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Supporting Those Who Serve

Ministry with Service Members,
Veterans, and Their Families

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Transforming Lives!

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Deeply, Differently, and for Life

Since 2001, nearly one million U.S. service men and women have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 300,000 of them have served multiple combat rotations lasting, on average, 12 to 15 months. Presently, some 160,000 service men and women are deployed to these war zones and nearly 30,000 are on their third or fourth tour of duty. These statistics do not include the tens of thousands of others who are deployed elsewhere throughout the world, sometimes in remote locations, facing hazardous situations.

When active-duty service men and women return home, they face the prospect of redeployment in a year. Much of the time between deployments is spent in combat drills and training. In an interview with Ann Scott Tyson (“Clinic Shootings Highlight Mental Health Challenges for Military,” *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2009), Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, vice chief of staff of the Army, said, “With only twelve months back at home, some people choose not to reconnect with their families. It’s too hard. They choose not to reintegrate.”

In this issue of *The Christian Citizen*, Chaplain David Forden suggests that, for many, returning home proves to be the hardest part of deployment. He hears many returnees—although adaptable and resilient—say, “They train you to go to the war

front, not back to the homefront.” Reintegration can be a challenge as well for veterans, who have completed their term of service, and have been impacted by what Chaplain Emilio Marrero terms “the vulgar realities of war and deployment.” Marrero says, “Long deployments in these theaters do not have to be fraught with intense combat experiences, death, or violence to be traumatic to the soul, yet these realities wound the spirit so much deeper when they are present.” Similarly, Chaplain Thomas Azar observes, “War is a physical and spiritual crisis that affects people deeply, differently, and for life.”

Similar concerns for active-duty and veteran service men and women are echoed by other contributors to this issue, many of whom are American Baptist chaplains serving in various branches of the U.S. military. Their unique perspective and expertise can help those of us who are not similarly connected better understand the stresses facing active-duty and veteran service men and women and their families, and the challenges and opportunities for ministry in these areas.

The demands our civilian leadership has placed upon our all-volunteer military since 2001 are high. Given troop increases in Afghanistan, these demands are not expected to lessen in the near term. As with previous wars and conflicts, our communities and our nation will be impacted and shaped by the experiences of those now serving in the military and their families over the long term. Likewise, we can anticipate the life of the church to be similarly shaped and impacted by these experiences.

Public opinion is mixed with respect to the conflicts in which our nation is currently engaged. This diversity of opinion is reflected in the American Baptist Churches USA as a whole and is surely manifest within individual congregations as well. This lack of consensus regarding the policies of our nation should not frustrate the response of the church to the persons most directly impacted by these policies. Much can and should be done to improve our capacity to respond in practical and supportive ways to the emotional and spiritual needs of active-duty and veteran service men and



“With only twelve months back at home, some people choose not to reconnect with their families. It’s too hard. They choose not to reintegrate.”

women and their families. Our hope and expectation is that this issue of *The Christian Citizen* will prompt new ideas and energy for churches to support, care for, and share the burden of those who have given so much through their service.

While many of us will never know firsthand the vulgar realities of war and deployment, our brothers and sisters in Christ and our neighbors have known these realities. We, who are members one of another, we who are called to share the gospel with all people, cannot separate and ought not isolate ourselves from these realities, even if at first we are unsure how best to respond. If war is a physical and spiritual crisis affecting one deeply, differently, and for life, it ought not be an experience faced alone, but rather shared in communion with those who can bear witness to the compassion, grace, and mercy of Christ.

Curtis Ramsey-Lucas is managing director, Resource Development, National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In 2003, the U.S. Army began the practice of capitalizing the word "soldier" in its publications and communications, suggesting this as a way of showing greater respect for soldiers. Later the U.S. Army requested dictionaries, reference books, and media organizations to follow suit. No style guidelines, including *The Associated Press Stylebook*, which we follow, accepted this change. While it is common to capitalize titles in connection with the names of specific individuals (Judge Smith or Dr. Jones), names of professions are normally not capitalized in general use: For example, "They appeared before a judge" or "They went to see a doctor." This traditional and widely accepted practice is in no way meant to indicate a lack of respect for a given profession. For this issue, as with all other issues of *The Christian Citizen*, we have decided to keep with traditional and widely accepted practices in matters of capitalization.

Lord, Get Me Out of Here

Can't see the sun for all the sand, something's burning up ahead
Smoke on the horizon, sound of gunfire in my head
Racing down this open road when daylight turned to night
A sudden flash then darkness, now I'm struggling for my sight
The world has stopped its turning and time is standing still
In the shadows death is lurking, looking for the kill
The dust it just keeps swirling 'round and the smoke won't seem to clear
Someone's saying the words I'm praying "Lord, get me out of here."

I was sleeping late one night, as best as one can here
If only for an hour or two I put aside these fears
And drifted back to my hometown and looked into the eyes
Of the woman who's not sleeping well and the son I left behind
I dreamt the rain began to fall and woke up with a start
To sirens in the distance and worry in my heart
The dust it just keeps swirling 'round and the smoke won't seem to clear
Someone's saying the words I'm praying "Lord, get me out of here."

I walk across this broken earth beneath the morning sky
This land so unforgiving stretched out before my eyes
From city streets where danger lurks to faces fixed by pain
I just want to do my job and get back home again
I see those that I've left behind most everywhere I turn
Haunted by their memories and the fires that still burn
The dust it just keeps swirling 'round and the smoke won't seem to clear
Someone's saying the words I'm praying "Lord, get me out of here."

Words and Music by Curtis Ramsey-Lucas © 2006. Used by permission. To download this song, go to curtlucas.com.

Lessons from Iraq I

Ghosts from Iraq haunt me.
They show me their albums:
Pictures of nameless dead soldiers;
Pictures of faceless soldiers choking on their own pulp;
Pictures of the fireball that lit the night.
Ghosts from Iraq haunt me.
They play their recordings:
Helicopters bringing in more wounded;
Radios squawking, "Gas! Gas! Gas!"
A nurse, "We didn't have a chance."
Ghosts from Iraq haunt me.
They grab me and steal my air.
Struggling for breath, I remember the mask—
Stifling, hot, dry, essential.
I pray for soldiers who breathe no more.
Ghosts from Iraq seared on my soul.
Dancing in my mind, they taunt me:
"We'll never leave," they hiss,
"Don't tell anyone about us,
No one will understand."

Ghosts from Iraq teach me.
They are strict masters
Demanding my full attention day
and night.
Their classrooms are splattered
with blood
And there is no recess.
Ghosts from Iraq teach me.
They carve on my soul
Lessons in strength, tenderness,
wisdom, and gratitude
And when I am changed, they
announce,
"We're leaving," and fly away.

Chaplain (Maj.) Susan Caswell serves as a U.S. Army Chaplain Recruiter, Northeast Chaplain Recruiting Team.

The Needs of Returning Service Men and Women

This past year I helped plan and then participated in a one-day conference entitled, *Returning from War: A Spiritual Response*. The conference, which was co-sponsored by the Christian Conference of Connecticut (an ecumenical body) and the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, was designed to help clergy and lay leaders become more sensitive to the needs of service men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq and the needs of their families.

I chose to help plan this event for several reasons. My husband is a Vietnam veteran and I am familiar with some of the experiences of veterans of that era. My great nephew was wounded when the Humvee he was driving went over an improvised explosive device (IED) in Baghdad. I am concerned for the well-being of military personnel and their families and I know that churches have been and can be reaching out to help



them, regardless of individual positions on these wars or war in general.

