

## CHAPTER IV

### PROJECT PHASE II: NAVY CHAPLAINS RESPOND

*“Provide for our own, facilitate the spiritual needs of others, and care for all.”*

A U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps motto

If the reflections from the Sea Service community in Phase I was the engine driving the train of the project, then Phase II was directed at the train’s crew. The Navy chaplains who were asked to participate in the project are the people charged with caring for the persons who wrote the reflections. It is the chaplains’ responsibility then to understand and respond to the needs of the communities that they serve. In order to understand the people in the community, the chaplain must first get to know the community, this why the reflections are so important. Phase II was comprised of essentially two steps. First, build a website that would contain the reflections written by the community where Navy chaplains would be sent to read and respond to the reflections. Secondly, recruit Navy chaplains willing to take part in the project. The purpose for this phase was to enable chaplains to examine their attitudes towards religious diversity and pluralism in the Sea Services. Chaplains who agreed to take part in the project were asked to visit the website, take a five-question “pre-test,” read the reflections, and then take a five-question “post-test.” This chapter follows the same format as chapter three, with a description of the Phase II website, the recruitment of the chaplains, and the responses of the chaplains themselves.

#### **The Phase II Website**

The website for Phase II introduced chaplains to the intent of the project and invited them to examine their own beliefs and attitudes, at the same time they were looking at the reflections offered

by the community. Each chaplain was asked to take a five-question “pre-test” that would help the chaplain explore his/her motivation for becoming a Navy chaplain and the consequent joys and struggles s/he had encountered along the way. It was believed that chaplains, along with rabbis, imams, priests, shamans, and other titles of religious/faith group leaders, must from time to time examine the reasons for their entering the ranks of the professional clergy class.

In addition to the four questions that looked at the motivation and reaction to ministry as a Navy Chaplain, the chaplains were asked to define some of the commonly used terms in the Chaplain Corps.<sup>1</sup> Each of these terms is discussed at length during the initial training chaplains receive at the Navy Chaplain School in Newport, Rhode Island. The chaplain may also expect to encounter these terms throughout their career in such diverse forums as the Corps’ magazine, *Throughout and Beyond*, the official Chaplain Corps website, <http://www.chaplain.navy.mil/>, the Chief of Chaplains’ White Papers and through attendance at Professional Development Training Courses (PDTC) and workshops (PDTW). These terms, Pluralism, Civil Religion, Meaningful Worship, Free Exercise of Religion, Faith, and “Cooperation without Compromise” are at the heart of the current struggle within the Corps over the interaction between faith and duty of Navy chaplains.

Following the reading of the reflections, chaplains were directed to respond to a set of follow-up questions. These questions were designed to gauge the impact that reading these diverse reflections would have on chaplains, as well as what, if any, changes they could foresee taking place in the manner that their ministry was conducted.

### **Recruiting the Chaplains**

In talking with Navy chaplains, it would appear that all too often what is of primary concern is the next assignment or billet or, in some cases, the previous billet. This involves the chance to

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<sup>1</sup> Glossary, page 250.

develop that career path that leads to the next promotion and the next rung on the ladder of success. What comes up at meetings of chaplains with alarming infrequency is the lack of mention of the communities of faith that are being served. For if the formation of communities of faith is a primary issue, and a deep and heartfelt concern to all those in ministry, then it is even more so an issue and a concern for those in ministry in the Sea Services. It was for this purpose that this project was envisioned, to enable the chaplains in the Sea Services to take the next step in the formation of and ministry in and with the people of the community.

It would be difficult to provide an accurate number of the chaplains who were contacted either directly by myself or in the course of the recruitment effort. The effort began while I was at the Naval Hospital at Camp Lejeune (NHCL), North Carolina. I began with the two chaplains I was working with at that time, both of who were senior to me in rank. The difficulty I had in recruiting both reflection writers and chaplain reviewers is illustrated in stark terms with the reaction I had from these two chaplains. My relationship with these chaplains was excellent, and our working together had accomplished much in the way of positive ministry within the command. Their initial support for this project was unreserved, and the work on the Doctor of Ministry degree would not have gotten as far as it did without them. One of these chaplains even accepted my invitation to join the Lay Advisory Team. Despite their initial enthusiasm of the project, following my departure from NHCL in February 2004, their participation ended. Neither of the chaplains responded to the offer to write reflections, nor did they participate in the reviews of the reflections. Neither recruited any writers from the command or through other contacts in the area, nor were other chaplains recruited for the effort either at Camp Lejeune or elsewhere in the Chaplain Corps.

