

**National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces**

**Annual Conference 12-15 January 2015**

*Serving Those Who Serve: Guarding Religious Free Exercise*

*Interactive Pluralism Workshop*

**Instructions:** The intent of this workshop is to give you the opportunity to engage with your fellow endorsers about the nature of pluralism and religious free exercise and conscience in American society and its impact on your work with your chaplains. Plan to spend about 10-15 minutes on each scenario. We suggest the following questions to begin with but be creative and let other questions inform your thinking. Designate one person at your table to briefly share the highlights of your discussion to the larger group at the end of the session.

1. What are the central issues involved in the scenario?
2. What course of action do you take? Why do you choose that course of action instead of another?
3. Is there a free exercise rights issue? If so, how do you address it? If there is a conflict between the free exercise rights of the parties involved, how do you ensure the best outcome for both parties? Is this important? Why?
4. Is there an establishment of religion issue? If so, how do you address it? If there is a conflict between establishment and free exercise rights, how do you balance the two?
5. How do the principles presented by Dr. McGraw inform your understanding of how to address the scenario?
6. Would you consider contacting other Endorsers in order to get their insights on the matter without violating the confidentiality of your chaplain? How would you use NCMAF to help?
7. What guidance would you provide your Chaplain to help him/her work through the challenge?

**Scenario 1:**

In the field in Afghanistan, a Christian chaplain, your endorsee, witnesses an officer making humorous remarks to all those present at a meal about a soldier declining to eat pork. Even though the officer knows the soldier is a Muslim, he goads the soldier with joking remarks – from his perspective, in good humor. Many present laugh – from their perspective, all in good fun. Others present, including Christians from various denominations also know that the soldier is a



Muslim and is prohibited by his religion from eating pork. They are uncomfortable with the situation, but do not feel that they can challenge the officer who outranks them. The Christian chaplain says and does nothing, as well. Later the situation comes to your attention through another source.

**Scenario 2:**

One of two Protestant chaplains assigned to a chapel are endorsed by your faith tradition. While the senior chaplain shares a common faith heritage he/she refuses to allow the junior chaplain, your endorsee, to preach and lead the congregation because of a difference of theology around issues of same-sex marriage. The senior chaplain feels that it is his/her religious obligation to prevent the congregation from being "corrupted/tainted" by your chaplain's false theology.

**Scenario 3:**

It comes to your attention that a Christian chaplain, your endorsee, carries around a notebook binder with a sticker on the front entitled "Enemies of Our Lord and Savior; 1 Corinthians 15:25" is visible to all who encounter the chaplain. You find out that the binder contains a list of people at the base who the chaplain believes stand in the way of the chaplain's efforts to evangelize soldiers who have not yet accepted Jesus.

**Scenario 4:**

A chaplain was asked to conduct mandatory unit training on the topic of suicide awareness and prevention. In addition to the standard content, at one point during the training he/she presented his/her own struggle with depression and how faith was a critical component of healing. On the handout he/she provided were traditional sources of information with some faith-based material on the reverse. A participant who felt that this was inappropriate given the context did not talk to the chaplain or chain of command but contacted an advocacy group who subsequently complained to the commander. The commander issued a letter of concern to the chaplain as their first course of action. The chaplain believes that their first amendment rights to both free speech and free exercise were violated and contacts you.