Several important insights came out of the event that pertain to positive and meaningful ways in which churches can support service men and

women and their families. I am also indebted to the current Commissioner of Veterans Affairs for the State of Connecticut, Linda Spoonster Schwartz RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN, for spending time in conversation with me and sharing information from a not yet published article entitled “Forging a System of Support for ‘Citizen Service Men and Women’ in the 21st Century.”

■ Warfare is different in the 21st century. In earlier conflicts, the majority of our troops came out of and returned to self-contained military bases that were scattered across the country. With National Guard troops and Reserve units being called up for what is becoming multiple tours of duty for the current wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq, service men and women are coming directly out of—and returning to—their communities. Such transitions are difficult for the service men and women and for their families, who are our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and fellow church members.

■ Post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and various traumatic brain injuries (TBI) that affect quality of life and the capacity for decision-making often go undetected until a crisis occurs. A Veterans Administration chaplain spoke about four levels of healing for military personnel. The first is healing of the physical body. Then there is healing of psychological, emotional, and spiritual wounds, which is where church folks come in. Whether or not there are physical wounds, service men and women and their families need a place to talk. We need to be strong and compassionate enough to provide that place by listening—really listening—without any judgment or condemnation. Trust does not come easily after living in a war zone, so creating a safe place can take time and commitment.

■ In previous wars, the majority of the military were young, single men. Today more than 58 percent of non-career military personnel are married. Women now make up 15 percent of the military. The American Psychiatric Association recently reported that since 9/11 more than 700,000 children in this country have had one or both parents deployed—a tremendously stressful situation for children.

■ The capability of instant communication through cell phone, Skype, and e-mail is another change in the landscape of war in the 21st century. Problems on the home front can be immediately relayed to a soldier in the field who can experience the stress of the situation without being able to address it.

■ Veterans often experience difficulties during the readjustment period. After living on the edge in constant danger and vigilance with adrenaline running high, life



at home can seem boring, even mundane. Dangerous living with fast cars, alcohol and/or drugs is a common problem, which can result in veterans endangering themselves or others, and getting into legal trouble.

In order to take advantage of the church's unique role in ministry to and with military personnel and their families, it is important to be informed about their experiences. Suggestions for reaching out to deployed and returning service men and women and their loved ones include:

■ *Be a military-friendly church.* This does not mean we must support or promote war. It does mean supporting service men and women, speaking about them and their families and regularly including them in prayer lists. It means offering a ministry of presence to help military families get through the long days and weeks of separation, and sending notes, cards and care packages to those who are deployed. Support might include inviting children of service members to youth groups and children's groups, or, if the local Guard/Reserve unit has an organization to support families, providing financial support or help coordinating something through them.

■ *Learn about the special needs of returning service members and welcome them home.* Acknowledge returning veterans in bulletins and newsletters. Be alert for signs of distress such as hypervigilance, depression, withdrawal, anger, and inability to hold down a job. While some of the normal symptoms of the readjustment period may be similar to post traumatic stress or even brain injury, these symptoms do not necessarily indicate PTSD or a TBI. When symptoms are chronic, though, they may need evaluation by the Veteran's Administration (VA). Check in privately about their comfort and don't assume that if they seem fine after six weeks they will be fine after six months. Should you notice behavioral changes, encourage them to seek assistance, perhaps even offering to accompany them to the VA as the system can be difficult to maneuver, particularly for someone who is not feeling well.

■ *Be patient.* Assume that it can take months, even years, for veterans to readjust and recognize that they may be forever changed by their experiences. Help them to come to terms with—and come to love—who they have become by accepting them as they are. They may also have a changed understanding of God. Allow room for questioning and letting their experiences influence their theology.

■ *Prepare to refer.* Learn more about your state Department of Veterans Affairs and the programs they offer as well as the local VA Medical Center, community-based outpatient clinics, veterans groups, and any other services available through the Guard/Reserve unit and the VA. If you know a service man or woman or family member who has needs beyond your capabilities, contact your state Department of Veterans Affairs (Veteran's *Administration* is the federal agency). Every state has a department and they provide excellent services to military personnel and families. They are equipped to assist in ways that we cannot. They may also be able to advise churches as they seek to support members of the military and their families.

Our soldiers and their families deserve our prayers and our care.

The Rev. Judy Gronemeyer Allbee is the executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut.

Resources

- For information about your own state Department of Veterans Affairs, call (800) 827-1000 or visit va.gov on the Web.
- A facilities locator can be found at va.gov/sta/guide/home.asp.
- The Veterans Service Organization Web site is va.gov/vso.



When I left for the theater, I was a successful soldier and a loving daddy of three girls, a devoted husband, a deacon, and local coach for whatever community sport was in season. Life was good. I killed 14 people in combat. I've been gone for 16 months. I don't fit in. I don't know who I am anymore. Now what, chaplain?

I can't believe they might actually kick you out of the military and put you in jail just for missing a formation. Come on, you were only a few minutes late. You go on these missions all the time. It's not like you weren't going this time!

What do you mean your commander is coming over to the house to talk about our kid's behavior on post? That's our business. I didn't invite him. Can he do that?

Are you sure we have to have a pass? It's only a weekend trip. Can't we just go on a little vacation without having to get somebody's permission?

This is our third one-year or more separation, and I quit counting the little two- to three-month deployments we endure as a matter of routine. The kids are growing up so fast, and he is not here to see it or share it with me. I'm not getting younger, and every time he redeploys it takes another six months to return to some kind of family "normal" again. No one else seems to notice. We keep up a routine. The kids need it and so do I. But sometimes I just wish someone would really care, ya know?



Mike Hoyt

The Law of Christ

What would "really caring" look like? How does a church family be family to military members who have the same emotions and spiritual needs as anyone else, but live under a set of expectations and rules that no one else shares? Our congregations are filled with people in various states of genuine need. Military personnel are not a privileged class, or a necessarily different group of people requiring special church attention. They are, however, persons who live under a unique set of requirements. What should a church consider about ministering to its military attendees that can make it more effective? I recommend three areas of focus: motivation, cultural insights, and respect for differences.

Motivation

The motivation for ministry must be rooted in the truths of Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be based in a political persuasion, come from a news headline, or be an emotional reaction to a touching story that is translated into a church opportunity. Media, politics, and even emotions are improper substitutes for spiritual conscience or spiritual obedience. Business is also no loyal friend of an obedient heart for Christ.

Any ministry, military or otherwise, must be rooted in a willing spirit, a transformed world view, and an obedient heart that is responding to the present and living Lord of life, Jesus Christ. Military ministry can seem appealing and flashy when the country wants to act grateful. Ministry is not a patriotic act. Ministry is not flashy; it exacts a human and soul cost. Burden-bearing is expensive and enduring.

"Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ," says Galatians 6:2. This scriptural admonition comes to us as an echo of Jesus' call in John 13:34 to "love one another even as I have loved you." It is a spiritual weapon of choice for maintaining the initiatives of faithfulness in the offensive against lesser

things. Whenever we look beyond ourselves in faith, we see Christ more clearly. Galatians and Romans call this liberty, freedom in Christ, and walking in the law of the Spirit of life.

Culture

It is important to allow the military culture to inform the functions of ministry. Military people are not different as people. They are people operating under different sets of requirements. Their personalities reflect adaptation to these requirements, which are a part of military culture.