The contact with chaplains elsewhere resulted in similar responses. One Advisory Team member, a chaplain assigned to Camp Lejeune, invited all chaplains at Camp Lejeune area commands to participate either as writers of reflections or as chaplain reviewers. This was an important

component, as there were a number of chaplains in that area who were participants in the lawsuit against the Navy and the Chaplain Corps alleging religious discrimination among other charges.<sup>2</sup>

That there are several lawsuits working their way through the courts at this time is a glaring example of the fact that the Corps is not the unified body that those outside of the institution may perceive it to be.<sup>3</sup>

It was hoped that these chaplains would leap at the chance to share their thoughts, and it was more than disappointing, it was shocking that none took part. I felt that to have chaplains who had felt discriminated against for religious reasons to take part in the project was an important component. These chaplains would be in an ideal position to understand and advocate for the inclusion of those persons excluded from the discussion of religious freedom and practice. After all, that appeared to me to be at the core of their arguments, that the Corps had for too long ignored their voices. I wanted to ensure that the chaplain participants reflected the diversity present in the Corps, as I had hoped to achieve in the recruitment of folks to write the faith reflections.

Every Navy chaplain whom I knew personally was asked repeatedly either in person or via email to take part in either of the first two phases of this project. A few responded with apologies of varying sorts, though most responded with silence. It cannot be denied that Navy chaplains are busy people; it is the nature of the profession that there is never a “down time.” And yet, it seemed puzzling that so few felt that this topic was worthy of their interest or time. Even the introduction of the (Navy) Chief of Chaplains White Papers in December 2003, the first three of which dealt with the very topics with which I was concerned failed to illicit any response for the project from the Corps.

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<sup>2</sup> This is discussed in Chapter I.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of this facet of the Corps may be found at *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2001, Vol. 45, Issue 7, page 19. Lieutenant Commander Dave Wilder, who is the subject of this article and was assigned as a chaplain to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, at the same time I was, was asked to participate in the project by myself and by a member of my Lay Advisory Group. He never responded to our repeated requests. Other litigants living in the Camp Lejeune area were also asked to take part with a similar non-response.

Following the gathering of the reflections in the spring of 2004, a chaplain from every one of the more than eighty faith groups<sup>4</sup> currently on active duty was contacted via an email invitation. It was hoped that by contacting this diverse group of chaplains, I would be able to gather together insights from a dazzling array of faith traditions. In addition to making sure that every faith group was given the chance to participate, I re-invited every chaplain with whom I had already made contact, to ensure that they knew the project was still going and their participation was needed. In this effort alone, more than 150 chaplains were contacted. Again, the result was mostly silence from the Corps. Of the 150 plus chaplains who were contacted in this effort, only five responded with negative replies and only one gave a positive reply.

Each year, a PDTC is conducted for Navy chaplains; the one I attended in May 2004, was at the Naval Support Activity in Naples, Italy. Thirty chaplains, the senior Chaplain Corps Detailer (the individual responsible for making the assignments), and the Chief of Chaplains himself attended this conference. It was an opportunity to reach chaplains in a different setting. I was given the opportunity to speak to the assembled chaplains and made my pitch, which I did with as much enthusiasm as I could muster. Six chaplains responded from that effort, and their comments as well as the other five chaplains who took part in Phase II, are to be found in Appendix B<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Chaplains Respond**

It cannot be overstated that the failure of chaplains to take an interest in this project was disappointing, but it is simply appalling that given the opportunity to engage in an activity that has not only professional dimensions but spiritual dimensions, more chaplains could not be bothered to take the time to read and respond to the reflections. Of the several hundred Navy chaplains who were

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<sup>4</sup> There was one faith group in the Chaplain Corps that was not directly asked to participate. This was not done to exclude this group, but rather because the Deputy Chief of Chaplains was the sole representative of this faith group; it would not have been appropriate for me to contact him directly.

<sup>5</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, page 205.

contacted, only a few had, what I considered, legitimate reasons for not taking part, e.g., they were deployed to Iraq. Some declined to participate, citing supervisory responsibilities or their other duties were such that they did not have time to read the reflections. But the simple fact is that too many, the majority of who were contacted, simply could not be bothered to read what the community had to say or to assist a fellow chaplain with an educational project. That the chaplains who were contacted did not seek to get members of either their personal contacts or military faith community to write a reflection was frustrating enough, but to receive such a dismissive response from so many members of the Chaplain Corps ran smack into one of the central concerns that the project sought to address. If anything, this response shows that there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done in this area among the members of the Chaplain Corps. The response to this project reveals an indifference on the part of many chaplains to helping their fellow chaplains. Why this is the case and how to turn that indifference into caring is the work of another project.

The demographic information supplied by the chaplains matches the skewed responses of the faith reflections and should not be given to represent an authentic picture of the Chaplain Corps.

**Ethnic Group:** This group of chaplains was of limited ethnic diversity, with eight Caucasians and three African-Americans. The conspicuous absence of chaplains who are Hispanic or Asian American was frustrating, as it limited the reach of the project.

**Gender:** The genders were also not represented in true numbers, with nine of the eleven responses coming from male chaplains. It should be noted that while the role and influence of female chaplains has grown tremendously over the past twenty-five years, they still represent a relatively small number of the total Chaplain Corps.

**Faith Group:** The eleven chaplains who did respond were members who demonstrated the diversity of the Corps well enough with the following faith groups represented: United Methodist, Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), National Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian Church USA,

Pentecostal Holiness Church, Southern Baptist, American Baptist, and the Episcopal Church. It is unfortunate that none of the Jewish chaplains responded, including the Naval Reserve rabbi who had agreed to be on my Advisory Team. One Muslim chaplain had agreed to take part in this phase of the project, although in the end, he too failed to come through with either a Phase I reflection or Phase II review.

