The United States military has many missions, related to both war and peace. The primary mission is to defend the country and its interests. But the military does a lot more than simply fight and defend. Some examples of military missions include rescue operations, medical assistance in impoverished areas, food and humanitarian relief, security at embassies and other locations, policing in volatile areas, natural disaster relief, law enforcement, and piracy and drug interdiction.<sup>5</sup>

### **Characteristics of U.S. Military Personnel**

The contemporary U.S. military is an extraordinarily well-trained and mature fighting force with technology and weaponry that is the envy of the world. The military as a profession provides training throughout the ranks that has created an exceptionally well-led fighting force. The profession of arms for both officers and non-commissioned officers provides opportunities

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<sup>4</sup> "What is the importance of the military in the United States? Why do we need the military? *Enotes*, <http://www.enotes.com/homework-help/whats-importance-military-forces-u-s-like-all-286156>.

<sup>5</sup> "What Does the Military Do?" *militray.com*, <https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/military-missions-overview.html>.

for promotion in rank and responsibilities. The U.S. military is more than ready for any mission it is called upon to perform.<sup>6</sup>

In order for chaplains to know how best to evangelize military personnel and their families, we must know something about them. There are common characteristics for those who serve in the U.S. military. One distinguishing characteristic of military life is mobility.<sup>7</sup> Typically, service members are moved every two-to-three years, rotating assignments for the needs of the military and for promotion opportunities. A second characteristic of military life is separations. While many military moves can be done with whole families, many cannot, such as deployments to war zones or to dangerous areas. Then there are military maneuvers and temporary assignments for training that divide families. Separations are a part of military life that is unavoidable. Both the mobility of service members, and their frequent family separations, are challenges to Christian evangelism in the military.

Another common characteristic of service members is their allegiance to a code or set of values. This is enforced by a chain of command in which all personnel or whatever rank are held to the same standards. In the U.S. Army this is called *The Seven Army Values*, which are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. The U.S. Navy core values are Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The U.S. Air Force values, which like the values of the other services are taught and reinforced at all levels, are Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. The three values of the U.S. Marine Corps are the same as the Navy, namely Honor, Courage, and Commitment. These diverse military values create its own culture of moral behavior, obedience to orders, and “mission-mindedness.”

### **Christian Evangelism and “Mission-Mindedness”**

The meaning of “mission-mindedness” is that the life of the service member can be all-centered on military obedience, performance, and achievements. “The mission-mindedness of the military [can] easily become an all-consuming passion that squeezes out concern for issues

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<sup>6</sup> Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, et al. *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012*, (New York: The Free Press, 2012), xii-xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Donald W. Hadley and Gerald T. Richards, *Ministry with the Military: A Guide for Churches and Chaplains*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 14.

of spirituality and local church or chapel involvement.”<sup>8</sup> I remember speaking to a young, new officer in the Army. I shared with him my belief in Jesus Christ as my Lord. He replied that he already had a commander. A similar account stated, “I once asked a gung-ho GI, “Are you a Christian?” “No,” he replied, “I’m a Marine.” It had never occurred to this young man that he could be both a Marine and a Christian.”<sup>9</sup>

The military presents service members and their families with meaning, purpose, and direction in life. Military life can be all-encompassing. They typically live and work in a subculture within the gates of their base. All their needs are met by the military, such as employment, housing, recreation, food services, camaraderie, education, medical, professional development, and the prestige of increased rank and pay. “For many service members the military is more than a career; it’s their world and their life.”<sup>10</sup> And the more “mission-minded” the trooper may be, the better are his or her chances for career advancement.

The military can present itself as a way of life, as a set of beliefs and values, as a cause of hope for the future, even as a religion of obedience to orders and the profession of arms. This is a belief system based on works, human achievement, and personal effort. This is essentially a civil religion, where adoration of the nation replaces God; where salvation or deliverance is based on a successful military career; where places of veneration are national cemeteries; where federal holidays replace holy days; where fellow veterans provide fellowship and support; and where military leaders of the past are hallowed and idolized.<sup>11</sup> The reality of the civil religion of the fanatically “mission-minded” is an epidemic in the military of suicides, spouse abuse, infidelity, alcohol abuse, and rape.<sup>12</sup> A military civil religion does not change the

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<sup>8</sup> Donald W. Hadley and Gerald T. Richards, *Ministry with the Military*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. Hadley and Gerald T. Richards, *Ministry with the Military*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Donald W. Hadley and Gerald T. Richards, *Ministry with the Military*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed study see Raymond J. Haberski, Jr. *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Meredith Leyva, *Married to the Military: A Survival Guide for Military Wives, Girlfriends, and Women in Uniform*, (New York: Touchstone Books, 2009). *Update on Military Suicide Prevention Programs: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel...* U.S. Congress, March 21, 2013. Krystina Murray, “Active Duty Military Personnel and Alcoholism,” *Alcohol Rehab Guide*, <https://alcoholrehabguide.org/resources/active-duty-military-personnel-alcoholism/>, July 24, 2019.

human heart. True and lasting spiritual change must come from within. Here is an opportunity for Christian chaplains and others for evangelism in the U.S. military.

### **Evangelistic Programs in a U.S. Military Chapel**

The United States military maintains chapel buildings to support the religious life of service members, their families, retired military, and select authorized personnel. These chapel buildings are under the authority of local military commanders and are typically the places of ministry for military chaplains. All the military academies in the United States have active chapel programs. All military bases of reasonable size have a military chapel.<sup>13</sup>

Military chapel congregations function much like those in civilian communities. There are the expected religious services with prayers, hymns, a sermon, and usually a collection. Fellowship activities and meals are typically well-attended by these military families who are often far from home. During the week, people flock to chapels for religious education, choir practice, benevolent activities, Bible studies, and various singles and youth groups.<sup>14</sup>

Yet a certain military flavor prevails. After all, the chapel is on a military installation. Many chapels are often adorned with military flags that represent units stationed at the base. Virtually everyone who attends chapel is a veteran, currently in the military, or part of a military family. Many in the Sunday morning meetings could be in military uniform. In the Fort Dix Chapel, New Jersey, the stained-glass windows represent various battles fought by troops who deployed from Fort Dix over the years to combat duty.

The emphasis on evangelism in a military chapel depends on the chaplain assigned to that chapel. Chaplains rotate in and out of chapel assignments every few years. For Protestants, a military chapel could take on the culture of a formal Episcopal service or the nature of an evangelical Baptist service. Typically, all Protestants are lumped together in what is called a "General Protestant Service." Those gathered in such a service could be Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, and more, as well as the unchurched. What would an

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<sup>13</sup> "Chapels of the Military Academies," <https://thecompletepilgrim.com/chapels-military-academies/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Religious services at military academies grow in popularity," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/11/28/religious-services-at-military-chapels-grow-in-popularity/d7cbc957-ef39-40ec-9e01-43a2725745bf/>.

evangelistic program look like in a General Protestant Chapel program?

