A Religious-Support Primer



By Chaplain (Major) Gregory K. Williamson

Our nation's constitution provides for individual religious freedom. In keeping with this constitutionally guaranteed right, the nation established the United States Chaplain Corps to minister to the diverse spiritual needs of those serving in uniform.

Every commander must ensure that soldiers are given the opportunity to worship and practice their religion according to the tenets of their faith. This normally means that soldiers are given time to worship, pray, and serve in their local synagogue, temple, church, or mosque. More narrowly speaking, it means that the commander establishes a plan of religious support within the unit.

Developing a Plan

The commander's staff officer for developing this plan is the chaplain. Every chaplain is professionally trained to function as a religious leader. Typically, but not always, the chaplain graduates from a seminary, serves a congregation for several years, and then comes on active duty under the auspices of a particular endorsing agency. The chaplain remains accountable to two authorities: ecclesiastical and military. He ministers according to the tenets of his faith and as the commander determines is best for his unit.

Within the context of personal religious conviction, unit needs, and the commander's wishes, the chaplain develops and recommends a religious-support plan. Each plan should be tailored to the religious composition of the unit, the commander's guidance, and the unit's mission. Typically, the plan evolves into a religious-support standing operating procedure for garrison operations and one for field operations. In addition, each operations order should address relevant and essential elements of religious support.

When developing a religious-support plan, the chaplain identifies the focus of religious activities. This focus should align itself with the phases of an order or mission. Before battle, the chaplain focuses on ministry to soldiers most likely to engage in combat operations. During battle, he focuses on ministry to wounded soldiers. Following combat operations, honoring the dead and ministering to the grieving is the focus.

A similar process is implemented for garrison operations. However, another component is added to the support plan: namely, family members. The chaplain, with the commander's guidance, must consciously decide where to focus ministry in garrison and determine when and where his religious-support assets are best applied. For instance, the commander may choose to have the chaplain perform home visits rather than visit a company on a range.

Elements of Support

To perform ministry effectively, the Unit Ministry Team (the chaplain and a chaplain's assistant) needs support from the commander and his or her staff. The four most significant elements of support—communication, transportation, information, and funding—greatly enhance the team's ability to provide quality ministry.

Communication. Whether in garrison or the field, the chaplain must be able to communicate with the units he is assigned to cover. In garrison, the chaplain needs a telephone and electronic mail; in the field, he needs a radio and a dedicated tactical telephone on the mobile-subscriber-equipment network. Commanders are best served by ensuring that their chaplains and chaplains' assistants are thoroughly trained in radio operations.

Transportation. To provide religious coverage, the unit chaplain must have appropriate transportation available. Chaplains need transportation resources to visit soldiers and their family members in their homes and while hospitalized, incarcerated, or convalescing. Most often, a sedan or van meets

these needs. When in the field, the chaplain must have either a tactical vehicle assigned for his use or share access to a vehicle. In the latter case, the command group must establish clear priorities among users before deploying.

Information. Chaplains gather information to assess the moral and religious health and needs of soldiers, their family members, and the unit. The following information is relevant for this purpose, although it does not exhaust the possibilities: soldiers' religious preferences, marital status, dependents other than spouse, emergency leaves, hospitalizations, convalescence leaves, Red Cross messages, marriages and divorces, adverse actions, and blotter reports. After assessing these needs, the chaplain implements a religious-support plan and conducts ministry appropriate to them. Assessing and conducting ministry is not a "once-and-for-all" activity; rather, it is an ongoing process that must be done regularly and in response to particular situations.

Funding. The unit's Command Master Religious Plan (CMRP) incorporates funding for the unit's religious support. This document details programs and ministry that meet the religious and moral needs of the unit along with the estimated costs. Two funding sources are available to the chaplain: appropriated funds through the unit and nonappropriated funds through the consolidated chaplains' fund. A well-written CMRP serves both the commander and the chaplain as a tool for prioritizing ministry and funding for it.

Commanders' Needs

The above discussion presupposes that commanders themselves identify religious life as a training and unit priority. Furthermore, commanders may choose to seek the counsel of the unit chaplain for personal pastoral needs, such as prayer and meditation, or simply as a sympathetic ear to hear about the day's frustrations. As commanders seek out the chaplain for personal pastoral care, they will invigorate the religious and moral climate within their units, sending a message that none are beyond the need of encouragement, care, and comfort.

Chaplain (Major) Williamson was the senior Unit Ministry Team observer/controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center before his current assignment as group chaplain, 4th Psychological Operations Group (A), Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The Engineer Writer's Guide

We think engineers take a special pride in their profession, and *Engineer* is always looking for articles from readers who want to share their expertise, experience, and ideas. If you are a potential contributing writer, here are a few tips to steer you in the right direction.

Articles may discuss engineer training, operations, doctrine, equipment, history, or other areas of general interest to an engineer readership.

We're especially interested in articles that have a "how-to-do-it-better" theme. For instance, we're not looking for articles telling readers how you conducted a routine field exercise. But if you think you have a "new-and-improved" way of conducting a tactical operation, training exercise, or other operational procedure that may prove helpful to other engineers, that's what we need.

Articles should generally come from contributors with firsthand experience of the subject being presented. Articles should be concise, straightforward, and in the active voice.

Length should range from 2,000 to 4,000 words, and text should be double-spaced. Generally, each such page should contain from 200 to 250 words. Manuscripts should be originals or clear copies. Provide a 3 1/2-inch disk in Microsoft® Word, Rich Text Format, or ASCII (please indicate word-processing format on disk or cover letter). You also may send articles by e-mail to *bridgess@wood.army.mil*.

Articles containing attributable information or quotations not referenced in the story should carry appropriate endnotes.

Contributors are encouraged to include black-and-white or color photos, artwork, and/or line diagrams that illustrate information in the article. Include captions for any photographs submitted. Hard-copy photos are preferred, but we will accept digital images originally saved at a resolution no lower than 200 dpi. Please do not include them in the text. If you use PowerPoint®, save each illustration as a separate file and avoid excessive use of color and shading. Please do not send photos embedded in PowerPoint®.

Include your full name, rank, current unit, and job title. Also include a list of your past assignments, experiences, and education; your mailing address; and a fax number and commercial daytime phone number.

Reviews of books on engineer topics are also welcome.

Articles or book reviews may be mailed to: Editor, Engineer Professional Bulletin, 320 Engineer Loop, Suite 210, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri 65473-8929.

All submissions are subject to editing.

If you have questions about an article you're working on—or considering writing—call Shirley Bridges, at DSN 676-5266, or commercial (573) 596-0131 ext. 3-5266. We look forward to hearing from you.

Note: Due to the limited space per issue, we will not print articles that have been accepted for publication by other Army professional bulletins.