**Age:** The age of chaplains tends to be older than the average member of the officer corps due to many factors. Chief among these is the fact that most chaplains enter the ministry at an older age, it being their second and sometimes third career. In addition to the lengthy requirements for Master's degrees and parish experience, many chaplains are, in fact, over thirty; many are approaching forty when they enter into the Fleet. Of the eleven chaplains, only one was under thirty; four were under forty; five were under fifty; one was over fifty.

**Billet type:** Of the eleven chaplains responding, eight were assigned to Navy units and three with Marines. As to the billets themselves, only one was a Navy operational unit,<sup>6</sup> and none of the responding chaplains was with an operational Marine Corps unit.

### **The Responses**

The pre-test questions were designed to illicit from the chaplains their thoughts about their personal motivations for becoming a Navy chaplain, for doing ministry in the Sea Services, and challenges encountered in the course of the time in their chaplaincy setting. Finally, chaplains were asked to help define some of the terms that chaplains are apt to find used in religious and professional literature, in discussions with other Navy chaplains, and in their work in the Fleet. When speaking with chaplains face-to-face about their call to ministry in general and to the military setting, in

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<sup>6</sup> The term "Operational Unit" refers to combat-orientated units. For the Navy, it refers primarily to ships and Naval aviation units. For the Marines, it is the ground combat units, armor, artillery and infantry, as well as the Marine Corps aviation units.

particular, one is struck by the earnestness of the responses. Most chaplains and their civilian counterparts speak about the call of God to the ministry and of their struggle to accept that God may, indeed, have a task for them. The call to ministry is challenging enough and requires much in the way of soul searching and discernment before one is able to, with boldness, proclaim that God is, indeed, working in that individual's life and now is prompting a change in vocation. When asked to describe the process/reasons for becoming a Navy chaplain, it was interesting to note that all eleven chaplains spoke in terms of "...the reason and process was totally a "God-thing"<sup>7</sup> for becoming a Navy chaplain. One would, of course, expect that chaplains would have this mindset for entering the ministry. To change vocational settings from the civilian setting to the military requires a significant leap of faith.

For these eleven chaplains, the call to ordained ministry was such that there was never a question of serving God, but where? To this group of chaplains, a strong case could be made that there was never really was a time in their journey when the call to ministry was not going to include the military setting as the next phase for ministry. Each chaplain describes the circuitous route to the Navy chaplaincy, which typically included the road blocks that are placed in their way, the life choices they had previously made, and the always mysterious "hand of God" that blocks one path, only to open another. Examples of this include Chaplain #2 who was serving God as a missionary, and when the doors to that field were closed, the Navy was seen as an alternative because "God just dumped it in my lap..." Another example would be Chaplain #4 who was offered a Naval ROTC scholarship, only to find that the program did not allow for the study of religion.<sup>8</sup> Feeling the call to ministry was stronger than the call to the sea, this chaplain entered the ministry and served as a parish pastor for

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix B, Question 1, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #9, page 206.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix B, Question 1, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #2, page 205.

fourteen years, before God placed before the chaplain an opportunity for him to serve in another setting, the Sea Services.<sup>9</sup> Each of the chaplains offers a similar tale, a story that relies on God's direction to a field that they feel well equipped to till.

When asked how their faith influences the ministry they provide, the faith of this group of chaplains bursts forth as the sole source and authority for the ministry that they have been called to perform as Navy chaplains. They start their answers to this question with the following comments, such as "My faith very much influences the ministry I provide."<sup>10</sup> "My faith controls my ministry completely."<sup>11</sup> "I serve at God's will."<sup>12</sup> One catches a glimpse of the powerful pull that the Gospel<sup>13</sup> has on their lives, upon their work, and the yearning they have to share that Good News with others. Of course, they each understand that their role is not only to minister to the Christians in their communities, but to all of God's children, wherever they might be and whatever they might call themselves. In one sense, it is their personal faith in Jesus Christ that permits them to offer themselves and their faith as a witness to the community. It is not what one calls themselves that matters so much, as that they are called by God. Without exception for these chaplains, it is the knowledge that all people are children of God.

When asked to describe the hardest part about being a Navy chaplain, these chaplains offered a unique perspective on the issues facing them in this challenging profession. Among these insights were three chaplains who mentioned the personal price chaplains and, indeed, all ministers pay in

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix B, Question 1, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #4, page 205.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix B, Question 2, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #2, page 208.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix B, Question 2, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #4, page 208.

<sup>12</sup> Appendix B, Question 2, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #10, page 209.

<sup>13</sup> Each of these eleven chaplains identified him or herself as a Christian.

their work.<sup>14</sup> It is a well-known axiom of ministry that building friendships while working in a pastoral role is not only challenging, it is very difficult. Where this concerns chaplains is that, as in parish work, being a chaplain is a twenty-four-hour-a-day job. There is no one with whom they come into contact in the course of a typical day that is not part of the military community. Hence, everyone with whom the chaplain might strike up a friendship is part of the military community the chaplain is serving. The chaplain must take great care to maintain the professional and personal decorum that enables the task of caring for people to be accomplished. Blur those boundaries, and the chaplain risks tainting the professional decorum that is expected.