First, the personality and theology of the chaplain must be considered. If the chaplain is from a liturgical or liberal background, such as Episcopalian or United Church of Christ, the evangelistic outreach of the chapel could be hindered or non-existent.

Second, a typical military chapel is full of retirees who have been there before the chaplain arrives and will be present when the chaplain departs. The retirees are the consistent core of the chapel. If they can be enthused about evangelism, the program will have encouragement and support.

A third consideration is the evangelization of the regular attendees of the chapel. The congregation will be from diverse denominational backgrounds that fall under the general heading of "Protestant." This does not at all mean that the congregation is a regenerate group. Evangelism begins with the regular congregational attendees and then reaches out.

Another consideration is the type of evangelism done, and the techniques used to share the gospel message. Caution must be observed, as some are outspoken critics on evangelism in the military.<sup>15</sup> If coercion or proselytizing is done, military regulations will be violated. But if evangelism is a normal outreach of individuals and chapel-sponsored programs, that recognizes the right for people to believe what they want or believe nothing at all, then no violation of military regulations has occurred.

Various chapel-sponsored evangelistic or outreach programs are prayer breakfasts, vacation bible school, men's chapel meetings, ladies chapel meetings, youth and teen activities, holiday concerts, literature tables, and more. Literature produced for evangelistic purposes should not denounce other groups but instead promote a positive and welcoming gospel message for all.

All military personnel are free to express their religious beliefs, but coercion and intimidation will not be tolerated. Chapel preaching and religious education programs are designed to strengthen believers and present the gospel to unbelievers.

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<sup>15</sup> Kathryn Joyce, "The fight over evangelizing military chaplains," *Newsweek*, June 18, 2009, <https://newsweek.com/fight-over-evangelizing-military-chaplains-80527>. The most outspoken group that seeks to remove all religious expression from the U.S. military is the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, <https://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/>.

The strengths of military chapels are that they are readily available on military bases, and that chaplains understand the pressures and difficulties of military life first-hand. Other strengths are the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural composition of military chapels. For example, at Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico we sang chapel hymns and choruses in English and Spanish, as the congregation was about 75% Latino. In the U.S. Virgin Islands my family and I were the only Caucasian family in a congregation of over 300 people. In Germany, on Reformation Day, we sang the Martin Luther hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, in German and in English. At one chapel assignment at Christmas we had people from the congregation sing *Silent Night* in their native languages, which included Japanese, Korean, Filipino, German, Italian, French, Russian, and Hungarian. Truly a strength of military chapels is the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural composition of the congregations.

The weaknesses of military chapels are several. For example, the nature of military life means that people are transient, so that chapel attendees are only at the base for a few years. Some troops often are called away for assignments to dangerous places with no notice, causing disruptions in family life. Also, the chapel congregation has no say in who is assigned to be their chaplain. The chaplain of a General Protestant service could be Reformed or Arminian, evangelical or liturgical, and may practice expository preaching or be a poet or storyteller.

Chaplains are free to preach in military chapels according to their beliefs and the doctrinal statement of their endorsing agency. Chaplains can evangelize from the pulpit, but most evangelism is done one-to-one or in small groups. When troops came to me as a chaplain for counseling, evangelism was always on my mind.

Evangelical military chaplains can use chapel preaching on Sunday mornings as evangelistic platforms. For example, Army Chaplain Charles Gilbertson stated, "My most effective evangelism has been conducted from the pulpit."<sup>16</sup> Air Force Chaplain Scott Nupson wrote that throughout his long military career he has never been confronted about practicing evangelism. Nupson recalled that he "boldly preached in chapel and shared the gospel every time I preach."<sup>17</sup> Army Chaplain Stuart Kazarovich stated,

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<sup>16</sup> Correspondence from Charles Gilbertson to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Correspondence from Scott Nupson to Kenneth Lawson, September 16, 2019.

This is a real warfare. We cannot retreat. If we succumb to those who want to just keep hitting the snooze button, we will fall into a slumber, but if we continue to wake people up when they want to sleep we will be frustrated.

There is a tension that exists and must exist that I am to blow the Trumpet while people are sleeping in the dark no matter how much criticism and shoes thrown at me. If I go silent, I better leave the room and return to civilian ministry. Too many sit in silence and the chaplaincy becomes a means to a pay check, parsonage and pension. We must engage and it is not pleasant to wake up those dead in sleep.<sup>18</sup>

The military chaplain does not have a traditional, civilian-type local church ministry.<sup>19</sup> Chapel ministries on bases can be missionary stations, as transient preaching platforms for evangelism and discipleship. The military chaplain assigned to a chapel is a missionary, an evangelist, and a pastor who wears a military uniform as an officer in the armed forces.

### **Recent Controversies on Evangelism in the U.S. Military**

The current controversies related to evangelism in the military go back at least to 2006, with the inception of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF). Founded by U.S. Air Force veteran and Air Force Academy graduate Michael “Mikey” Weinstein, the MRFF claims to “have worked tirelessly to protect the rights of our clients by fostering a national discussion, influencing military policies, and pursuing legal remedies through our court system.”<sup>20</sup> Weinstein stated that as a Jewish man he was persecuted for his faith as a student at the Air Force Academy. He did nothing about this until years later when his son experienced similar discrimination and harassment at the academy. Weinstein decided to fight back and formed the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

Mr. Weinstein had legitimate issues with the U.S. Air Force Academy related to religious freedom. Accusations were made of forced proselytization, ridicule of non-Christians, pressure by faculty and staff to convert to Christ, and coaches asserting their influence to win converts.

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<sup>18</sup> Correspondence from Stuart Kazarovich to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Travis Long, “The Military Chaplain – Missionary, Evangelist, or Pastor?” *Frontline Magazine*, July 4, 2014, <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2014/07/04/the-military-chaplain-missionary-evangelist-or-pastor/>.

<sup>20</sup> “Military Religious Freedom Foundation.” <https://militaryreligiousfreedom.org/achievements/>.