Military members relocate a lot. We've moved 36 times in 34 years of service. This type of mobility places a premium on making friends fast and getting involved quickly. This conduct can be interpreted as overbearing, pushy, "typical military-controlling." Mobility can at times create a reticence to "start all over again," which



can work itself out as reserved, unfriendly, impatient, or uncommitted behavior. Knowing something of the culture helps produce a well of grace to draw from when relating with military folks. Grace keeps us from rushing to judgment and can help us think twice before planning programs that meet our needs instead of the needs of others.

All five branches of the armed forces interpret their sense of duty to the country and its citizens as selfless. There is a built-in reluctance for service members to seek anything extra. All the services offer layers of programs to care for military members and families. For some, this produces an internal skepticism that sort of "circles the wagons" against external (civilian) overtures. Don't take it personally. Instead, enter into partnership with available military options to provide the broadest ministry possible.

Nothing binds people together like shared experiences, especially hardships, dangers, and grueling demands. The military is a shared experience on steroids. Ministry to the military is most effective when it is personal, instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. Authenticity is the key. Civilian church ministry does not need to look as "military" as possible. It is not about competing with the military to achieve some new or better experience. Effective ministry is person-centered, not program-centric, and should look as Christ-like as possible.

Differences

It is important to respect the differences between the civilian and military worlds. It does not work to try to civilianize the military or militarize the civilian. True ministry represents Christ as purely and lovingly as possible. The motivation is God's work through us. The common factor is surrendered service to God. Normal in Christ's church is accepting each other in our respective venues and walking in a manner worthy of Christ.

Military personnel will work hard at making things appear "civilian," and finding out the differences will take a determined effort in love. The true normal will be when "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) reaches through every barrier to communicate the assurance that "Yes, we really care." The Body of Christ is committed to helping everyone—no matter what his or her war has been—find him or herself again, and be reborn in Jesus Christ.

To willingly bear another's burden and labor with people in the mental sweat and emotional pressure of demanding times is a wonderful exercise in faith. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: "And if one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:26, 27).

Chaplain (Col.) Mike Hoyt, U.S. Army, currently serves in Alexandria, Va. He has served as pastor of eight military congregations over the last 30 years. Hoyt is the 2009 recipient of the Military Chaplain Merit Award, American Baptist Churches USA.

Military Family Ministry Partnerships



Balloons danced on the ends of strings. Welcome banners unfurled as happy families greeted their marines and sailors after 13 months in Iraq. There were mostly smiles and tears of joy. Within weeks, some of the returning military personnel began appearing at the lawyer's or the chaplain's office. The topic was divorce. The issues were compulsive gambling, unfaithfulness, intrusive memories, miscommunication, changed values, dashed dreams, lost trust, and brokenness. The stresses of a combat deployment were contributing factors in most cases.

Although the Navy and Marine Corps have a robust system and structure for family support, it is often underutilized. Many military families are active in churches, yet pastors and congregants are unaware of the unique needs of these families or available resources. Recently, while visiting Fort Bragg, first lady Michelle Obama encouraged everyone "to reach out on your own—through schools, PTA, Little Leagues, churches, workplaces"—to give support to military families. Chaplains would like to enter into partnership with church members who grasp the significance, catch the vision, and seize the opportunities to support military families, especially those returning from deployment and reintegrating into families and society.

"Military marriages, extended families, and even churches are caught in the crossfire of the flying shrapnel of stress caused by their loved one's wartime experiences," reports Military Ministry Press in "When War Comes Home." Combat deployments that require repeated family separation and reintegration wears on some who regularly sit in church pews. These families are looking to God, their pastoral leadership, and their brothers and sisters in Christ for hope and comfort. Congregations desiring to work with military chaplains might catch the following vision:

Compelled by the love of Christ, we are missionaries to military families preparing for deployments, during deployments, and through the reunion phase. We will learn the culture; grow to understand the tempo and

phases of deployment; empathize with the family members' experienced tension between pride and concern about the sacrifices and risks of deployment; and respond to signs of difficult readjustment and reentry after surviving the abnormal requirements of war.

Retired Navy chaplain, Capt. Lester Westling, emphasizes, "When one has returned to the safety of one's homeland and family, the compassion and understanding of others . . . heals and helps one leave the war behind." When congregations enter into partnership with chaplains, opportunities are expanded to:

- Increase awareness of resources available through chaplains, family-readiness officers, key volunteers, and counselors on the military base;
- Deepen understanding of symptoms of combat-operational stress and how it affects families;
- Establish small group studies focused on spiritual disciplines couples share during and following deployments;
- Commit to pray for military families and to send care packages to service members during deployment;
- Host the military unit's return and reunion briefing and learn strategies for readjustment as the families learn;
- Encourage participation in the Chaplain's Religious Enrichment Development Operations (CREDO) or retreat programs that assist family reintegration.

Chaplains, in partnership with churches, enhance military family ministry. Join us.

Capt. Ollis J. Mozon Jr. is an American Baptist–endorsed Navy chaplain currently assigned as the supervisory chaplain at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Sources

- "When War Comes Home: Christ Centered Healing for Wives of Combat Veterans," Chris Adsit, Rahnella Adsit and Marshele Carter Waddell (Military Ministry Press, 2008)
- "When Johnny/Joanie Comes Marching Home: Reuniting Military Families Following Deployment," Lester Leon Westling Jr. (Praxis Press, Inc.)

Supporting Military Chaplains

The Lower Providence Baptist Church Military Chaplaincy Program is 33 years old. It seems like only yesterday, when newly retired Army chaplain Col. Gordon Hutchins proposed such a program to the congregation. Hutchins knew the needs of military chaplains. He knew firsthand the fears and needs of those who serve in our nation's armed forces, having been drafted from a farm in Vermont during WWII and later serving during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. In addition to his cross, he wore a combat infantry badge.

Over the next decade, his leadership in the program molded it into a mature mission of the church. Hutchins' leadership, skill, and willingness, along with a three-decade-plus effort by a special member of the

congregation, Betty Musselman, combined to make this program a meaningful ministry to those serving in the U.S. military. The military chaplain ministry at Lower Providence Baptist Church attempts to answer the question,

"Where does the chaplain go when the chaplain needs a chaplain?" The program offers one oasis for these men and women.

The military chaplaincy program has served an average of 20-30 American Baptist military chaplains each year since its inception. The program has primarily consisted of sending birthday cards, Valentine greetings, and Christmas and Easter cards from members of the congregation and drawings from youngsters in Sunday school classes. The chaplains frequently respond, sharing how meaningful these efforts are to them, especially the cheerful hand-drawn and colored pictures from the children. Last year the church sent boxes of gifts, cookies, candy, writing supplies, and toiletry items to Iraq in response to a request from a chaplain. The appreciation of the soldiers for the packages was overwhelming.

The current pastor, Rev. Rob French, writes Easter and Christmas letters, and often adds a specific personal note to chaplains who have expressed needs, family concerns, or asked questions about the church. French has received telephone messages of thanks from chaplains, and the church has been fortunate on occasion to have a chaplain be the speaker in the morning worship service.

We are called by II Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing." We pray regularly for the safety of the chaplains and for their family needs as we learn of them. Every Sunday, the pastoral prayer includes the military chaplains. The congregation considers itself "home front prayer warriors."

Over the years, the church has taken into its membership chaplains who needed to be associated with an American Baptist church. We provide full membership for them, as we do for missionaries, while they serve away from the area. The history of our support to chaplains and their families includes occasional practical items, perhaps a psychological boost, and always spiritual encouragement along with the confidence that unceasing prayers are being made to God for their life and service to Jesus Christ.