Another factor to be considered is that the chaplain is also a Naval officer. While the chaplain does have a great deal of flexibility in moving between the ranks, given the pastoral role; the fact remains that the Navy is a rank-conscious institution. The regulations that govern the lives of those in the Sea Services still maintain a strict demarcation between ranks, even within the officer corps. While chaplains are expected to be involved in the lives of their communities, they must still adhere to the Navy policies on fraternization. Likewise, a chaplain might wish to have a friendship with another officer, but those who are senior or junior in rank to the chaplain are inhibited by the regulations from establishing anything more than a professional relationship. That leaves only those of similar rank, and the chaplain typically is not seen as the person with whom the rank and file officer typically wants to befriend. That this observation is made here should not be surprising as a similar example may be made in the personal lives of civilian clergy. The reasons for this condition are many. Suffice it to say that the chaplain's role as the moral and ethical advisor to the command, Navy regulations, access to the chain of command, attitudes towards religion in general or religious professionals in particular, and the religious orientation of the chaplain's profession: all contribute to this attitude on the part of the community members.

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<sup>14</sup> Appendix B, Pre & Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 3, Chaplains #1, 2 and 4, page 209-210.

A significant revelation that arose from this question came from the responses from four of the chaplains, who made reference to the politics and the lack of cooperation between chaplains.<sup>15</sup> The lack of response to this project is but one example of how chaplains do not, despite the slogans and efforts from “on high,” work and play well together. As Chaplain #9 states so clearly: “The hardest thing for me is the lack of cooperation and spirit of teamwork from some within the Chaplain Corps. We preach love and acceptance of a loving God but fail to exhibit this same quality as chaplains toward one another.”<sup>16</sup> An example of this professional indifference to their fellow chaplains made be found in pages of the forum set up to dialogue about the Navy Chief of Chaplain’s White Papers. In the nine months since the release of the first white paper in December 2003, only thirty-five chaplains responded, with 130 postings, to the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their fellow chaplains, over some of the most significant issues to face the Corps since its inception in 1775.<sup>17</sup>

All Navy chaplains are expected to adhere to the tenets of their faith group; that is a given. They are also expected to be able to function in a pluralistic environment and, as stated in the Code of Ethics for Military Chaplains, they must recognize that their obligation is to provide for the free exercise of religion for ministry to all members of the military services and their families. Chaplains must come to terms with this, while retaining integrity with regards to their own faith and beliefs. This is the core of the conflict over the chaplains’ role. The eleven chaplains who responded, all from different Christian tribes, spoke about a sense of excitement that comes from reaching people where they are at the various points in their own journeys that gives military chaplaincy a flavor and a

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 3, Chaplains #6, 8, 9, and 10, page 210.

<sup>16</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 3, Chaplains #9 and 10, page 210.

<sup>17</sup> The first three White Papers dealt with the topics relevant to this paper: *Constitutional Foundations for Military Ministry, The Call, the Endorsement, the Oath, American Religious Pluralism, and Cooperative Ministry in the United States Sea Services*. The Chief of Chaplains has taken it upon himself to promote an environment where dialogue between chaplains is of paramount importance.

passion different than that found in the civilian faith community. “I will do whatever it is I can do to facilitate the meeting of their religious needs.”<sup>18</sup> “Those requests are frequent and an important part of my ministry.”<sup>19</sup> “I have responded to requests for prayer and services from many faith groups.”<sup>20</sup> These comments highlight the cornerstone of this group of chaplains’ approach to ministry in the Sea Services.

However, it is more than that. Being open to the needs of others does not, in any way, imply that one ceases to act upon the beliefs that are at one’s core. Rather, it is because those core beliefs are so solid, that chaplains are able to reach out to others in love and humility, seeing the needs of others as their own. Chaplain #6 said it best: “When we DO NOT respond to people—with or without faith—we make our ministry about US. This casts a poor light on our commitment to decrease while he increases.”<sup>21</sup> Chaplain #6 is a Christian who sees the role of being a Christian as one of expressing Christ’s love for people where they are, not where we would have them. To see ministry to these “others” as somehow beneath us, then we who are Christians deny the One in whose name we are called and sent. We must respond to people, with or without faith, so that we make our ministry about them, and Him.

The final segment of the “pre-test” was to ask the chaplains to consider several terms that are part and parcel of the discussion before them and the Navy Chaplain Corps and to offer their own definitions. The terms or phrases used were pluralism, civil religion, meaningful worship, free exercise of religion, “cooperation without compromise,” and faith. The thoughts offered by the chaplain respondents made some significant contributions to my understanding of these critical terms

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<sup>18</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplain #2, page 211.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplain #4, page 211.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplain #8, page 212.

