

# **Pathways to Military Chaplaincy**

Update: 7 January 2018

The purpose of Pathways is to advocate for specialized theological education for military ministry, and for future chaplain candidates who are fully competent to meet the diverse religious and spiritual needs of today's military service members, veterans, and their families.

The most recent meeting of the Pathways Leadership Team was on November 11, 2017 at the Williams Library in the Church of the Covenant, 67 Newbury St, Boston, MA. during the annual gathering of the American Academy of Religion.

The Pathways Leadership Team is made up of representatives from distinguished seminaries and schools of theology, including Boston University School of Theology, Brite Divinity School, Chicago Theological Seminary, Eden Seminary, and Iliff School of Theology.

Also, present and participating in the consultation, were representatives from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Hood Seminary, Princeton School of Theology, Seminary of the Southwest, Wesley Theological Seminary and the Forum on the Military Chaplaincy.

It was reported that the Seminary of the Southwest and Hood Seminary have now launched resident courses specializing in military chaplaincy. Pathways hopes other seminaries will follow in the paths of these institutions, recognizing the need for focused theological education and training for military chaplains.

Pathways is developing an academic resource page with teaching resources, syllabi, scholarly articles, and comprehensive bibliographies. The vehicle for this project is to be determined. Likely possibilities are Facebook, Google Groups, Google Docs, or using the Zoho Project Manager.

In addition to the academic resource page targeting faculty members, Pathways will be developing a Facebook interaction page for students,

faculty, military personnel and veterans. This page will allow participants to interact about various issues impacting the military chaplaincy, with particular interest in how the free exercise of religion is being both impeded and secured within the military.

Such projects will require funding and staffing to develop and curate these pages, such as a doctoral candidate in an affiliated school. Ideally, the candidate would be:

A Military veteran;

- Highly organized, and available ten hours per week for the first 3-4 months, then perhaps dropping to 5 hours weekly;
- Outgoing and persistent in reaching out to market the Pathway values and resources.
- Capable of translating the sometimes complex language of competing theologies into contemporary concerns of students preparing for military ministry.

Grant requests are to be submitted shortly to several Foundations to fund these undertakings.

The recent consultation was also briefed on current issues being discussed and/or addressed in the Military Chaplaincy, including:

- The age limit for accessioning Navy chaplains in high demand apparently increased from 42 to 50.
- More chaplains seem to be transitioning between reserve and active duty.
- The Army Chief of Chaplains has opined that some chaplains may not have sufficient background in preaching and congregational leadership in faith communities. There is a recognized need to strengthen the quality of military preaching, in addition to the widely recognized value-added benefits of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and Family Life. The Chief will now require chaplain candidates to have accrued two years of professional experience as leaders in communities of religion and faith. In addition, accessioning

applications may now require a twenty-minute video recording of the candidate's preaching.

- The Pathways Leadership Team expressed concern that the revised requirement for two years congregational "professional experience" requirement may privilege some traditions (Evangelical, for example) but disadvantage other traditions (like Buddhist and Christian Science). Prior to this policy change, clinical and institutional chaplaincy satisfied the Army's requirement for professional experience. Now, it may not. (Note: The Army Chief of Chaplains has not eliminated CPE requirements for selected specialized clinical assignments.)
- The Pathways Leadership Team is looking at future requirements for military chaplains, and whether competency in preaching and military chapel leadership will be a priority in ministry to millennials. Chapel attendance in CONUS is reportedly down, at least in part because military personnel and their families often go off installation for worship. In terms of ministry to millennials, the Pathways Leadership Team is evaluating essential academic and experiential preparation for military chaplains, i.e., CPE, institutional chaplaincy, congregational leadership, preaching skills, etc. (Note: CPE embraces and values pluralism and critical thinking skills, which seems to be eschewed by some conservative endorsers and their chaplains.)

Going forward, the Pathways Leadership Team will meet at the Society for Pastoral Theology in Decatur, Georgia, June 14 -16, 2018, as well as during the 2018 American Academy of Religion meeting in Denver.