In 2007, both Hutchins and Musselman died. These two wonderful soldiers of Christ had been the heart and soul of the ministry. During 2008, the pastor and congregation worked hard to maintain the program while looking for a new leader. In February 2009, I volunteered to assume responsibility for the ministry. As previous activities continue their effectiveness, communication has been increased and expedited through e-mail. A plan is in place for a quarterly newsletter, and the ministry has been expanded to include new chaplains who want to avail themselves of the support from the Lower Providence Baptist Church Military Chaplaincy Program.

Rev. Silas Belden is an American Baptist minister currently serving as a hospice chaplain with the hospice unit of Montgomery Hospital in Norristown, Pa.



What Can We Do FOR OUR TROOPS?

In my travels across the country as a Navy chaplain, I am frequently asked by pastors and church folks, “What can we do for our troops?” Often what they really mean is, “What can I send them in Iraq and Afghanistan so they know they’re appreciated?” While I appreciate their inquiry, I’d like to ask that we refine the question to, “What can we do for our troops in our communities?” While it may feel good to pack a few boxes of amenities and ship them around the world to our troops in a remote firebase in Afghanistan, I would contend that to do so is easy. It demands little commitment from us and can be a “fire-and-forget” approach. Besides, plenty of people are meeting that need. I’d like to see us focus instead on what we can do relationally with those who are in our midst.

I’d like to challenge our churches to consider that, since 2003, our nation has had more than 130,000 troops on average (with as many as 155,000 in 2008) in Iraq yearly. We have had an average of about 10,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan every year until 2008, when we increased the number to 32,000. These numbers do not include the tens of thousands who are deployed to the Horn of Africa, Kuwait, Bahrain, the Persian Gulf, and remote volatile areas, such as the southern islands in the Philippines. Nor do they include the hundreds of thousands of U.S. contractors, state department, or other government, and even non-governmental, agencies actively engaged in these theaters of operation. Add these numbers up, and we jump into the millions.

Why is it important to understand these figures? The vast majority of those who have served in these remote areas and arduous conditions are your neighbors, church members, and community members. I once heard Gen. James L. Jones, the 32nd commandant of the Marine Corps and our current national security advisor, explain that in any given year 60 percent of the Marines whose contracts are due to terminate leave the corps. Overwhelmingly, these young men and women do not remain in the service past their first enlistment.

For the most part, they do their duty and return home to their—and your—communities.

It is imperative that pastors, regardless of their positions on any of these wars, understand that a large population of veterans, contractors, and statesmen who have been directly impacted by the vulgar realities of war and deployment are mixed within their communities. These people hurt on many levels. One level often injured, but unseen or unaddressed, is the spiritual self. They ache deep within and long for healing, but often do not understand the reason. Long deployments in these theaters do not have to be fraught with intense combat, death, or violence to be traumatic to the soul. Simply being within such a context has its occupational hazards that wear away at the soul. Yet those experiences wound the spirit much more deeply when they are present.



The mental health community, in and out of the military, is frantically attempting to respond to unseen injuries at many levels. The most popular term used too frequently and inappropriately is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It has been reported by some newspapers that as many as 30 percent of all returning vets are suffering from PTSD. This is a misstatement that characterizes a significant number of returning veterans as broken or ill. The reality is that as many as 30 percent of our returning vets may be suffering from PTSD symptoms. However, over time, these symptoms subside, therefore lacking the chronic and persistent nature that defines PTSD as an illness. Nonetheless, the reality is that, while these may not be fully diagnosed instances of PTSD, something is leaving a persistent, unsettled feeling within our vets.

Dr. Robert Grant, author of “The Way of the Wound,” points out that trauma often shatters our concept of reality. He asserts that, through traumatic experiences, our conceptual understanding of world order, our guarantee to safety, our sense of justice, or sense of God’s pre-eminence is turned upside down. Trauma tends to shatter our neat, systematic, intellectual concepts of reality and forces us to wrestle with a world and reality different from that which we work so hard to conceive. With the parameters of our reality in shambles, we step out to reorganize our thoughts and emotions, often in a daze and alone.

Hundreds of thousands of men and women left secure and comfortable lifestyles in the United States and entered a reality in which some saw their friends

die violent deaths, some came close to death themselves, and most witnessed firsthand religious oppression they’d never seen before as well as poverty and disenfranchisement affected by tyrants and religious zealots. The cultural shock on many levels was intense. Many were forced to put their needs—whether medical, financial, educational, familial, or vocational—on hold to go live in an alternate reality under arduous and austere conditions.

These people are now home and—even if they never witnessed a shot fired at them—they witnessed the effects of war. They felt its vulgar presence. They sit in the same congregations, share the same roads, and shop in the same markets as you. They may be leading normal lives externally but internally, as described to me by a hospital corpsman master chief who saw combat in 2003, many are “trying frantically to quiet the demons deep inside” of them.

One Marine described it like this: “I feel like I shut down certain emotions while I was over there, and now I can’t turn them back on. I don’t feel anything when I look at my child.” I call you to look at these men and women through the lens of Jesus: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36 NIV).

To return to our question, “What can we do for our troops?” I believe the first challenge is to convey care. You don’t have to be a vet to understand the need and demonstrate compassion. It is important to refrain from making assumptions about PTSD, combat, or the politics of war. Instead, provide a safe place to talk. Don’t be afraid to inquire and to ask them to share, but do so on their terms. Incorporate them in your ministry to give them a reference that will help them to concretely see what it means to be part of a loving community. The experience of combat often generates a real sense of belonging and intimacy rarely felt elsewhere, but a loving church with an incarnate message of hope can fit the bill. Nurture them back to the land of the recovering, for we are all recovering in the hands of the Great Healer.

Capt. Emilio Marrero is the force chaplain, Navy Expeditionary Combat Command, and author of “A Quiet Reality,” available at aquietreality.com.

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Partners in Care

Local congregations and faith-based organizations across Maryland have found in Partners in Care an opportunity to minister to those who suffer the stresses and strains of service in the Maryland National Guard. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Maryland National Guard has been deployed and at war longer than at any time in history since the Revolutionary War. During this time of persistent conflict with no apparent end in sight, members and families of the National Guard are experiencing significant levels of stress due to the combined responsibilities of military service, family obligations, and civilian employment. Regardless of beliefs about war or political party affiliation, God calls all Christians to care for their neighbors. Participation in the Partners in Care program helps affiliates to minister to their Maryland National Guard neighbors in need with love and compassion.

The need for such a supportive program is evident given the disparity between support offered to the active-duty military and that offered to the National Guard. Active-duty military members deploy from a military base where support is located within the defined geographic area of that base. While the service member is gone, family members are able to live on the military facility surrounded by other families who share and understand the experience. Upon return from deployment, the service member and his or her family are provided on-base support for successful reintegration, offered by a full-time group of mental health, medical, and chaplain personnel.

In contrast, the National Guard units that deploy are composed of unit members gathered from communities across the state. Their families are often isolated during deployment from other families who share their experience. Returning guard members, while they may be offered the support of resources on active-duty installations, may find those installations to be too far away to be of much help. Reintegration of service members and their families is a challenge, given that most of the support personnel are traditional part-time guard

members themselves. Money is generally more available to the deployment-cycle support of active-duty military members and their families than to those who serve with the National Guard.

This disparity of support and accessibility to support led to the development of Partners in Care. The program reflects the reality that local congregations and faith-based organizations were the original social service organizations. Throughout Maryland and in communities across the United States, there have



always existed houses of worship and groups of faithful people who care about the needs of their neighbors. Most congregations also have military veterans with the unique ability born of experience to relate to military members and their families. As a military chaplain endorsed for service by American Baptist Churches USA, I see this call to care for military members and their families as part of our mandate to encourage new life in Christ.