The head football coach, Fisher DeBerry, placed a banner in the locker room stating, “I am a member of Team Jesus.” After objections, the banner was removed.<sup>21</sup> One chaplain at the academy resigned her commission based on the overbearing evangelical pressure on the cadets. Both the Pentagon and the U.S. Congress investigated and demanded changes. More recently, the Air Force Academy was in trouble over insisting that new recruits use the phrase “so help me God,” in their enlistment oath.<sup>22</sup>

An example of how the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) assists military members comes from a summer 2019, incident when a Christian army officer asserted his faith into a secular safety lecture at which the troops were required to attend. The safety officer delivered a Fourth of July holiday safety lecture with an admonition that “none of you should be independent from Jesus,” and that “the only real permanent safety in life is to accept Jesus as Lord and savior.” Based on fear of retribution from the Safety Officer, a soldier approached the unit’s senior NCO (non-commissioned officer) for advice. The unit’s senior NCO agreed that the Safety Officer’s religious admonitions were “total messed up trash” and provided contact information for MRFF. Mr. Weinstein immediately assisted these clients in addressing their concerns via proper military channels, namely the Equal Employment Office and the Inspector General.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Weinstein has appeared many times over the last ten or so years on all major media networks. In October 2006, St. Martin’s Press released Weinstein’s book, *With God on Our Side: One Man’s War Against an Evangelical Coup in America’s Military*. The book is an expose of what he perceives as the ongoing problem of religious intolerance throughout the United States military. In January 2012, Mikey’s latest book was released, *No Snowflake in an Avalanche: The Military Religious Freedom Foundation, its Battle to Defend the Constitution, and One Family’s Courageous War Against Religious Extremism in High Places*. It details MRFF’s prominent case

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<sup>21</sup> Bret Briggeman, “Air Force finds nothing wrong with football assistant spreading Bible verses via Twitter,” [https://gazette.com/sports/air-force-finds-nothing-wrong-with-football-assistant-spreading-bible/article\\_ae9a4884-7cdf-51c7-b837-276f978b2f13.html](https://gazette.com/sports/air-force-finds-nothing-wrong-with-football-assistant-spreading-bible/article_ae9a4884-7cdf-51c7-b837-276f978b2f13.html).

<sup>22</sup> Dave Majumdar, “U.S. Air Force – Swear to God, or Get Out,” *Daily Beast*, April 14, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/us-air-force-swaer-to-godor-get-out>.

<sup>23</sup> “MRFF Assists 13 Active Duty Soldiers in Standing Up to Religious Proselytizing by Officer Delivering 4<sup>th</sup> of July Safety Briefing,” July 2, 2019, <https://www.militaryreligiousfreedomfoundation.org/2019/07/7-2-19-mrff-assists-13-active-duty-soldiers-in-standing-up-to-religious-proselytizing-by-officer-delivering-4th-of-july-safety-briefing/>.

studies, struggles, and the sometimes violent reactions to MRFF advocacy.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Weinstein and the MRFF concentrate their efforts to silence evangelical Christianity. Many have considered him a fanatical, unbalanced antagonist against conservative Christians. For example, Weinstein believes that Liberty University, an avowed evangelical institution, is seeking “a systemic hostile takeover of the U.S. Military by lunatic, fundamentalist Christians.” Weinstein called the divinity school at Liberty a “cabal of deranged endtime warriors,” and “weaponized religious crusaders unleashed to bring about a violent apocalyptic vision.” Speaking about President Donald Trump’s support of the military, Mr. Weinstein stated, “Now that the fundamentalist Christian jihadists have no pesky barriers of constitutionality to worry about, they’ve entered safe harbor for the latest phase of their destructive orgy.”<sup>25</sup>

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a conservative Christian legal think-tank, responded to Mr. Weinstein’s comments about Liberty University. Writing for the ACLJ, Skip Ash stated that Weinstein “has moronically equated sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the military to violent Islamic jihadism.” Mr. Ash continued, “Mr. Weinstein’s rants are routinely characterized by hyperbole, diatribe, and embellishment, not reason.” While stating that Weinstein “is quite delusional,” Ash stated, “Granted, Mr. Weinstein, the MRFF, and those who agree with them have every right under our constitution to espouse the message they espouse. Most often, however, they espouse fantasy. They assert as law what they want the law to be, not what it is.”<sup>26</sup>

### **DoD statement on Proselytizing and Evangelism**

The current controversy on evangelism in the military centers around the interpretation of the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging

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<sup>24</sup> “Military Religious Freedom Foundation,” <https://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/about/michael-i-weinstein/>.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Weinstein, “Liberty University Disgrace: Mission Accomplice,” *LA Progressive*, [www.laprogressive.com/liberty-university-disgrace/](http://www.laprogressive.com/liberty-university-disgrace/), January 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Skip Ash, “Equating Christians in Uniform with Jihadists,” *American Center for Law and Justice*, <https://aclj.org/religious-liberty/mikey-weinstein-rants-again-equating-christians-in-uniform-with-jihadists>, May 29, 2018.

the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” The relevant part of this amendment to our discussion is the phrase, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” For Mr. Weinstein and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, the pertinent phrase relates to “an establishment of religion.” Simply stated, Weinstein and his group believe that evangelical Christians are favored in the military, and are unethically proselytizing among the troops. This is apparent from a 2008 interview Weinstein did with *Hustler* magazine which asserted that “the Pentagon is commandeered by the military-evangelical complex,” without defining what that is. Weinstein stated in this article that the Pentagon and the Department of Defense (DoD) have been overwhelmed by evangelicals and therefore can no longer function independently. He asserted, “There is no Department of Defense – it’s a faith-based initiative,” a “Pentecostal Pentagon.”<sup>27</sup> Mikey Weinstein believes that evangelicals are virtually unrestricted in the military and can proselytize almost at will.

The U.S. Department of Defense, General Order 1B, issued in March 2006 under President George H.W. Bush, prohibited “proselytizing of any religion, faith, or practice.” That order superseded General Order 1A, issued in December 2000, during President Bill Clinton’s presidency, which contained the exact same language. Both orders said that civilian violators may be subject to criminal prosecution or administration action and that military violators may be subject to penalties under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.<sup>28</sup> The pertinent question is, “What is the difference between proselytizing and evangelism?”

On May 2, 2013, the Office of the Secretary of Defense released its definition of proselytization. It stated,

The U.S. Department of Defense has never and will never single out a particular religious group for persecution or prosecution. The Department makes

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce David and Ed Rampell, “Mikey Weinstein: Jesus and the Generals,” *Hustler*, January 2008, <https://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/press-release/hustler.html>.

<sup>28</sup> D’Angelo Gore, “Court-Martialed for Sharing Religious Faith?” <https://www.factcheck.org/2013/05/court-martialed-for-sharing-religious-faith/>, May 2013.

reasonable accommodations for all religions and celebrates the religious diversity of our service members.