<sup>21</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplain #6, page 211.

and phrases and are included in the definitions in the Glossary.<sup>22</sup> I chose these five terms because, in the reading of the Chief of Chaplains' White Papers, articles relating to the lawsuits against the Corps, and other material that I encountered during the research phase of this project, it appeared to me that these terms are be at the heart of the formation of a new understanding of Navy chaplains the Chaplain Corps. It is important, that within any institution, that the members of that community have a common language. The Chaplain Corps, which is comprised of more than eighty distinct faith communities, must strive towards, at the very least, an awareness that there is more than one way to interpret these terms. This project is one small step towards that effort.

To begin this section, *pluralism*<sup>23</sup> was given as the first term to define. I believe that the general consensus of this group of Navy chaplains is that pluralism allows for or encourages tolerance of beliefs and practices. Chaplains are to embody the belief offered by President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. "Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather, it condemns the oppression or persecution of others." This tolerance comes in many forms, but from the stance of a Navy chaplain, it means "the practice of being able to work with persons from varied backgrounds to provide a comprehensive ministry to all."<sup>24</sup> It is important in reading these definitions to remember that all eleven chaplains who responded are Christians and that their understanding of pluralism hinges on a pragmatic approach to ministry in a setting that is seemingly at odds with the traditions and beliefs of the individual chaplain. Seeking to engage in a unique ministry setting, these chaplains must come to terms with their role in two institutions that do not always agree with the form, style or intended results of the ministry that is presented in the Sea Services.

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<sup>22</sup> Glossary, page 250.

<sup>23</sup> Glossary, page 252.

<sup>24</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 1), Chaplain #10, page 213.

It is seeing their ministry in a comprehensive fashion that allows these chaplains to function in a setting vastly different from that for which they had been trained. For example, Chaplain #2 states “Pluralism to me is the state in which varying religious viewpoints co-exist in harmony for a purpose outside of each of their respective messages.”<sup>25</sup> While perhaps harmony might be a bit of a reach, given the internal conflicts within the Navy Chaplain Corps, it is certainly something that chaplains can strive for in their presentation of the Divine to the Sea Service community. A contrasting position is offered by Chaplain #1 who states, “I’m not a pluralist or even much of an ecumenist... I see pluralism not so much in theological terms but rather in terms of social policy.”<sup>26</sup> Seeing the actions of chaplains as the institution sees these actions reveals that this chaplain is fully aware of the conflict between the right and left side of the collar and has chosen to respond with a realist’s response. Clearly this chaplain would prefer to chose a more firmer position that reflects his faith beliefs, but given that his ministry to God’s people has led him into a setting where some of these people do not care about his beliefs, he realizes that to be a Navy chaplain means that sometimes one must bend to the system if one wants to do the good that can be done for those who are a part of it.

The terms “*civil religion*” and “*civic religion*” send many a chaplain reaching for the solace of some imagined place of theological purity. This term refers to a task that many chaplains struggle with, which is the need to provide ministry in settings that do not contain an overtly religious meaning. Chaplains will say that in the parish everything they did was part of their faith community, but this simply is not so. Speaking from personal experience, particularly in small communities, a pastor is every bit as much a civic figure as he/she is a religious figure. Chaplains are expected to provide spiritual comfort, religious services, and moral guidance, all from a personal understanding

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<sup>25</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 1), Chaplain #2, page 212.

<sup>26</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 1), Chaplain #1, page 212.

based on a particular faith experience. The challenge then comes when this same chaplain is expected to provide a similar pastoral presence in settings or situations that are not inherently religious in form or substance. “A generic act of worship which may or may not provide any real meaningful worship”<sup>27</sup> is how Chaplain #9 describes his role in these ceremonies and events. Examples of these ceremonies or events of a civil nature that chaplains will find themselves experiencing are change of commands, graduations at training commands, national holidays, and briefings.

Chaplains are often expected to participate in events with which they find their own beliefs to be in conflict. The reasons for this conflict are that the chaplain is there to meet the State’s needs along with the needs of the individual member of the community. Why does the State desire the chaplain’s presence at these events? “I think of this as the nation’s or state’s way of invoking the Divine blessing on its existence and its actions and conceiving of God as being somehow interested in and guiding the affairs of the state.”<sup>28</sup> It is this interaction between a governing body and the members of that body that chaplains are expected to move at ease. All members of a community have responsibilities and have a vested interest in the unity that derives from a civil relationship. Chaplains are the reminder to the body politic that we are each entitled to our own individual beliefs, but we also have a responsibility to each other and to the collective whole. Chaplains who forget this duality are doomed to experience frustration and rejection as the State seeks those who can provide this service, with the least amount of disruption. It is possible to practice civil religion and faith-based religion simultaneously, but it requires more than occasional practice.

The term “*meaningful worship*” is a completely subjective term and is open to interpretation at many levels. For the purpose of this project, the chaplains who are charged by two institutions with seeing that it is both defined and accomplished define the term. How difficult this task is will be seen

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<sup>27</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 2), Chaplain #9, page 214.