Partners in Care is an initiative of the Maryland National Guard Joint Force Headquarters Chaplain's Office. The program is designed to establish supportive relationships between local Maryland congregations and guard members and their families during times of need. The program began in March 2005 with four pilot congregations and today has 57 participating organizations in Baltimore and 22 of Maryland's 23 counties. Participants currently include three Orthodox Jewish congregations, four Roman Catholic congregations, a Unitarian fellowship, a Ukrainian Orthodox congregation, a Knights of Columbus chapter, a United Methodist women's group, and congregations representing 13 different Protestant denominations.

Thus far, more than 300 referrals have been made for support of various kinds, including the following: counseling for individuals, families and children; basic auto and home repair; mentoring for singles, couples, teens, and children; budget and financial planning; emergency food and clothing; transportation; deployment-cycle stress management; substance abuse counseling and support groups; child care; domestic violence intervention; transitional housing; grief and loss support; and spiritual direction and counseling. Recognizing that congregations vary widely in size, resources, and abilities, Partners in Care allows each to determine the types of supportive services it can provide. Most support is usually in the form of goods and services, and direct financial help is strongly discouraged.

An example of the Partners in Care program at work was featured as part of the Public Broadcasting System's "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly" program on December 22, 2006. (The program and transcript are available at pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1017.) This episode told the story of a Maryland Army National Guard soldier and single mother returning from Iraq finding support from a Partners in Care congregation as she faced the challenges of reunion with her three children.

A "Memorandum of Understanding" signed by both entities formalizes the Partners in Care relationship between the Maryland National Guard and participating faith-based organizations. Written by the Maryland National Guard Judge Advocate General's Office, the Memorandum of Understanding eliminates concerns about violating the separation of church and state. This

This program reflects the reality that local congregations and faith-based organizations were the original social service organizations.

legal document makes clear that a referral made by the Maryland National Guard is not an endorsement of the particular religious group to whom the referral is made, but merely utilization of a faith-based community resource for support of a Maryland National Guard member. The document requires that any support rendered by the participating congregation be provided free of charge, regardless of religious affiliation, and without further obligation on the part of the recipient or congregation.

Referrals to Partners in Care congregations are made by Maryland National Guard unit chaplains, full-time employees of the four Family Assistance Centers located across Maryland, and unit commanders or their appointed representatives. Normally a soldier, airman, or family member in need would seek help from one of these sources; therefore, it follows naturally that these are the authorized referral entities for support from the Partners in Care program. Referrals are always made to the closest available Partners in Care organization. The only exception to this policy of referral to the geographically closest resource is when a participating congregation or organization has a unique ability that matches the unique need of a service member. This partnership between the Maryland National Guard and local congregations demonstrates God's love and hope to guard families across Maryland.

Chaplain (Col.) William Sean Lee is an American Baptist minister serving as the Joint Force Headquarters Chaplain for the Maryland National Guard.

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On Honoring Returning Veterans

For almost three years, it has been my privilege to be part of a team of U.S. Army chaplains at Fort Dix, N.J., that has ministered to soldiers returning home from Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Kosovo, and Guantanamo Bay. Some of these returning veterans are still teenagers, while others know that Fort Dix is their last stop before retirement. For some, deployment has been a time of growth and life focus. Some return home beaten and bruised, but ready to get on with their lives. Still others



Yet many veterans say that transitioning home was the hardest part of their deployment; they are trained to go to the war front, not back to the home front.

have sadness in their eyes because some members of their units are not returning with them. Soldiers return to the states with different stories and experiences, depending on their roles and where they were stationed. Not everyone was at the “tip of the spear,” facing danger daily on the streets of Balad, Mosul, or Kabul, but that does not diminish their service in any way. The Army is an interdependent team, where every soldier is important.

For a majority of redeployed Reserve and National Guard veterans, returning home is a smooth transition

from the structure of military life to the casual routine of being a civilian once again. For the most part, human beings are adaptable and resilient. Yet many veterans say that transitioning home was the hardest part of their deployment; they are trained to go to the war front, not back to the home front.

Most returning service men and women are simply tired. They are tired of being told what to do and when to do it, and often not fully understanding the purpose of their actions. They are tired of the long hours and the repetitive nature of their “Groundhog Day” existence in places far away from home. What they have in common is that each member of our armed forces has been in a “far country.” Each has been separated from friends as well as immediate and extended family. Typically, veterans have been pulled out of their lives for 15 months or more at a time, sometimes for two, three, or even four tours of duty. They are aware that life has gone on without them, and they realize that they are somehow different, too. They have crossed some unknown threshold in life, seen places and done things that have affected their views of the world, of themselves, and even of God. As they re-enter the civilian world, they often experience various degrees of anxiety.

How do we, as followers of Jesus, minister to those who have given so much? How might their sacrifices inform our appreciation of the freedoms we enjoy in Christ? Our ministry needs to begin the day someone commits to serving in the military and needs to extend long past his or her return home. Serving in the military is not only a job. It is a commitment to a set of values and responsibilities that may place the service man or woman in harm’s way. Military personnel come to view the world in ways most civilians may never fully understand.

One crucial way to help military personnel is to be supportive of their families in practical ways while they are away. Service men and women are better served by consistent, loving support to their families while they are gone than by a parade and a slap on the back when they return. When they are away, military personnel



continue to worry about the everyday concerns of family life, such as fixing the water heater, making sure the bills get paid, or mowing the lawn. They think every day about the safety of their families and other loved ones. Knowing that there is a supportive community to assist the family can mean a lot. When they know that the ones they love are safe and cared for, it is easier to focus on the challenges of the mission at hand.

When service men and women return home, it is important to give them space if they need it. One of the recurring questions among returning veterans is, “How do I tell my parents [spouse, friends, neighbors, or whoever] that I do not want a party as soon as I get home? I am simply not ready.” The timing of a celebration can mean the difference between a joyous event and a painful time. It is important to find out what the returning veteran and family want and then follow their lead. Most want their own personal time to get used to being back in the states and back with their loved ones; it is essential to ask what they want to do and how they want to be welcomed back. Consider their need to get used to being in a civilian world again, where they can make their own choices rather than follow orders. If there is to be a party, make sure the party reflects their desires, rather than your needs or assumptions. There may be emotional, interpersonal, social, and spiritual issues at work that could backfire if those needs are not

respected. Be genuine in your acceptance and invite—not pressure—they to reconnect.

When speaking with a veteran, honor the boundaries of his or her privacy. Avoid asking invasive questions. Riding in a Humvee outside the wire in a war zone while trying to avoid roadside bombs or taking another person’s life can be deeply painful experiences that affect individuals in unexpected ways. A returning service man or woman may or may not choose to share private demons with you. If he or she does, it needs to be on his or her timetable. Few returning military personnel view themselves as heroes. They have simply done their duty and now they simply want to rejoin their families, enjoy their friends, and feel valued by their communities. The task of faith communities is to let them know that we support them and their families and thankfully welcome them home.

Chaplain (Col.) David Forden, D.Min., an ordained American Baptist minister, currently serves as an installation chaplain, serving mobilizing and de-mobilizing soldiers at the Warrior Transition Unit at Fort Dix, N.J. In his civilian life, he is a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice. Forden is the 2009 recipient of the Military Chaplain Merit Award, American Baptist Churches USA.