Service members can share their faith (evangelize), but must not force unwanted, intrusive attempts to convert others of any faith or no faith to one's beliefs (proselytization).

If a service member harasses another member on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, or disability, then the commander takes action based on the gravity of the occurrence. Likewise, when religious harassment complaints are reported, commanders take action based on the gravity of the occurrence on a case by case basis.

The Department of Defense places a high value on the rights of members of the Military Services to observe the tenets of their respective religions and respects (and supports by its policy) the rights of others to their own religious beliefs, including the right to hold no beliefs. The Department does not endorse any one religion or religious organization, and provides free access of religion for all members of the military services.

We work to ensure that all service members are free to exercise their Constitutional right to practice their religion -- in a manner that is respectful of other individuals' rights to follow their own belief systems; and in ways that are conducive to good order and discipline; and that do not detract from accomplishing the military mission.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the ongoing objections of Mikey Weinstein and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, evangelical Christians in the military can practice evangelism. "The Pentagon has clarified its position on religious talk among U.S. troops, saying it's OK to talk about one's beliefs, but aggressive proselytizing is not allowed."<sup>30</sup> The question is how best to follow the teachings of the Bible and do evangelism while honoring God, sharing your faith, and staying within the parameters of the military culture.

I interviewed several evangelical military chaplains to better understand the contem-

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<sup>29</sup> Press Release from the United States Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2, 2013, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/20130302PentagonEmail.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Brown, "Pentagon says military personnel can evangelize but not proselytize," *Deseret News*, May 6, 2013.

porary challenges and opportunities in Christian evangelism in the military.

## **A Personal Philosophy of Evangelism**

Before stating a personal philosophy of evangelism, the term needs to be described. Christians generally agree that evangelism means the heralding or sharing of their faith in Jesus Christ as resurrected Lord and Savior. The Anglican theologian Alister McGrath wrote a brief essay on evangelism, stating that it is “integral to the life, mission, and well-being of the churches,” and that evangelism “has no overtones of manipulation, imperialism, or authoritarianism. It speaks of the good news of what God has done,” and that “Evangelism rests on the basic human desire to want to share the good news of life. We do not evangelize to dominate people, to score points off them, or to assert our superiority to them.”<sup>31</sup>

The word “evangelism” in its noun and verb forms appear over 120 times in the New Testament. The word means “to share or announce the good news,” without any regard to methodology. It is a proclamation of a message regardless of the results.<sup>32</sup> An evangelist is one who delivers a message, who proclaims good news.<sup>33</sup> The motives for evangelism are the glory of God; obedience to Christ’s command; thankfulness for the grace of God; and a concern for the temporal and eternal state of unbelievers.<sup>34</sup>

Developing a personal philosophy of evangelism is essential to prioritizing, organizing, evaluating, and focusing. Several recent and current military chaplains have shared their philosophy of evangelism. United States Navy Chaplain Hap Struthers (retired) wrote, “My philosophy of evangelism was to remember my calling as a disciple-maker in accordance with Matthew 28:19 and my appointment to bear much fruit (John 15:16).”<sup>35</sup> Army Chaplain Richard Bach stated his philosophy of evangelism in the military simply as, “I have always tried to have a

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<sup>31</sup> Alister McGrath, “Rediscovering Evangelism,” in Michael Green and Alister McGrath, *How Shall We Reach Them*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, et. al., *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 241.

<sup>33</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1989), 384.

<sup>34</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, et. al., *New Dictionary of Theology*, 241.

<sup>35</sup> Correspondence from Hap Struthers to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

Biblical philosophy regarding evangelism, and that is to proclaim the gospel as much as possible and in a kind and respectful manner.”<sup>36</sup> In more detail, Army Chaplain Darin Mitchell wrote,

I used to think that the only way to 'spread the gospel' was the Romans Road<sup>37</sup> with an offer to pray afterwards. I now think more that evangelism is far more than that. Understanding that it is only a relationship can fully meet your need as a human, that God has the answers to all of life (not just heaven and hell), that caring for people because they are human and not only a mission project—that kind of thing is also evangelism. Don't get me wrong, salvation is a one-time event. You don't just live into salvation. I believe that the gospel is the only way. At the same time, the idea of evangelism is FAR MORE to me now than an act you do on Thursday night or a well-rehearsed speech.<sup>38</sup>

After a long and successful military career, retired Air Force Chaplain Steve Siefkes saw evangelism in the military as follows;

My philosophy has been attempting to follow the Biblical examples of personal involvement in individual's lives. Jn. 3 and 4 are great examples of the differences between witnessing to men and women and yet sharing the gospel truth. I've tried to find out where people are in their faith walk during counseling.<sup>39</sup>

Others agree with Chaplain Siefkes, that a philosophy of evangelism is effectively applied through counseling. Army Chaplain Charles Gilbertson stated, “I make an effort to present the gospel as central to problem resolution for those in need of counsel.”<sup>40</sup> Air Force Scott Nupson wrote, “I have strived to share Christ as the Lord provides opportunities. The most effective, at least in my mind, has been through counseling. I share the Gospel at every counseling session.”<sup>41</sup>

Navy Chaplain Jacob Eastman has a more pragmatic approach to evangelism. When asked if he has a personal philosophy of evangelism, Eastman stated, “No, each assignment poses unique opportunities, so I have had to adjust my creativity to evangelism by the

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<sup>36</sup> Correspondence from Richard Bach to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> The “Romans Road” is an evangelistic outline utilizing Bible verses from the Book of Romans. See <https://christianity.com/wiki/salvation/what-is-the-romans-road-to-salvation.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Correspondence from Darin Mitchell to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence from Steve Siefkes to Kenneth Lawson, September 7, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Correspondence from Charles Gilbertson to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Correspondence from Scott Nupson to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

assignment."<sup>42</sup> Army Chaplain Stuart Kazarovich places great emphasis on evangelism in his ministry, and wrote the following account of his philosophy of evangelism.

I make it a point on my very first contact when they introduce me to the unit to give my personal testimony including the main elements: God is my creator, Adam sinned and we inherited a sinful nature, penalty for sin is death, the key word "substitution" and how I learned Christ became my Savior, the day I admitted my sinful condition, the day I believed in Jesus Christ, and the day I chose to ask Jesus to be my Savior. I try to describe my past life briefly, my salvation experience and how God called me to be a Chaplain.

