



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

THE FORUM ON THE MILITARY CHAPLAINCY  
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27 February 2014

The Honorable Susan A. Davis  
Ranking Member  
Military Personnel Subcommittee  
House Armed Service Committee  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Subcommittee Hearing on Religious Accommodation in the Armed Services on  
February 29, 2014 at 9:30am EST.

Dear Congresswoman Davis,

The Forum on the Military Chaplaincy is an all volunteer organization made up of over 80 actively serving and retired military chaplains, ecclesiastical chaplain endorsers, veterans, clergy and lay people. Our mission is to 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.

We understand that on February 29, 2014, your subcommittee will be conducting a hearing on the issue of religious accommodation in the Armed Services. We write today to express our deep concern about a burgeoning problem that will lead to the degradation of the effectiveness of America's Armed Forces. That problem is the effort of a few religious conservatives who are attempting to carve out special status for themselves within a military where equal codes of conduct, good force management, and paramount concerns of unit cohesion, morale, and readiness apply to all.

Specifically, we draw your attention to the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board's (NAMB) "Guidelines" issued on 29 August 2013 which prohibit Southern Baptist endorsed chaplains from engaging in otherwise routine pastoral care – if such care is directed or connected to same-gender couples or LGB troops. Specifically, the "Guidelines" mandate that NAMB endorsed chaplains are restricted from:

*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.*

1. Attending a wedding ceremony of a same-gender couple, either on or off a military installation.
2. Performing supportive pastoral counseling of a same-gender married couple.
3. Assisting or supporting contractors or volunteers leading same-gender relational events.
4. Offering any kind of relationship training, on or off a military installation that would give the appearance of accepting the "homosexual lifestyle or sexual wrongdoing."
5. Participating in jointly led worship services "with a chaplain, contractor or volunteer who personally practices a homosexual lifestyle or affirms a homosexual lifestyle or such conduct."

Failure to comply with these "Guidelines" would result in removal of the chaplain's endorsement by the denomination. As you know, loss of endorsement means a chaplain would lose his/her commission as a military officer, ending his military career, and in some instances, the loss of retirement benefits.<sup>1</sup>

While NAMB has the right to issue denominational guidelines to its chaplains, NAMB oversteps its authority when its directives are counter or inapposite to the Covenant and Code of Ethics for Chaplains of the Armed Forces adopted by the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF). The Chaplains' Code of Ethics sets forth uniform and uncompromising standards across all branches and all forces of service in the Department of Defense (DoD).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Southern Baptist North American Mission Board "Guidelines" dated August 29, 2013, attached hereto, at page 1 which states: "chaplains in violation of these restrictions will be subject to removal of their endorsement."

<sup>2</sup> All Chaplains must agree to the following:

*I understand as a chaplain in the United States Armed Forces that:*

- 1. I will function in a pluralistic environment with chaplains of other religious bodies to provide for ministry to all military personnel and their families entrusted to my care.*
- 2. I will seek to provide for pastoral care and ministry to persons of religious bodies other than my own within my area of responsibility with the same investment of myself as I give to members of my own religious body. I will work collegially with chaplains of religious bodies other than my own as together we seek to provide as full a ministry as possible to our people.*
- 3. I will respect the beliefs and traditions of my colleagues and those to whom I minister. When conducting services of worship that include persons of other than my religious body, I will draw upon those beliefs, principles, and practices that we have in common.*
- 4. I will, if in a supervisory position, respect the practices and beliefs of each chaplain I supervise and exercise care not to require of them any service or practice that would be in violation of the faith practices of their particular religious body.*
- 5. I will seek to support all colleagues in ministry by building constructive relationships wherever I serve, both with the staff where I work and with colleagues throughout the military environment.*

The NCMAF Code of Ethics is consistent with the stated DoD policy of full equality and inclusion. In contrast, NAMB's directives are not consistent with these stated policies of full equality and inclusion, nor do they comport with military regulations on plurality.<sup>3</sup>

In our opinion, the NAMB "Guidelines" give explicit voice to the position that Southern Baptist chaplains are NOT duty bound:

- To follow a Commander's orders if those orders are perceived to violate NAMB's mandatory "Guidelines."
- To follow their sworn duty as military officers;
- To treat all equally;
- To refrain from bias and discrimination embedded in endorser regulations;
- To respect the First Amendment, due to denominational directives establishing their religious beliefs, and using DOD appropriated funds to support their salaries and faith based programs.

Southern Baptist Chaplaincy, under the leadership of retire Chaplain (Major General) Douglas Carver are attempting to create a separate class of chaplains – and then a separate class of troops – within our military. The mandatory guidelines, as written and mandated for all NAMB endorsed chaplains, supersede the Uniform Code of Military Justice and DoD regulations. Such dual standards will undermine morale, pluralism, cohesion, and good order and discipline throughout the Chaplain Corps. This is unacceptable.

All members of the military have taken an oath to support and defend the U.S. Constitution. As military officers, that is the sworn duty of every chaplain. The right of service members to their own private faith is guaranteed by Constitutional law. The laws also require that no religious group may impose its policies, practices and beliefs over the rest of the country, and certainly not over government institutions like the military.<sup>4</sup>

During this upcoming hearing we request you specifically address our concerns with one of your witnesses, Douglas Carver, former Chief of Chaplains of the Army and current

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*6. I will recognize that my obligation is to provide for the free exercise of religion for ministry to all members of the military services, their families and other authorized personnel.*

<sup>3</sup> Military regulations require endorsing agencies to verify that their endorsed chaplains "function in a pluralistic environment, . . . [and] support directly and indirectly the free exercise of religion by all members of the Military Services, their family members, and other persons authorized to be served by the military chaplaincies." DoD Instruction 1304.28 paras. 6.1.2 and E3.1.3.3. Endorsing agencies must also affirm in writing annually that its endorsed chaplains continue to meet these requirements. DoD Instruction 1304.28 para. E3.1.7.

<sup>4</sup> From its founding, members of the Chaplaincy Corps have followed the policy of "perform or provide" whereby if a chaplain cannot perform the requested service, he or she provides the service by enlisting the help of a fellow chaplain. The onus of getting the job done is on the chaplain, not on the requester of services.

endorser for the North American Missionary Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. We are attaching a few questions you might consider asking Mr. Carver.

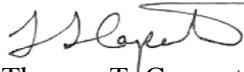
Thank you for your positive consideration of our request.

Very truly yours,

The Forum on the Military Chaplaincy



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