<sup>28</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 2), Chaplain #8, page 214.

later in the paper in Appendix C.<sup>29</sup> It is necessary to first define what is worship and then to attempt to articulate what makes worship meaningful. Both components are addressed in the answers given by the chaplains, although to say that a completely satisfactory answer is given would be in error.

When asked to describe what “meaningful worship” was, these eleven chaplains quickly responded with the understanding that this was not a difficult concept at all, but rather one that every pastor deals with. Every one of the responses touched on the fact that meaningful worship is meaningful when it changes the worshipper and directly connects that person with the subject of the worship service, namely God. When this term was included in the list, I had anticipated that chaplains would use this as an opportunity to speak about style, denominational preferences or their own preferences. What was submitted is highlighted in Chaplain #7’s response, when he states that meaningful worship is “an encounter with God in community that engages my sensory, intellectual, spiritual and physical being.”<sup>30</sup> Meaningful worship is not what I prefer, but rather that which brings people into a closer understanding and connection with God, that is, those acts which serve to transform people into vessels of God’s presence. To say one is having meaningful worship is to say that it does not happen only in certain places or at certain times, but can happen and does happen wherever people and God connect.<sup>31</sup>

At first glance, the term “*free exercise of religion*” would appear to be the simplest to define and the source of the least amount of controversy. However, as is seen in these eleven responses provided by the chaplains, there is room for interpretation. How one engages in this practice of freely exercising their religious rights can and does leave room for controversy. The First Amendment to

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<sup>29</sup> Appendix C, One Navy Chaplain’s Experience, page 224.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 3), Chaplain #7, page 215.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 3), Chaplain #6, page 215.

the U.S. Constitution states in part “Congress shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion (the “establishment clause”) or the free exercise thereof (the “free exercise clause).”<sup>32</sup> It may sound simple, and yet, the debate over what the government may or may not do in support or hindrance to religious rights and practices has raged on unabated since the inception of the Bill of Rights. Navy chaplains are representatives of particular faith groups who are employed by the Federal government and permitted to engage in religious activities in government buildings, using government money on government time because as Chaplain #4 puts it “the very constitutional reason I exist, (*is*) to facilitate the freedom of religion of our service members.”<sup>33</sup>

As has already been alluded to elsewhere in this paper, Navy chaplains wear two emblems on their uniforms that depict the dual responsibility Navy chaplains bear to both church and state. They wear an insignia of their rank in the military that indicates their commitment to the Constitution and the people of the United States. They also wear an emblem of their faith group that indicates their commitment to its beliefs. In the Navy, the chaplain is the physical reminder to the commander (and to others in the community) that the State is there not merely to enforce political aims via military means against our enemies, but to secure and protect the rights of its citizens, even if it means from the State.<sup>34</sup> “Sometimes I sense that chaplains are more concerned about their own personal right of religious expression without being concerned about the other’s rights as well” summarizes where this term causes the most conflict for Navy chaplains.<sup>35</sup> This leads directly into the next term, “cooperation without compromise.”

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<sup>32</sup> David E. Guinn, *Faith on Trial: Communities of Faith, the First Amendment, and the Theory of Deep Diversity*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002, page 1.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 4), Chaplain #4, page 215.

<sup>34</sup> What is meant here is that the chaplain, as an employee of the State, is also there to ensure that the State does not forget to protect the members of the community from the power of the State.

<sup>35</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 4), Chaplain #1, page 215.

The Navy Chaplain Corps has as one of its mottos the phrase, “cooperation without compromise.”<sup>36</sup> The response to this phrase overflows with diverse opinions as to its meanings and uses. As it was explained to me during the Chaplain’s Basic Course, chaplains are expected to cooperate with other chaplains and with those with whom they are in ministry with without compromising their core beliefs. Again, it sounds simple in theory, but then we do not live in such an idyllic land, do we? The chaplains who responded to this question held that cooperation is a virtue, that to work with others in the “effort to respectfully co-labor with persons of divergent religious perspectives while remaining true to one’s own for the benefit of the common community or institution” is a prayer-filled endeavor,<sup>37</sup> and one to which chaplains must commit themselves to with all their heart and mind and soul. Unfortunately, for some chaplains to cooperate implies compromising their core beliefs and practices. To these “Chaplains who consider compromise a “black mark” (they) are probably best left for the local parish and not a military/industrial vocation.”<sup>38</sup>

For most chaplains, this issue is largely a benign one. Most Navy chaplains report never having been pressured to offer ministry to a group they were unable to minister or compromise a tenet of their faith. Some have reported such pressure though, and to these brothers and sisters, the military and religious institutions must seek to protect and support in strong and perceptible ways. It is indefensible that there have been instances of pressure and expectations of compromise.

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<sup>36</sup> Glossary, page 251.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplain #7, page 216.

<sup>38</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplain #6, page 216.

What the Corps can do to prevent such abuses from occurring or to reform itself is the subject of legal action.<sup>39</sup> What individual chaplains can do is to simply get along with each other in the spirit of the faith that each chaplain holds dear. If the community sees Navy chaplains not supporting other chaplains in their religious beliefs and practices, then how realistic is it to ask the community to trust chaplains and to respect the community's religious beliefs and practices? "Working under this vision requires immense patience, broad-mindedness and a fundamental respect for each person and faith tradition."<sup>40</sup> Sounds simple, right?