The first time they introduce me is the best time for me to plant the very first seed. It permits the Holy Spirit to work. Everyone is interested in who the new chaplain is. This is where they make their first judgment of me so I might as well as be straight forward. I am here to preach the gospel to every creature regardless of whether you like it or not. I am here to wake up the dead.<sup>43</sup>

### **Effective Evangelistic Techniques**

In the previously mentioned May 2, 2013, the Office of the Secretary of Defense definition of proselytization, it stated, "Service members can share their faith (evangelize), but must not force unwanted, intrusive attempts to convert others of any faith or no faith to one's beliefs (proselytization)." Therefore, what evangelistic techniques can be used by those in the military to evangelize their fellow service members? Numerous military chaplains had suggestions.

Navy Chaplain Jacob Eastman listed the following evangelistic techniques that he has used with some success;

Bible studies with a meal, the film Jesus of Nazareth and Ben Hur, handing out Christian resources, building relationships while 'breaking bread' which means investing time and elevator chats while on the deckplates. Taking a personal interest in the other person, searching for common ground and meeting the

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<sup>42</sup> Correspondence from Jacob Eastman to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Correspondence from Stuart Kazarovich to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

person where they are while remaining prayerfully sensitive to the Spirit's leading. Letting His light shine and making sure my heart is first filled with love and pity for the lost.<sup>44</sup>

Noting evangelist techniques, retired Air Force Chaplain Steve Siefkes wrote, "I have used sports, cars, and creation as conversation starters. Bible classes have also been effective. Eschatological conversations stimulate interest as well."<sup>45</sup> Air Force Chaplain Scott Nupson stated,

I always share the gospel when preaching and when counseling. In counseling, I always ask permission to share Christ, and I don't "force" anyone to repeat a "magical prayer." My goal is to plant a seed. I usually listen as folks describe their problems. I then tell them that I can't help them...but I know someone who can. Then I ask them if I can show them from God's Word how they can find help, hope, and even joy through a personal relationship with Christ, and share with them the Romans Road.<sup>46</sup>

While acknowledging that techniques in evangelism are only tools under the sovereignty of God, there are pragmatic examples and illustrations of curriculums and evangelistic procedures that have shown some success. Army Chaplain Brian Huffling wrote, "If the troop asks a question or shows interest, then I try to answer the questions or help as much as I can. When helping people think through their faith, if I use any "method" it would be Norman Geisler's Twelve Steps of Apologetics."<sup>47</sup> Army Chaplain Richard Bach stated, "I am fond of using a... Socratic method of questioning based on the foundation of the [Old Testament] law. I also use a hybrid of Evangelistic Explosion and basic friendship evangelism."<sup>48</sup> Navy Chaplain Hap Struthers wrote,

I have used both The Bridge<sup>49</sup> and The Roman Road methods and one I call the *Plugged In* method. I would point to the light fixture in the room or office

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<sup>44</sup> Correspondence from Jacob Eastman to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Correspondence from Steve Siefkes to Kenneth Lawson, September 7, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Correspondence from Scott Nupson to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Correspondence from Brian Huffling to Kenneth Lawson, September 8, 2019. See Norman Geisler, *Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True*, (Indian Trail, NC: Norm Geisler International Ministries, 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Correspondence from Richard Bach to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019. See Evangelism Explosion International, <https://evangelismexplosion.org/>.

<sup>49</sup> "The Bridge to Life," <https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-bridge-to-life/>.



where I was sharing the Gospel with someone and point out the absolute necessity of having an outside source of energy to function as designed. The light fixture was designed to give light; we were designed by God to give light, live a purposeful, fruitful life. The light fixture needs an outside source of energy; we need God/Christ in our lives if we are going to have life and function as God created us to live a purposeful, happy and fruitful life. I then would turn off the light switch in the room or a nearby lamp to illustrate this truth. Then I would ask the person, Are you plugged into go? vs Are you saved? I would use verses to illustrate the point such as 2 Cor. 5:17, etc. I remember especially sharing the Gospel with a sailor aboard my aircraft carrier, the *USS INTREPID* where I had an extremely small office with no outside light. When I turned off the light switch, we were extremely in the dark. The immediately sensed the absolute necessity of an outside source of light-giving energy.<sup>50</sup>

There is a danger that pragmatism or an “ends-justifies the means” ideology could make evangelism a matter of human persuasion or manipulative conversations to achieve a pre-desired result. Evangelism is the work of people, but conversion is the work of God. A helpful reminder of this is the book by J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, as well as chapters by Robert Lightner in *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, and by Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*.<sup>51</sup>

Army Chaplain Jose Rondon at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri appears to have well-balanced the distinction between the sovereignty of God and practical opportunities for successful evangelism. Rondon stated, “There is nothing more exhilarating in life than seeing people come to Christ.” He gave the example of his intentionality to share the gospel by stating, “To be intentional is to be faithful to Christ and obedient to His Great Commission,” and that Christians should “be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to share His message of reconciliation if, and when, the time fits.” Chaplain Rondon remarked, “God is doing great things at Fort Leonard Wood among the hundreds of soldiers who have come to know Christ personally.”<sup>52</sup>

Army Chaplain Darin Mitchell counsels hundreds of soldiers and family members every

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<sup>50</sup> Correspondence from Hap Struthers to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Books, 2012). Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 139-157. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), vol. II, 331-353.

<sup>52</sup> Josie R. Bingham, “Revival hits army base with 1459 receiving Christ,” *Baptist Press*, August 15, 2018.

month as a Family Life Chaplain at Fort Carlson, Colorado. When asked about the evangelistic techniques he uses, he responded,

As a counselor and a Family Life Chaplain now, I have had a lot of effectiveness to the question, "Who is God to you? What role does he fit?" I am in no way saying that God changes as is popular in this post-modern culture. Instead, understanding a person's view of God is enlightening. To some he is a judge that is waiting to drop the gavel. To others he is an old man. Some Christians even see him in a fatherly way, but pretty busy and without much time for them. As I figure out what a person's needs are, it is easy to steer a person into a place where they see a relationship with God is needful. He might be a judge at this point in their life, but he can also be that father they never had, or a source of variety in life, or security in these uncertain times.<sup>53</sup>

### **Confrontations over Evangelistic Practices**

In the contemporary culture of sensitivity about proselytism and evangelism in the military, it is important that those practicing evangelism are respectful, cautious, and considerate of others. The Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) is relentless in exposing alleged religious abuse in the military, and they are enthusiastic to confront those who they perceive are abusing the religious rights of others or are desirous of expanding evangelical influences in the military.

