



*Nurture the Living
Care for the Wounded
Honor the Fallen*

THE FORUM ON THE MILITARY CHAPLAINCY
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Evangelical Chaplains Respond to Dr. Albert Mohler

We would be the first to defend the right of Southern Baptist and all Evangelical military chaplains to serve our country's patriotic and heroic warriors. In fact, the military chaplaincy as it has always existed should reflect a fair and representative cross section of religion in America. Our soldiers, sailors, airman, Marines and coast guardsmen deserve nothing less!

Most chaplains agree that they have a sacred obligation to either "perform or provide" for the religious needs of all troops. Military chaplaincy has a long history of "Cooperation without Compromise." The proud history of the military chaplaincy is rich with the stories of chaplains who have successfully navigated those challenging requirements, and it should be no different today. We have absolute confidence that our chaplains, with few exceptions, understand their obligation to remain faithful to their beliefs while serving their country.

Both signers of this response represented conservative evangelical denominations during long and rewarding military careers. Paul served thirty-one years of military service as a chaplain endorsed by Southern Baptists. Herman served thirty-four years, endorsed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Neither of us was ever asked or required to violate our religious beliefs, or the expectations of our respective denominations. Our commanders and supervisory chaplains at every level recognized and respected our particular, unique denominational values.

The demise of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and the "Defense of Marriage Act" has not changed these time-honored principles of military chaplaincy. Statements suggesting otherwise are divisive and sadly misguided. They are creating unnecessary tensions in the military chaplaincy that are distracting chaplains from their primary duty to be of service to all, and to secure the free exercise of religion for America's service members.

Most would agree that the "moral crisis" Dr. Mohler claims the military chaplaincy is facing is part of an evolving culture in the nation and the world. Our courageous and loyal service members, whether gay or straight, serve their country in the midst of a shifting culture, one in constant change, and one that is far more pluralistic and diverse than when we served. Military chaplains face new challenges, unprecedented battle tempos, and immense personal and family

Advocate for a Military Chaplaincy committed to free and diverse religious expression, and to the sacred traditions of personal integrity, selfless compassion, respect for others, and excellence in leadership.

stress. Perhaps more than ever, our military chaplains work in a multi-cultural environment demanding respect of both differences and commonalities as citizen of this great experiment in democracy.

These new challenges should not be fought at the cost of cooperative and collegial ministry to the Armed Forces. Yet, some denominational executives and endorsers are crafting policies that hamstring their chaplains with unrealistic and unreasonable demands -- demands that are making religious ministry in the military virtually impossible. They may be forcing chaplains into a false dualism, and the untenable position of either caring for their troops, or serving their denominations.

Some chaplains today are faced with new endorser requirements restricting the freedom to work with chaplains, chaplain assistants and chapel volunteers from other faith groups, and inhibiting ministry to all service members without bias and discrimination. Specifically, Southern Baptist Chaplains are now forbidden by mandatory guidelines, published by the North American Mission Board, from pastoral ministries with those who are welcoming and affirming of LGBT service members, their spouses and families. Or, in the words of Dr. Mohler, "those churches and denominations who are wearing out their knees bowing to Baal."

As hurtful as the attitudes and rhetoric of some denominational executives are, homosexuality is simply not the issue threatening the Chaplain Corps. Faith communities that believe committed homosexual relationships are sinful have every right to their sincerely held religious beliefs. However, while these faith communities are expected to endorse fully qualified chaplains for military service who share their beliefs, these communities have also accepted the mandate that all chaplains must be able to work within the pluralistic and multicultural environment of the military. Attitudes of religious hostility, which erect walls rather than build bridges, are incompatible with those pledges. Military commanders and leaders with boots on the ground fear this unnecessary and manmade battle in the chaplaincy will become a mission distracter, and a deterrent to good order, discipline and morale.

The historic and time-honored motto of military chaplains says it best. "Nurture the Living. Care for the Wounded. Honor the Fallen." Honoring this, with uncompromising ethics and genuine integrity, chaplains of every faith and belief will be able to serve honorably and proudly in American's military.

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