Supporting Military Personnel and Their Families DURING DEPLOYMENT

During Holy Week 2009, my pastor introduced her sermon by defining a soldier as “a person who is trained to kill.” Her words momentarily transported me back to a time several years ago when my husband faced his second deployment. I felt sad because that definition is wrong. It lacks sensitivity and, however unintentional, it hurts. Such statements have a great impact on members of the military and their families and can interfere with creating a healing environment. Our churches can provide various forms of support to military personnel and their families throughout the stages of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, redeployment (re-entry), and preparation for a second deployment.

■ **Pray.** Prayer is an anchor that increases awareness of needs and provides encouragement. It is important to pray that the church will have the sensitivity and commitment to provide what the situation requires.

■ **Become informed about the military.** Finding out what happens during deployment and re-entry, understanding the differences between active-duty military and reservists, and learning the terminology will communicate empathy.

■ **Determine the military service profile of your congregation.** Are you part of a military community? Are the service men and women in your congregation career or reservist? Are your military families culturally diverse? Create a social map to determine how to better support them. If you have only one military family in your congregation, don't let that discourage you from doing this important work. That one family needs support.

■ **Encourage people to talk to each other.** Program activities to get people together, especially families of those who are deployed. This way the church can serve as a bridge for military families that don't know each other, offer encouragement to those impacted by deployment, and share the love of Christ with military personnel and families who are not part of the church.

■ **Support the family.** Parents, spouses, and children all have different needs. Families with small children need a strong support system for errands, babysitting, transportation, mentoring, car maintenance, and home repair. Families also need different types of support, depending on the stage of their process. Deployment is a fragile time that sometimes requires more psychological and emotional support. Re-entry or redeployment can be one of the most trying and vulnerable times for a family.

■ **Create a virtual ministry.** Developing online connections for military personnel and their families is one of the most powerful gifts churches can provide. In addition to connecting with families, members of the military can be ministered to electronically and participate in a supportive network. If your sermons or worship services are podcast, it is important to be aware that others might be listening.

■ **Create a veterans ministry.** Once a member of the military returns, everything does not automatically go back to normal. Deployment is a life-changing experience that carries over for a long time. The way the church responds to returning and former military personnel can help reduce the trauma and high number of suicides associated with veterans.

I am grateful for the prayers of my church during my husband's deployment. After my husband was deployed, it took about a year of reconstructing and reaffirming our relationship and our family to get back to feeling like we belonged to each other. Some families are not as blessed. May God bring peace and hope to all who serve in the military and their families. May our churches engage in dialogue, share their blessings, and spark the engine of hope.

Beatriz V. Rivera-Cruz, Ph.D., is vice president of Builders of Family Peace, a Baptist peace building initiative in Puerto Rico (congresopazfamiliar@yahoo.com).

Building a Heavenly Web

Pastors can assist military personnel and their families by focusing on their health, heart, and holiness during the deployment, separation, and reintegration stages. Both sides of the front line—at home or in harm’s way—require professional responses to meet the complex needs of individuals living in a complicated political and economic culture.

When I deployed in 1993 and 1996, and volunteered for a one-year assignment in 2001, I observed that individuals without vibrant relationships with God and other people often struggled with purpose and productivity. Churches, schools, and military and civic groups play a critical role in building a unified proactive continuum of care that can deepen relationships, reduce stress, and invigorate and heal family members. I recommend the following initiatives, which I experienced firsthand in my deployments:

■ **Assign a spiritual and/or military-savvy couple to younger individuals.** Nothing beats human contact. Support from seasoned veterans of the military experience is especially valuable for providing kinship and guidance.

■ **Build a diverse web of support, making support a team effort.** Cross-pollination of information from religious, military, educational, and family groups helps to effectively address complex and evolving needs. Our committee organized events—such as a town hall meeting, meal, and interfaith service—at which our commanders and chaplain addressed mission

and family concerns. We invited pastors, youth leaders, and education staff to dialogue with military agencies. Many worship off-base, so connecting churches is vital. School counselors can provide information about how children are doing outside the home. Even within a team effort, it is essential to protect confidentiality.



■ **Set up recurring programs to nurture the whole family.** Programs that go the depth and distance, such as MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), AWANA (Approved Workmen are Not Ashamed) clubs, and thematic Bible studies work well. Send the workbook to those who are deployed—along with any artwork or letters from children—so they can participate along with family and church family.

■ **Help with regular contact and information.** The technological sophistication of today’s teens is both a value and a risk. It makes it easier to stay in contact with deployed parents, while at the same time allowing for bombardment with anxiety-producing information from blogs and media. Consider providing computer facilities and monitored Internet access to the children of military personnel.

■ **Prepare for issues of readjustment among returnees.** Post-traumatic stress impacts a number of returnees, but with proper intervention, they can regain their health. War is a physical and spiritual crisis that affects people deeply, differently and for life. Free training programs in our community were encouraged to add content specifically geared toward the military context, such as suicide prevention, marriage enrichment, singlehood, post-traumatic stress, and death and grieving. Pastors need to read up on current clinical information to sharpen their radar for abnormalities during reintegration and be prepared to refer to qualified caregivers.

■ **Consider the caregivers.** Chaplains work eight days a week overseas and at home. Pastors are in a unique position to engage returning chaplains. I was exhausted after my deployments and was unable to discuss experiences with my family because of confidentiality. I appreciated the support I received from an anointed pastor and my American Baptist endorser.

Rev. Thomas Azar (lieutenant colonel, retired), former U.S. Air Force chaplain, serves as interim pastor of FBC, Hoosick Falls, NY.

Varios rostros de LA GUERRA

Estar en guerra no es nada fácil. Muchas y diferentes emociones afloran en la vida de los hombres y mujeres que un día decidieron, por las razones que fueren, ingresar a las fuerzas armadas. Somos una nación que está en diferentes guerras y nuestros hermanos/as están combatiendo sea en tierras extrañas o en nuestra propia tierra. El juramento así lo indica: Apoyaré y defenderé la Constitución de los Estados Unidos contra todos los enemigos, extranjeros y nacionales.

Pero no sólo los soldados que usan un uniforme están en guerra, está también la otra cara, la familia que queda acá, sin su hijo/a, esposo/a, madre, padre, amigo. Sí, ellos y ellas tienen que batallar su propia guerra; la ausencia de un ser querido, la expectativa de recibir una mala noticia, el tener que asumir más roles en la casa, como el de padre o madre, por mencionar unos, no es nada fácil tampoco. Por esa razón es importante que, independientemente de cuál sea el sentir con relación a los conflictos bélicos que está enfrentando la nación, esas familias que quedan alrededor nuestro sientan que hay una comunidad de fe con la cual ellos/as pueden contar; que sepan que no están solos/as en ese

momento de sus vidas, sino que hay una comunidad de fe que les apoya, que se preocupa de cómo están, qué necesitan y que, además de orar, les pueden ayudar.

Ahora bien, para que esas familias sepan que hay una comunidad de fe que les apoya hay que dejarles saber de que nuestras iglesias les aman, les apoyan y están a sus órdenes para servirles. Por ejemplo, la unidad a la que pertenezco, el Tercer Regimiento de Infantería, conocido como *"The Old Guard"*, envía soldados que voluntariamente se van Irak o Afganistán. En esta unidad, al menos cada dos semanas se establece contacto con los familiares. El propósito es saber cómo están y si necesitan algo. De esta manera esos familiares no se sienten solos y saben que hay alguien con quien contar. Esto se hace a un nivel secular; pero de cuánto más impacto sería saber que hay una comunidad de fe que me respalda y con la cual yo puedo contar no sólo en carácter espiritual, sino también en cualquier otro aspecto.