The MRFF is currently involved in a case whereby they represent several clients at a veteran's hospital. These clients were offended by a Bible (Old and New Testament) that was placed on a memorial table honoring service member missing in action. Mr. Weinstein and the MRFF want the Bible and any other religious items removed from such displays. Vice President Mike Pence stated, "The last Administration was removing Bibles and even banning Christmas carols to be politically correct, but under President Trump, VA hospitals will NOT be religion-free zones." Weinstein and the MRFF responded, "Mike Pence is one of the most repulsive and repellent fundamentalist Christian supremacists and bullies on the scene today... it is hardly surprising that he is lending his ugly bigotry and pervasive prejudice in support of keeping that

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<sup>53</sup> Correspondence from Darin Mitchell to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

Christian bible bolted down on that POW/MIA table at the Manchester, New Hampshire VA Medical Center.<sup>54</sup>

Various chaplains and military members have been confronted over their religious or evangelistic practices, and others have not. For example, Army Chaplain Darin Mitchell stated that he had not ever been confronted about his evangelistic practices, saying “I am pretty upfront about my beliefs. I am confrontational at times.”<sup>55</sup> Air National Guard Chaplain Richard Bach wrote, “I have never had service members ask me about evangelism and its appropriateness, nor have I ever had anyone complain that I was proselytizing or being rude and pushy during an evangelistic encounter.”<sup>56</sup> When asked if he ever was confronted about his evangelistic practices, retired Air Force Chaplain Steve Siefkes wrote, “Yes, one time I had a gun pointed at me and was told to get off his porch.”<sup>57</sup> Navy Chaplain Jacob Eastman stated, “I was accused of proselytizing on a number of occasions; even once by my CO [Commanding Officer].”<sup>58</sup> Army Chaplain Scott Crosley said that he had been asked about his evangelistic practices, but never confronted.<sup>59</sup>

I was stationed at Fort Hunter Liggett, California from 2010-2012. I was the senior chaplain on the base. When Jewish soldiers asked me if they could advertise for a Passover celebration using funds from my office, I approved it. These same Jewish soldiers asked me if they could hand out invitations to the Passover service at the door of the post exchange and commissary, and I said yes. Shortly thereafter, there was a large training exercise at the fort, and several hundred new troops were temporarily assigned to the base. I brought gospel tracks and chapel invitations to the post exchange and commissary, handing out the literature and inviting all to attend our chapel activities. No one objected to my outreach or evangelistic activities except the chaplains temporarily assigned to the fort, wondering why I was doing

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<sup>54</sup> “MRFF Actions Exposes Trump/Pence Clear Contempt for the U.S. Constitution in Favor of Corrupt Christian Dominionist,” Military Religious Freedom Foundation, September 3, 2019, <https://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/2019/09/8-29-mrff-actions-exposes-trump-pence-clear-contempt-for-the-u-s-constitution-in-favor-of-corrupt-christian-dominist/>.

<sup>55</sup> Correspondence from Darin Mitchell to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Correspondence from Richard Bach to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Correspondence from Steve Siefkes to Kenneth Lawson, September 7, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence from Jacob Eastman to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Correspondence from Scott Crosley to Kenneth Lawson, August 27, 2019.

outreach and stating that my evangelistic attempts were a waste of time. Army Chaplain Stuart Kazarovich stated that “only liberal chaplains” confronted him about his evangelistic activities, stating, “Milk-toast Chaplains and secularists are only interested on their success and the results that come from success, but then they de-Jesus everything.”<sup>60</sup>

A contemporary example of a confrontation over evangelistic practices in the military concerns the case of Brigadier General E. John Tiechert, commander of Edwards Air Force Base in California. General Tiechert created a personal website as a civilian, not on a military server or database. His concern is for the spiritual welfare of America. His website is a plea for prayer for the nation. He encourages people to pray during their own free time at lunchtime, wherever they work. There is nothing compulsory about his plea. No records are kept as to who participates and who does not. There is no attempt at evangelism or proselytizing on the website. Everything about this prayer project is voluntary, anonymous, and has nothing to do with the military.<sup>61</sup> Yet some complaints were made, and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation was asked to intervene. General Tiechert is accused of “violating Department of Defense policies on religious proselytizing.” A MRFF attorney accused Tiechert of “using both his military rank as well as his position and status as an Air Force officer to aggressively promote his brand of religion.”<sup>62</sup>

Clearly the contemporary atmosphere for evangelism in the military is tenuous. This delicate situation was described in a recent *Christianity Today* interview of retired four-star General Roger A. Brady. General Brady is a dedicated evangelical Christian who had a stellar career in the Air Force. Brady was assigned to oversee the 2005 investigation of alleged religious discrimination and harassment at the U.S. Air Force Academy, and has interacted often with Mr. Mikey Weinstein and the MRFF. General Brady correctly stated that “there have been instances of Christians who abused their position in promoting their faith, though I think that may be exaggerated by the attention it gets when it occurs.” Brady encouraged faith discussions with peers in the military, and stated, “We do need to be respectful of each other.

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<sup>60</sup> Correspondence from Stuart Kazarovich to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> The website is <https://prayatlunch.us>.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Parvini, “Religious website triggers complaint against Edwards Air Force Base brigadier general,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2018, [www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-in-air-force-religion-20180813-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-in-air-force-religion-20180813-story.html).

That includes being sure that people in positions of authority do not take advantage of their positions to impose their beliefs on people in a subordinate position... that is clearly inappropriate.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Examples of Successful Evangelistic Encounters**

Successful evangelism in the U.S. military can be done without violating the rights of service members. Evangelical outreaches within the military can be accomplished while honoring the beliefs of others. Without using force, manipulation, or intimidation, Christians in uniform can practice their evangelical religion by witnessing to their fellow military members. Air Force Chaplain Scott Nupson wrote,

I recently had an Air Force Captain ask me if I remembered him. I said I did not. He said he was a brand new Airman at Offutt Air Force Base in 2006 and was experiencing problems. In counseling, he said I shared the gospel with him, and while he did not accept Christ that day, he did so a short time later. He is now a solid believer, faithful to the Lord in a daily walk and leading his family. That’s pretty exciting to hear feedback like that!<sup>64</sup>

Retired Army Chaplain Ron Benzing recalled an evangelistic opportunity he experienced while assigned in Germany.

