Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum chaplains deliver messages of faith, hope and resilience during pandemic

Fort Drum, NY - Chaplains from across the 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum are delivering timely and heartfelt messages of faith, hope and resilience to help community members cope with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) James Foster, 10th Mountain Division (LI) chaplain, said they are maintaining a strong presence – both physically and virtually – in the community. Unit chaplains are working with command teams, family readiness groups and off-post organizations to provide religious support to Soldiers in their homes, barracks and workplace. Chapel services have continued each weekend via livestream.

“Chaplains are using creative ways to push encouraging and supportive words through social media,” he said. “There are numerous daily and weekly messages published on brigade and battalion Facebook pages, and some chaplains have even established their own YouTube or unit-specific religious support social media pages.”

Soldiers and family members attend chapel services via livestream at https://www.facebook.com/FortDrumChapel/ or contact their unit chaplain for support (https://home.army.mil/drum/index.php/my-fort/all-services/chaplains-office).

Foster noted the efforts of 1st Brigade Combat Team chaplains who are tending the needs of Soldiers placed in quarantine.

“They are assisting the command in delivering care packages and special items to those in quarantine, and supporting the families with everything from emotional support to advice and counsel,” he said. “Our chaplains are still available for counseling. We are using web sources, group phone conversations and other practices for counseling opportunities that are in line with social distancing guidelines.”

Chaplain (Maj.) Stuart Kazarovich, family life chaplain, said that the Religious Support Office team quickly adapted by developing a new capacity to livestream their services.

“It is amazing how a crisis will stretch your imagination and expand ministry,” he said. “Each service is saved (online) and can be viewed live or at any time, by anyone and anywhere. Soldiers and family members can also view other chapel services for more spiritual nourishment. We have increased our outreach immensely.”

He said that this “new normal” will have an impact long after the pandemic passes. Kazarovich said that when Soldiers and families move, deploy or transition out of the Army, they will always be welcome to reach back to Fort Drum and watch the chapel services.

Kazarovich said that an additional benefit to having virtual access to the chaplains is that people can learn more about their spiritual leaders and their gifts for preaching, evangelism and teaching. For some, using digital technology is a new talent they are developing.

“Staying connected is the key,” Kazarovich said. “My greatest concern is our ability to be available and ensuring our services can be accessed for those who are having the greatest difficulty adjusting. Most of our community will take wise advantage of a crisis and use it to benefit the greater whole, but it is always that small percentage of those who seem to struggle no matter what the circumstances might be that concern me the most. It is for this group that we want to make sure they have our contact information in case they need to shout out for assistance.”

Chaplain (Capt.) Moshe Lans, 10th Mountain Division Artillery chaplain and Fort Drum rabbi, had never used Facebook before the pandemic. Seated in the same space at the Main Post Chapel where he meets members of the Jewish faith every Friday evening, Lans now appears on the popular social network for his regular 6 p.m. Erev Shabbos (before the Sabbath) Shmooze.

“My wife, Laurie, manages all the information technology for the Jewish community of Fort Drum,” he said. “Computers and technology are not the forte of Chaplain Lans. The Army Chaplaincy preaches the ministry of presence, and being readily available and with the community is the Army Chaplain way.”

Participants can interact with Lans by commenting during the livestream, and he reads questions and responds to them in real time. His wife also responds to questions sent via Facebook Message. Lans said that the livestream allows him to connect to the Jewish community at a time when the virus prevents gatherings, even though the technology is outside his comfort zone.

“Embracing technology to spread Torah is a relished opportunity,” he added. “Redundancy creates familiarity, and each week the Facebook livestream is more enjoyable.”

Lans credits Staff Sgt. Jose Carrasquillo, religious affairs noncommissioned officer in charge, with giving him the ability to connect with a virtual audience.

“Staff Sgt. Carrasquillo is a genius,” he said. “Without him, there would be no conceivable way the Jewish community of Fort Drum could have a weekly event at this time. He is a force multiplier making virtual ministry possible for every worship service at Fort Drum at a desperate time when the masses need their chaplains.”

Lans said that a virus can be defeated through the creation of an antivirus, and that each person’s act of kindness and prayer becomes their spiritual antivirus.

“Think of others at this difficult time,” he said. “If capable, consider sending something to quarantined people. Food, flowers, cards, notes, gift cards, calling them on the telephone are all ways to let the quarantined person in your life know that you are together despite being physically separate.”

Lans asked that people contact him if they are in need of Jewish ecclesiastical supplies, or even a home-cooked meal, by emailing him at moshe.lans.mil@mail.mil.

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) David Stoner, Fort Drum garrison chaplain, said that the pandemic serves as an opportunity for people to demonstrate their faith.

“It could be as simple as checking on others who you believe may have a more difficult time getting things or it could be as significant as providing financial assistance for someone in light of their economic difficulties,” he said. “Faith can move us to great things both large and small, it can help us grow inwardly and provide stability. Faith is a great thing to have during a difficult time, much like we are facing now.”

Adversity can add clarity to one’s beliefs and can be seen as an opportunity to develop one’s faith.

“Many have been forced to slow down and take time to investigate what they believe,” Stoner said. “They can take this time to read sacred texts, meditate and pray. Spiritual activities are often neglected and forgotten because of frantic schedules and bloated calendar requirements. Now that much of that has been stripped away, one has a gift: time – time to look at important things like faith.”

He said that it often takes difficult times for people to turn to faith and contemplate their spirituality.

“True faith always grows in the face of adversity,” Stoner said. “When we really know what we believe, develop it in our lives and actually live it, that faith can provide an answer.”

Foster said that having faith and hope is crucial in times like this one.

“I would encourage everyone to recognize the smallest to greatest gestures of hope in their own lives,” he said. “No matter what level of anxiety we may have, we all operate with some level of hope, and if there is a flame there, the fire can be fed.”

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