Por otro lado, el regresar a casa luego de estar en una guerra es difícil. El proceso de ajuste es bien grande y toma tiempo. Esto sin contar con los cambios emocionales que de por sí conlleva estar en una guerra.



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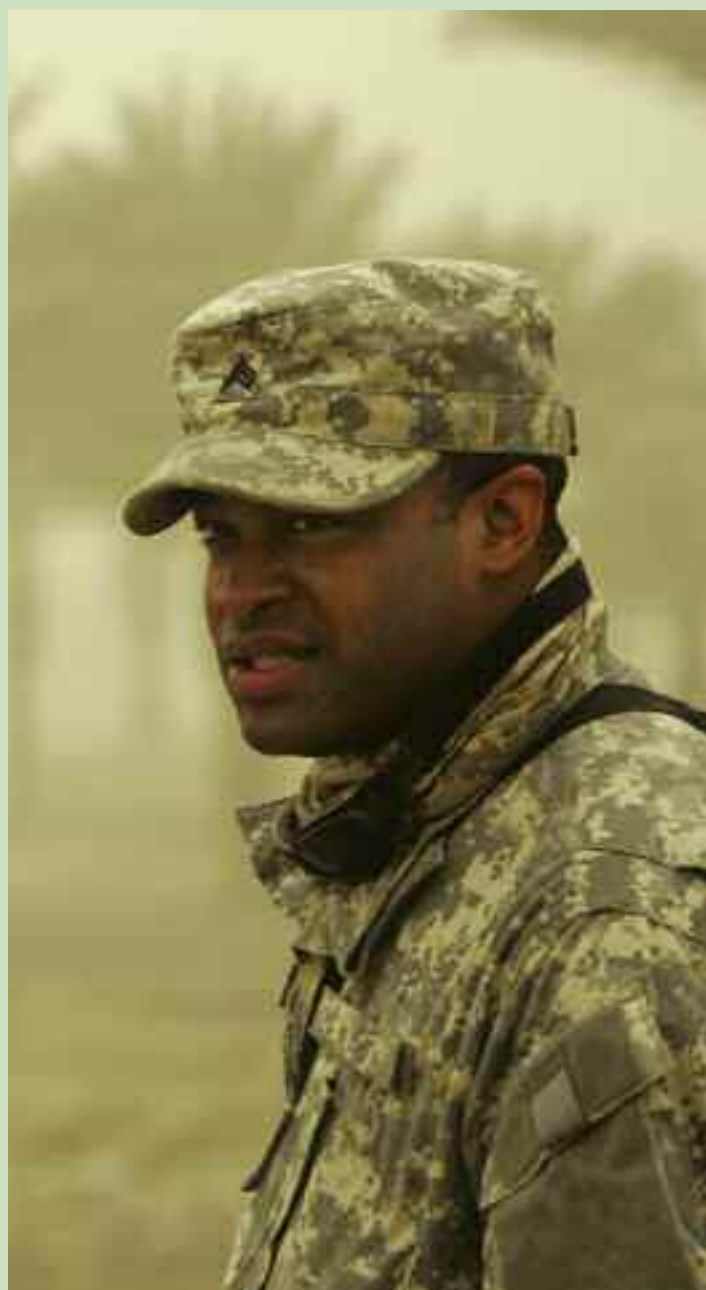
Cada ser humano es diferente y reacciona de manera diferente al hecho de estar en una guerra. Muchos factores influyen: a qué se está expuesto, qué experiencias tiene la persona, qué ve, qué pierde, tanto en la zona de combate como en la casa...esto por mencionar algunos. Es aquí donde la comunidad de fe puede ministrar a aquellos/as que llegan de una zona de combate. Una de las cosas que yo hacía las dos veces que fui a Irak, era visitar las diferentes áreas de internet y teléfonos que se proveen para mantener contacto con los seres queridos. Esto me ayudaba en muchas ocasiones a medir u observar cómo estaban las relaciones con los seres queridos y ser proactivo en ayudar o ministrar a mis soldados. Si se establece una red de apoyo a los familiares, ésta servirá de barómetro para así tener una idea de posibles problemas o situaciones a surgir con la llegada a casa de los soldados y así estar preparados con un plan de ministración.

Hablando en términos generales (pues cada soldado es un ser único y reaccionamos diferente), cuando la persona llega de la zona de combate no es la misma persona que se fue un tiempo atrás. La manera de ver las cosas es diferente, y yo me he dado cuenta en mí mismo, pues cosas que antes me podían hacer reaccionar de forma muy emotiva ya no lo hacen. Y no es que uno haya perdido los sentimientos, éstos siguen ahí, pero la manera de ver o calificar las cosas ya no es igual. En mi primera ocasión, la unidad en la cual yo era capellán perdió 12 soldados y tuvimos 46 heridos, desde una pequeña herida hasta pérdida de extremidades. Ahora, cuando doy consejería a matrimonios y una de las quejas es que los esposos ya no son tan expresivos luego de haber llagado de la guerra, yo trato de explicarle a la pareja que una de las razones pueden ser las experiencias vividas allá. Es todo un proceso de reajuste, que necesita del fruto del Espíritu Santo, así como del diálogo como pareja o familia y la oración a Dios para que les ayude. Es bien importante que las parejas entiendan que ambos necesitan tiempo para el reajuste, que no sólo es él o la que regresa de la zona de combate, sino que son ambos. Como indiqué al principio, los familiares que se quedan libran también su propia batalla.

No importa cuanto tiempo sea la separación, ésta siempre afecta. Soldados del ejército son los que están fuera más tiempo, pues normalmente es un año de despliegue en la zona de combate. Muchas cosas cambian durante ese período de tiempo: los intereses, los hábitos, los roles en el hogar, la disciplina de los hijos/as, las amistades... Esto además de que uno tiene la sensación de que el mundo se detuvo por ese período de tiempo. Algo que enfatizo a los soldados es que en nuestra ausencia el mundo siguió su curso y que somos nosotros los que tenemos que reintegrarnos a él y no él

a nosotros, aunque al principio se nos hace duro y nos sentimos aislados. Por eso es crucial que no importa cuál sea el sentir personal que se tenga respecto a la guerra, demos a los /as egresados/as de la zona de combate, que les amamos y que estamos a su disposición para escuchar sus historias, sin ningún tipo de recriminación; que somos una comunidad de fe a la que no le importan las diferencias que podamos tener y que les apoyamos y queremos ser su compañía en su soledad, sus penas y sus dolores. No sólo eso, también queremos ayudarles a caminar con ellos y ellas en la senda en la que estén, no importa cuál. Es muy importante que les hagamos saber esto, con la más profunda sinceridad y empatía de nuestros corazones.

El Mayor Ladi Hernández es capellán del Ejército de los Estados Unidos.



Various Faces of WAR

Being at war is not easy. Our nation is at war, and many of our friends and relatives are fighting in a foreign land, upholding the oath that says: “I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

But not only are the soldiers who wear uniforms at war. There is also the flip side, the family left here, without a spouse, a mother, a father, a friend. Yes, these who are left behind also have to fight their own war, which involves the absence of a loved one, the expectation of receiving bad news or the responsibility of having to assume more roles in the home. It is not easy. Because of that, it is very important that, regardless of the feelings we may have toward armed conflicts, those families feel that there is a faith community they can count on, that they know they are not alone, and that they understand the faith community cares about their well-being and will pray for them.