When I arrived in Hanau, GE in Summer, 1976, I was given the assignment to a large Maintenance Battalion and the preaching responsibilities for the morning service at the Main Chapel at Pioneer Kaserne. I began to consistently preach messages focusing on the Gospel and the need for repentance and faith in Christ. After several months, about 8-10 young Soldiers in my unit came to faith and the Congregation grew to over 200. We scheduled a baptism for them using a large Army blivet which was part of a field laundry unit. They were faithful witnesses to their fellow Soldiers and as a result several others came to Christ. We also had a Sunday evening service and weekly Bible study to which they attended faithfully. I am in contact with a couple of them who are still walking with the Lord.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Jim Willis, “Four-Star General: Military More Cautious About Faith,” *Christianity Today*, November 9, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october-web-only/four-star-general-military-expressing-faith-veterans=day.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Correspondence from Scott Nupson to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Correspondence from Ron Benzing to Kenneth Lawson, September 25, 2019.

Evangelistic opportunities can be planned, or can be spontaneous. Chaplain Brian Huffling wrote, “I had a cadet in our service ask to receive Christ. I have also had several people in counselling sessions ask how they can learn more about Christ and Christianity.”<sup>66</sup> Army Chaplain Darin Mitchell recalled, “When I was in Iraq I went to a tent to witness to a Soldier using a gospel tract. While I was talking another NCO [non-commissioned officer] listened. Afterwards he asked me to explain it again. He prayed with me and began attending church with me.”<sup>67</sup> Army Chaplain Scott Crosley wrote, “After spending two months with my Ranger Buddy in Ranger School... he came to faith and asked for me to baptize him on graduation day.”<sup>68</sup> Retired Air Force Chaplain Steve Siefkes recalled an unplanned evangelistic opportunity;

Years ago I was on a TDY [temporary duty], it was about 2200 hours and I was carrying my laundry to the basement in the quarters. The male desk clerk stopped me and said ‘Sir, may I ask you a question?’ I replied that would be fine but I wanted to put a load in the washer first. After I loaded the washer I came back upstairs and told him to go ahead with his question. He then asked me this ‘Sir, why do you always have a smile on your face?’ I then explained that no matter what was going on or where I was I always had my best friend with me and I shared the gospel with him. He accepted the Lord that evening and I returned back to my regular duty station the next morning.<sup>69</sup>

Often evangelistic opportunities are the natural response to genuine friendships. Air Force Chaplain Scott Nupson stated,

I like to be friendly and build relationships... On deployments, I make it a point to eat most every meal with someone new. That has opened doors in a big way as I get to build relationships with lots of folks. On one deployment, there was an Army Maj who didn’t appear to like me. He was very gruff, and cold. He yelled at me a couple times asking me why I wanted to know how he was doing. One day I saw him sitting alone in the Dining Facility....so I asked if I could sit with him. He questioned why I wanted to sit with him, then said, It’s

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<sup>66</sup> Correspondence from Brian Huffling to Kenneth Lawson, September 8, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Correspondence from Darin Mitchell to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Correspondence from Scott Crosley to Kenneth Lawson, August 27, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Correspondence from Steve Siefkes to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

a free country.” God opened his heart the longer we talked and the next time I saw him he greeted me like a long-lost friend. I shared the gospel with him freely over the remainder of the deployment, but I don’t believe he was a believer.

The AFOR Cdr [Air Force Commander] on a joint deployment and I soon became “friends.” I was a Captain and he was a Lt Colonel but we were the same age and he was not in my chain of command. I didn’t ask him to come to chapel, but one Sunday he showed up. He said he had never attended church before except for funerals or weddings. He attended faithfully, and a short-time later he accepted Christ. That was a huge blessing!<sup>70</sup>

Retired Navy Chaplain Hap Struthers recalled a memorable evangelistic incident early in his chaplain career;

A very vivid and consequential memory took place at the U.S. Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, VA in 1962 shortly after our arrival there. One evening I was visiting families in Navy housing, inviting them to attend Chapel. I knocked on the door of one unit and heard a loud, booming response from within, “Come in!” I opened the door and across the room in an easy chair was a Navy Chief with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, intoxicated. His wife, Helen, was standing in the kitchen doorway with her hand on the shoulders of her two little boys, noticeably embarrassed. I introduced myself as the Station Chaplain and noted that I just wanted to get to know them a little and to invite them out to Chapel services...

To my amazement the following Sunday as I was leading in an opening hymn, who should walk in and take a seat fairly down front but the Chief and his family. They started coming regularly and within a few weeks I had the privilege of leading him and his wife to the Lord. They started attending Sunday School regularly with the boys, other Bible Studies we had going, and I was able to spend time with him privately in Bible study... Soon after I had the privilege of baptizing both the Chief and his wife at the First Baptist church in Yorktown...

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<sup>70</sup> Correspondence from Scott Nupson to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

He later was transferred to a ship where he became the religious lay leader. Upon retiring he went to Bible School and became Director of a year-round Bible camp in Kentucky. Later he started pastoring and continued ministering in this capacity until his late eighties. When he went to be with the Lord at age 93, he was still preaching and serving the Lord. It all began with a knock on a door in Navy housing and a Mother's prayer for her wayward boy.<sup>71</sup>

Evangelism in the military can be unplanned and unpredictable. Army Chaplain Stuart Kazarovich recalled when a female senior NCO came unexpectedly into his office. She was triggered by an incident and was having trouble dealing with reality. She had been sexually abused as a child. She had lost faith in church, church leaders, and was suicidal. This Soldier came to the chaplain for counseling. She understood her need for Christ and was saved. Chaplain Kazarovich stated, "She is now being disciplined in PWOC [Protestant Women of the Chapel] and Bible study. She teaches at AWANA [a children's Bible program derived from the first letters of Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed]. She has regained her smile. She is back in church."<sup>72</sup>

Retired Navy Chaplain Steve Brown recalled how routine, everyday activities as a Navy chaplain led to a variety of unforced evangelistic opportunities to a variety of people.