The final term the chaplains were asked to consider is the one that people must come to deal with at some point in their lives, *faith*. This term was the recipient of the shortest answers, and the one for whom chaplains were able to offer as insight into their own spiritual journeys. What is faith? Two of the chaplains turn to the Bible, quoting Hebrews 11:1 "It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen"<sup>41</sup> is how they come to understand that which cannot be seen. Others expressed it in more academic fashion, saying, "faith is choosing to subscribe to a system of thoughts and ideas that are not readily provable or significantly evident."<sup>42</sup>

However it is expressed, faith is for each chaplain a crucial element of the ministry and the vocation of a chaplain. It would be wrong to neglect the mention that faith in God is not the same thing as saying one has faith in others or even in "the system." To experience a loss of faith in the system in which one is engaged does not imply that one has lost faith in God; indeed, it is only through faith in God that one is able to experience faith in a meaningful fashion.

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<sup>39</sup> This legal action is dealt with in Chapter I. The first case major case involving a non-liturgical chaplain suing the Navy is *Sturm vs. United States*. For a glimpse at the issues involved, see *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2001, Vol. 45, Issue 7, page 19.

<sup>40</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplain #8, page 216.

<sup>41</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 6), Chaplains #3 and #4, page 217.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 6), Chaplain #2, page 217.

It would also appear that Navy chaplains, like other people engaged in helping professions, have a tendency to get so wrapped up in the task of helping others that they forget why they got into the vocation in the first place. It is essential for chaplains to pay particular attention to their own faith journey and to tend to it with a particular and peculiar zeal. Faith is real, and a real part of the chaplains' art. Like any other art, it must be practiced and shared to have any real value.

Following the reading of the sixty reflections, a task that one chaplain noted was a rather daunting task, the chaplains were asked to respond to five additional "post-test" questions, designed to gauge the impact the reflections had on the readers. The first question asked was what, if any, changes might occur in the chaplain's ministry as a result of reading the reflections. Each chaplain responded that there would be no change. This was something of a surprise at first; after all, how could such diverse stories not have an impact on one's ministry? However, the chaplains who read these reflections are the chaplains who have been inclined to participate in a wider understanding of ministry all along. These reflections merely reinforced their understanding of the role they play in the Sea Service community. Chaplain #8 comments, "I'm already about as pluralistic as I need to be in my vocation and my life."<sup>43</sup> This chaplain voices the belief seen in the other chaplain's responses, that requests people made to him (or the other chaplains) will be treated equally, regardless of the starting point of the person making the request. They did not appear to feel any need for extensive elaboration on that point, save one.

Chaplain #1 gave a lengthy answer that touches on the sensitivity that this issue has for many Christian chaplains. While acknowledging that everything that can be done will be done to offer support to a person's needs and rights to free expression, this chaplain stresses that there are some things that cannot be accommodated, simply as a matter of conscience or for theological reasons.

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<sup>43</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 1, Chaplain #8, page 219.

“I sense that trying to build a faith community out of so many divergent perspectives on faith and pluralism would be impossible...I do not endorse wholesale ecumenism since I believe it robs spirituality of a basic element: a faith that is centered on the person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>44</sup> There is a clear tension between “wholesale ecumenism” and the orthodox belief with which this and many other chaplains must wrestle. How does one embrace the seemingly divergent beliefs that all are acceptable and “my way is The Way?” Chaplain #1 answers this dilemma with an honest assessment of where many chaplains stand: “I can’t be ALL things to ALL people, but I can be MORE things to MORE people than I currently am!”<sup>45</sup>

A difficult concept for some chaplains to understand, at least initially, is that there will be constant interaction with members of other faith groups. When one is immersed in the teachings and practices of a certain belief system, then it is challenging, to say the least, to accept, tolerate, and even respect other belief systems. Chaplain #8 perhaps offers the clearest assessment of the changes faced by many chaplains in this respect. As a chaplain with more than twenty-five years in uniform, Chaplain #8 has seen his beliefs and attitudes move from a toleration of others outside of his faith group to include other Protestants and to include other Christians, including Roman Catholics. Eventually this experience with other faiths has led to toleration for other theistic religions and respect for these others in the Fleet. Gradually, this toleration has extended to other “world religions,” although respect is noted to still be a ways off.<sup>46</sup> If one can enter into an institution such as the Sea Services and emerge after any length of time with the same beliefs as one had upon entering, then the questions must be asked: Just what were you doing with your time, and who did you encounter along your journey? Others we meet on our pilgrimage change us. Only the foolish would

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<sup>44</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 1, Chaplain #1, page 218.

<sup>45</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 1, Chaplain #1, page 218.

<sup>46</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 2, Chaplain #8, page 220.

deny someone else's worth and not learn from those experiences and beliefs encountered along the way.