For these families to know that there is a faith com-

munity supporting them, we must let them know that our churches love them and are at their service. For example, the unit to which I belong, the Third Infantry Regiment, known as “The Old Guard,” sends soldiers who willingly go to Iraq or Afghanistan. In this unit, at least every two weeks, we establish contact with families. The purpose is to find out how they are and determine if they need something. That way, these families do not feel alone and they know there is someone to count on.

Returning home after being in a war is difficult. The adjustment process is quite stressful and takes time—all this, without considering the emotional changes that a war involves. Every human being is different and reacts differently to the experience of war, influenced by what a person is exposed to, what a person sees, what he or she loses, both in the combat zone and at home—the list goes on.

This is where the community of faith can minister. One of the things I did both times I went to Iraq was to



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visit different Internet sites to find telephone services for maintaining contact with loved ones. These helped me on many occasions to be proactive in helping or ministering to my soldiers. If we establish a support network for families, it can serve as a barometer of potential problems that may arise when soldiers return home, helping us to be ready with a plan for ministry.

Generally speaking (because every soldier is unique and reacts differently), when a person returns from a combat zone, he or she is not the same person who left. Those who return from war see things differently, and I've noticed that in myself, because I do not react emotionally to some things as I did before. This is not because we have lost the feelings; they are still there. But the way we see and evaluate things is not the same. My first time at war, the unit in which I was a chaplain lost 12 soldiers; 46 were wounded, ranging from a small wound to loss of limbs. For those who survive, this kind of experience can make a soldier numb.

Now, when I counsel couples and one of them complains that the other is not as expressive as they used to be, I try to explain that it may be one symptom of having been in combat. It is a readjustment process that requires the help of the Holy Spirit and dialogue among partners and family members, as well as prayer. It is also important that couples understand both need time to readjust, not only the person returning from the combat zone. As mentioned before, family members also fight their own battle.

No matter how long the separation, it always affects people. Army soldiers are away the longest, since deployment in the combat zone is typically one year. Many things change during that time: interests, habits, roles at home, the discipline of children, friends. In addition, for soldiers, there is a feeling that the world stopped during their deployment.

Something that I emphasize to my soldiers is that in our absence the world continues its course, and it is us who have to rejoin, instead of expecting the world to rejoin us. That is why it is crucial that no matter personal feelings about war, faith communities show returning soldiers that we love them and that we are available to listen to their stories, without any kind of recrimination.

Returning soldiers need to know that we are a faith community that does not focus on differences, and that we support them and want to be company to their loneliness, sorrow and pain. Not only that, we also want to walk with them wherever they are. It is very important that we show our support with sincerity and empathy in our hearts, so that they will know it in their hearts as well.

Major Ladi Hernández is a chaplain in the United States Army.



Lessons from Iraq II: NIGHT DUTY

They patrol every night;
Marching into my dreams unescorted.

Screaming soldiers shake me awake;
I am having another nightmare.

When I push them away, they return,
Bringing buddies who are even more forceful.

When I turn away, they multiply
Until I am surrounded by their bloody faces.

When I plead, "Leave me alone!" their demands crescendo,
"Remember me?" "Remember me." "Remember me!"

Drowning in tears and sweat, I am overpowered.
Competing for my decision, only one will be selected.

"Choose me and you can rest," one promises;
"Have mercy on me and give me peace," he begs.

He judges every word as I painstakingly translate
The scars on my soul into his memorial.

When his report is complete, he is released.
"Thank you," I whisper as he is dismissed.

His restless comrades are angry.
They will return tomorrow.

They patrol every night,
Tortured souls seeking release.

Chaplain (Maj.) Susan Caswell serves as a U.S. Army chaplain recruiter, Northeast Chaplain Recruiting Team.

Mission Profile:

REV. PAUL E. CLARK Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agent



A native Californian, Chaplain (Colonel) Paul E. Clark (retired), an ordained American Baptist pastor, has traveled much of the world in his role as chaplain/pastoral counselor. In November 2008, he was called by National Ministries as its endorsing agent for chaplains and pastoral counselors, whom he considers colleagues on the front lines of ministry. “They are engaged in activities that challenge the human spirit,” he says. “They go from sick bed to sick bed, from prison cell to prison cell, as well as to trauma scenes to bring hope and share the good news that you are never alone. These men and women go wherever YOU are. They don’t wait for you to come to them.”

Nor does Clark wait for chaplains and pastoral counselors to come to him. He travels to where they are so that he can “look them in the eye” and touch those in need of support, both spiritual and personal. He wants them to see in his face the physical evidence that the host of American Baptist Churches USA is with them as they carry out the great commission of Christ while laboring in God’s creation. Clark’s work gives him a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, knowing that God has enabled him to see that pastoral counselors and chaplains are where the need is—in the right place at the right time. “The will of God is being done,” he says. “And I’m witnessing it.”

The will of God has been on his mind since childhood. When he was 8 years old, an accident caused him to lose sight in one eye and jeopardized the other eye. When he was released from the hospital, the doctors expressed little hope for his recovery. But when he returned to have the bandages removed, he could see absolutely everything, including the amazement on the doctors’ faces. Miraculously, Clark says, his recovery was foretold by a stranger who told his family that “God has plans for him” and that he would regain his sight. A miracle? Perhaps. But Clark is convinced he was healed by the power of the Holy Spirit. He sees all life as a miracle from a loving God.

Married and the father of two daughters and a son, Clark loves the outdoors. An avid fisherman, he recalls snagging a 14-pound trout in New Zealand and hopes to repeat that accomplishment in the future.

Mission Profile

Resources

Organizations/Books

- American Combat Veterans of War: acvow.org
- American Legion: legion.org
- “God Understands Series,” American Bible Society: bibles.com (search under “God Understands”)
- Military Home Front (Department of Defense Web site): militaryhomefront.dod/mil
- National Military Family Association: nmfa.org
- National Resources Directory: Online tool for wounded, ill, and injured veterans, their families, and those who support them at nationalresourcesdirectory.org
- Purple Heart Service Foundation offers a “Veteran’s and Families Guide to Recovering from PTSD” by Stephanie Laite Lanham as well as other publications and resources. See purpleheartfoundation.org or write to P.O. Box 49, Annandale, VA 22003
- Soldiersheart.net offers a variety of articles, poems, books, and CDs. Check out the resource pages at soldiersheart.net/resources
- Veterans of Foreign Wars: vfw.org
- *While They’re at War: The True Story of American Families on the Homefront*: kristenhenderson.com
- Wounded Warrior Project: woundedwarriorproject.org

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Web site (myhealth.va.gov) provides information for Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom returning veterans and links for various benefits, including compensation and pension, education, vocational rehabilitation, and guidelines for how local faith-based and community organizations can enter into partnership with VA programs. A chaplain directory can be found at the National Chaplain Center home page for VA chaplains (chaplain.med.va.gov/page). The article “Baptist Chaplain Assists with Clergy Day at Veterans Medical Center,” (available at nationalministries.org/front_center_va_clergy_day) tells the story of gatherings in which institutional chaplains connect with local clergy to improve the quality of care and services for veterans.

Resources for/about Children

- Sesame Street: sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion
- “Some Are Doubly Special,” Capt. Ollis Mozon (The Children’s Corner, Fall/Winter 2008). Available by request from Loretta Harper at Loretta.harper@abc-usa.org or 1-800-222-3872, ext. 2462, or online at www.nationalministries.org/children/childrens_corner.cfm
- Zero to Three: Find ideas for supporting the youngest of children of military families at zerotothree.org

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