My first tour of duty was from 1987 to 1989 at US Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay Cuba (GTMO), a US Naval Base surrounded by 50,000 land mines (on our side of the fence), and an unknown number on the Cuban side of the fence line. I lived with my family on the Leeward side of the Base and served as the Naval Air Station (NAS) Chaplain. NAS GITMO was a small even more isolated community of about 600 Sailors, Marines and 10 families. I was the Pastor for a Congregation that met in an old Quonset Hut Chapel. I remember praying in my Office (in the NAS Hangar) my very first day, *Lord, lead me to someone who needs you today* (my genuine desire as I began to serve as a Navy Chaplain was to lead Sailors and Marines to Christ). Later that day an Airman came to see me. She was troubled about a number of things. As I counseled her, I shared that her greatest need was the peace that only God could give when one trusts Jesus Christ. In my office on my first full day of duty she trusted Christ. She

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<sup>71</sup> Correspondence from Hap Struthers to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Correspondence from Stuart Kazarovich to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.



immediately went out and told others in the Hangar, and later that same day she brought another trouble Airman to see me. That Airman also gave her heart to Christ. Our small GTMO Quonset Hut Chapel averaged 15 per Sunday Service when I arrived, but by the time I transferred from GTMO thirty months later we averaged 90 per Sunday. My first day of duty was the beginning of a 26 year career in the Navy in which I saw the Holy Spirit bring hundreds to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The need of the heart has not changed, and neither has the need for more faithful soul-winning Chaplains.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

A long-time activist and attorney in the civil liberties field, Barry W. Lynn is also an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Mr. Lynn wrote an insightful and practical article in 2016 that has served as a guide for issues related to religion in the U.S. military. He addressed allegations of favoritism towards evangelical Christianity in the armed forces and advocates for the free expression of religion, or the expression of no religion, in the military. A major theme in this article is the complete rejection of any and all coercion related to evangelism and religious expression. Lynn wrote that those in authority are to exercise extreme caution in sharing religious beliefs with subordinates, saying “The hierarchical nature of the chain of command and the military’s need to stress discipline can make it difficult for a subordinate to feel entirely comfortable challenging a superior.” He elaborated, “In hierarchical structures, efforts to share faith are sometimes perceived as unwanted and unwelcome forms of coercion... At all times, any soldier is free to explore the faith of his or her choosing. But that act must be voluntarily initiated and free of even the hint of coercion.”<sup>74</sup> This is sound advice that should guide evangelistic efforts in a military setting.

There is no doubt that respect and caution must be practiced when it comes to evangelism in the military. Evangelicals in the military see it as a part of their faith to witness or evangelize, as a natural outflowing of an inner faith to share. It is a part of the makeup of evangelicalism to share the good news, the gospel, with others, in obedience to Christ’s

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<sup>73</sup> Correspondence from Steve Brown to Kenneth Lawson, September 25, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Barry W. Lynn, “Religion in the Military: Finding the Proper Balance,” *Air University Journal*, February 2016, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu>, 15, 18, 24.

command in Matthew 28:19-20<sup>75</sup>. The recent directive from the Office of the Secretary of State<sup>76</sup> allow for evangelism in the military, if no coercion is involved, and respect for others and military regulations are followed. This provides a delicate but workable balance for evangelical military chaplains.

The current sensitive attitudes towards evangelism in the military requires balance and sensitivity. Army Chaplain Scott Crosley remarked, “We must be bold but wise.”<sup>77</sup> Army Chaplain Darin Mitchell stated that he believed evangelism “at the battalion level, person-to-person, was wide open.”<sup>78</sup> Air Force Chaplain Scott Nupson expressed his personal concern that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) had over-extended itself, as they have called into question the right of evangelical chaplains to practice a part of their religion, namely evangelism. Nupson wrote of his evangelistic activities, “It is becoming harder to exercise the Constitutional right of freedom of religion. Groups like MRFF... gained traction in the past, and though they have been rightly marginalized recently, people are running scared, believing false ideas about the practice of their faith in their communities and in the military.”<sup>79</sup>

A retired Air Force attorney named David Fitzkee taught law at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He wrote a helpful article about religious speech in the U.S. armed forces, with several applications to evangelism. For example, he wrote of the dangers of military leaders asserting their religious speech while failing to allow their subordinates similar freedom. He wrote that there was no place in the military for “perceived favoritism” based on religion and that leaders “should not single out religious speech for special limitation just because it is religious.”<sup>80</sup> To avoid the appearance of establishing any religion in the military, Mr. Fitzkee recommends that military leaders practice their faith but not endorse, impose, or sponsor any religion. He recommends that military chaplains handle the religious issues for their

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<sup>75</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

<sup>76</sup> Copied in this paper on p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Correspondence from Scott Crosley to Kenneth Lawson, August 27, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Correspondence from Darin Mitchell to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Correspondence from Scott Nupson to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> David E. Fitzkee, “Religious Speech in the Military: Freedoms and Limitations,” *Parameters*, Autumn 2011, <http://www.christianfighterpilot.com/articles/files/fitzkee.pdf>, 60.

commanders and their unit.<sup>81</sup> Specifically related to evangelism and proselytizing, Mr. Fitzkee stated that “leaders (and those complaining) must recognize that the First Amendment protects proselytizing and does not require a speaker to stop speaking merely because others do not like the message.”<sup>82</sup> He continued by arguing that the military culture is different than civilian society, in that strict discipline and obedience to orders are required. In this culture, some freedom of speech, such as evangelism, might be temporarily curtailed by military requirements, and that it is never allowable for military members to misuse religious speech to intimidate, coerce, or favor one service member over another.<sup>83</sup>

Evangelism can definitely be practiced by Christian chaplains. There is no standard that determines what is evangelistic speech and what is not. The recently published note from the Office of the Secretary of Defense had this pertinent statement: “Service members can share their faith (evangelize), but must not force unwanted, intrusive attempts to convert others of any faith or no faith to one's beliefs (proselytization).”<sup>84</sup> Within this religious freedom, evangelicals in the military must remain careful to not use their rank to influence others; not to retaliate against those not interested; not to impose their beliefs on others; and not to grant favors to those who respond favorably to evangelism. Army Chaplain Charles Gilbertson wrote about his opinion of the current attitude towards evangelism in the military, stating, “The general attitude towards evangelism is more against than in support of it. Great caution and wisdom are needed when providing religious counsel, and much prayer.”<sup>85</sup> Navy Chaplain Jacob Eastman believes that it is still common to run into individuals who are hostile towards evangelism.”<sup>86</sup>

Retired Navy Chaplain Hap Struthers stated, “I am afraid that sharing the Gospel is not as easy as it was when I served. The liberal element is definitely against free speech only when

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<sup>81</sup> David E. Fitzkee, “Religious Speech in the Military: Freedoms and Limitations,” 59-64.

<sup>82</sup> David E. Fitzkee, “Religious Speech in the Military: Freedoms and Limitations,” 66.

<sup>83</sup> David E. Fitzkee, “Religious Speech in the Military: Freedoms and Limitations,” 67

<sup>84</sup> Press Release from the United States Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2, 2013, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/20130302PentagonEmail.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> Correspondence from Charles Gilbertson to Kenneth Lawson, September 9, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Correspondence from Jacob Eastman to Kenneth Lawson, September 10, 2019.

it agrees with their anti-biblical agenda. May God grant our chaplains and committed Christians to wisely but boldly share their faith as appropriate.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Correspondence from Hap Struthers to Kenneth Lawson, September 6, 2019.