This chaplain, as well as many others, assumes an interesting position. He notes that while he tolerates others, he still does not feel able to respect those with differing views. Respect is seen as equality among equals, and for people with an exclusive claim on the divine truth, to respect other beliefs implies that they are equally valid. This is something that these chaplains cannot bring themselves to accept. When toleration is used, it must be understood to recognize this imbalance of power. Many people of faith, and this would hold true for most people, believe that they have a corner on the truth market and that their role is to help the lost find the true path. To tolerate another assumes a position of power, of some form of superiority over another. Those with power tolerate those with less power. There is seldom respect between the two levels of power. To tolerate another does not mean that I respect him or her. It becomes the challenge for all, and for chaplains in particular, to move beyond the starting point of recognizing others, to tolerating them, and then to respecting them. However, it is a challenge that must be accepted and met.

All chaplains, at some point in their careers, if they stay in for more than a single tour, will find themselves preaching to a wider community of faith than they may have realized was possible when they began their ministry career. Many chaplains would find it challenging to offer a message based on the reflections they read in this project, although three of the chaplains who did read them did attempt to offer a summary to an imagined congregation. Chaplain #10, in a sermon titled "Love Sincerely From a Pure Heart Point," says that "My positive response to others is 1) a Reflection of God's work in me; 2) an opportunity to share the love of God. 3) An opportunity to practice my own faith. 4) Creates an opportunity for further dialogue for ministry... A right response to God will bring right response in others.<sup>47</sup> We are given an amazing opportunity to share our beliefs with others;

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<sup>47</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 3, Chaplain #10, page 221.

they, of course, have the same opportunity to share with us what they believe. When chaplains speak of their response to God in their lives, they must understand that the community already knows what God is doing or not doing, simply by watching them and their actions. Before a word is ever spoken or a passage of scripture is read, the message or sermon has already been preached. The only question that remains is will the community hear a positive response to God or a negative one?

One such place where the community sees a potential for response is in the assistance offered to individuals of other faith groups. Each chaplain stated that they were usually comfortable meeting the needs of others and, in fact, had frequently been asked to do so. An area that frequently comes up for discussion is sacramental acts (as these differ among faith groups) and weddings. Balancing the needs of the individual and the pastoral obligations of the chaplain is an on-going struggle for many in this group of chaplains. The one group that often appears to make these chaplains, and others in the Sea Service community, uncomfortable is the Wiccan faith group. Chaplain #8, who had expressed a growing toleration for members of other faiths in the previous question, came back in this question to offer his own struggle. When approached about facilitating a sailor's Wiccan beliefs, the chaplain balked, objecting "...on the grounds of the vows of my ordination and my Christian conscience."<sup>48</sup>

As the U.S. Code and Navy Instructions attest, even Wiccans get to benefit from the their chaplains. This simply means that for the Wiccan service member, the benefit comes from the fact that their chaplain is there to ensure the free exercise of religion. A Wiccan who comes with a request for help in a religious question, for counseling or any other need from his or her chaplain expects to be afforded the same level of support that would be provided to members of the chaplain's

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<sup>48</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 4, Chaplain #8, page 222.

own faith community. What the chaplain gets out of the encounter is up to the chaplain. Perhaps it is the knowledge that the chaplain has helped a shipmate is enough.

Having struggled through deployments, obstinate fellow chaplains, indifferent or hostile commanders, and their own faith journeys, the chaplains were lastly asked what advice they would give a civilian counterpart considering the Navy as a place to do ministry. With all they know and have experienced, each of the chaplains would set off on the journey as a Navy chaplain again, without hesitation, and would encourage others to do likewise. Of course, there are some conditions and some things that these chaplains felt that prospective chaplains would need to understand about what they were getting into, but still they want others to know the amazing ministry that awaits them in the Sea Services. While being a chaplain is not for everyone, as it requires a degree of theological flexibility some might have problems with, "...those tensions are worth bearing in order to have the opportunity to influence people for Christ."<sup>49</sup> However, says Chaplain #8, "...abandon the idea that the Navy is hiring you to be a Lutheran, Methodist Catholic, Jewish (denominational) chaplain. Such a thing does not exist in the Navy."<sup>50</sup>

Every chaplain one encounters in the Fleet has their own unique reasons for seeking this setting in which to engage in the practice of ministry. Regardless of the chaplain's faith group, there is work to be done. Is it possible to be a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, and a Buddhist and still be a chaplain? Indeed it is, for as chaplain #10 offered, "It is truly and opportunity to "Be all things to all people." Never be afraid to engage others from different backgrounds and to provide facilitate and care for all."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 5, Chaplain #1, page 222.

<sup>50</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 5, Chaplain #8, page 223.

<sup>51</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Part 2, Question 5, Chaplain #10, page 223.

It truly is a divine calling to offer the grace of God to such a diverse collection of people. However, are these chaplains willing to take on the burdens of ministry in such a diverse setting, pushing the envelope of tolerance and conscience at every turn? Yes, they would, for as Chaplain #3 states in the briefest answer to this question, “I would start again in a heartbeat – no regrets, no second thoughts.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-Test Questions, Question 5 (part 2), Chaplain #3, page 222.