CHAPTER II

PROJECT REPORT

"I look upon the world as my parish."
The Rev. John Wesley

The initial purpose of this project was to educate chaplains, to illustrate that religious diversity is a way of life in the Sea services.[1] I hoped that the project would illustrate the enormous variety of religious expressions present in the Sea Services through the sharing of reflections written by the community. I believed that these reflections would show that religious diversity is not something that chaplains bring with them into the military, but that it is rather something that is already present in the Sea Service community. Religious diversity is not something that chaplains must embrace at the cost of their own spiritual well-being. It is, however, something that every chaplain is charged with supporting and facilitating. An early goal of this project was to provide a document that can be shared with new chaplains to illustrate that religious diversity is already in place. Regardless of the religious affiliation the individual chaplain holds, s/he must be able to facilitate the needs of all members of the community, be the need spiritual, emotional, institutional, or other.

I believe that the sharing of our reflections or stories with one another is a significant method for creating community. It is in the realization that strangers have experiences that I can learn from, that the stranger becomes my neighbor. Finally, it is when I am able to make my neighbor's story my own that I am able to expand my own story and my understanding of the world in which I live. This project sought to provide the vehicle by which individuals may begin to claim own faith stories. This had the anticipated consequence of expanding the story of both the individual and the community. It is not possible to determine what, if any, impact the reflections would have on anyone who reads them. The initial purpose of educating and informing chaplains gave way to educating and informing the community, by providing an

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[1] Glossary, Page 243.

avenue for sharing the stories of faith that, to this point, have not been shared with the wide Sea Service community.

The formation of faith communities is a concern for those in ministry and for those persons in the faith community who desire to see both their faith and community grow. Creating a faith community in the midst of a secular institution, however, poses unique challenges that may not be as common in religious institutions. The people commissioned to serve as chaplains in the United States Navy come from a diverse assortment of faith groups. This project comes directly from my firsthand experiences as a U.S. Navy chaplain. This project is about real people, p[people who struggle with their journey and look to their chaplains for help along the way. The fact that chaplains come from more than eighty distinct faith groups pales in comparison to the vast array of expressions of faith (or non-faith) that may be found through the Sea Service community.

Following the awareness that the initial purpose, the informing of chaplains of the diverse religious nature of the community, was too narrow, the purpose of this project shifted from focusing solely upon chaplains to focusing upon the entire community. The purpose became how to gauge the impact of religious diversity in the Sea Services and how chaplains can do their work, given that degree of diversity. The first phase in this educational project is presented in reflections that were written by members of the community. I hoped to show that the people with whom chaplains are in ministry to and with are not dependent upon any single understanding of faith or style of expression. In other ministry settings such as a local church, the faith community would consist of those persons who share a common focus or description. In a setting such a local church, the pastor would be expected to cater exclusively to members of that particular faith community. In the Sea Services, the idea of a community of faith expands to include all persons in the community. This idea of an ever-expanding community is unique.[2] That being the case, it was important to understand that the community of faith that Navy chaplains serve is comprised of persons from many faiths, even those with no particular faith.

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[2] The community of faith as I use it includes not only the members of the community that worship together as would be the case in a local church, but also includes people of other faith communities and those persons for whom the chaplain provides not direct or indirect religious ministry.

The second phase was to ask chaplains to read the reflections and then participate in an active consideration of what they had read. Each chaplain was asked to consider the impact of the reflections on the chaplain and his/her ministry. As is the case with their dealings with members of the wider community, it was hoped that this project would help chaplains to realize the diversity that exists not only in the community of faith, but within the Chaplain Corps as a whole. Asking chaplains to examine their attitudes towards the community of faith must also involve chaplains examining their attitudes towards other chaplains.

The third phase was to interpret the dialogue, begun in the reflections and chaplains' discussions, to the wider Chaplain Corps in the form of a resource guide.[3] This guide has been published as a website and includes community reflections, chaplain observations, a comment page, a glossary of terms, and links to diversity-themed websites. My hope is that the professional project will be a useful tool to both lay members of the community and Navy chaplains in understanding the diverse make-up of the faith community with the Sea Services.

The project had six objectives, beginning with providing the means for individuals who have a connection to the Sea Services, to reflect upon their faith journey through the writing of two- or three-page reflections, which would serve a s vehicle for articulating the source, impact, and person needs of the writer regarding his/her faith. The second objective was achieved by including as wide an assortment of writers for reflections as possible, e.g., faith groups, gender, military status, etc., thereby allowing a glimpse of the diversity present in the community of faith. These first two objectives fed into the third, enhancing the ability of Navy chaplains to actively consider what it means to do ministry in such a multi-faith setting. It was believed that by reviewing the reflections, chaplains would increase their own awareness of the impact that their attitudes have on the ministry being provided to the community, and they would become aware of any changes that needed to be made in their attitudes or ministry. Chaplain were asked to read reflections and to define terms such as religious diversity, religious pluralism, civil religion, faith community, and a Chaplain Corps motto, "Cooperation without compromise." By engaging some of the words and phrases chaplains routinely use in the Fleet,[4] it was believed that chaplains would come to a fresh awareness and understanding of how these terms impact

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[3] www.revdralkula.weebly.com
[4] The needs of the Fleet are typically seen as superseding the needs of any individual service member.

upon the community. The fourth objective was realized when the conceptual clarity emerged that allows the project to be more beneficial for the chaplains seeking a better understanding of the impact that pluralism and diversity have on the work.

The final two objectives dealt with how to interpret this dialogue to the wider Chaplain Corps, as well as to the rest of the Sea Service community. It was decided that a resource website would be an appropriate means, given the worldwide nature of this community. This site has been published and includes community reflections, links to more than 400 faith and belief groups, the Golden Rule in the words of the world's major faith communities, and more. This is an effective means to advocate a model of pluralism for the Sea Services based upon the experiences of the faith community, the Chaplain Corps, and the institutional and constitutional requirements of the Sea Services.

The objectives were achieved by organizing the project into three phases. The first phase consisted of the creation of a website, to which members of the community were directed to begin the writing process. This site contained guidance for community members to begin writing of the reflections. Contact information was also provided on the website for those requesting further guidance. The website avoided providing a specific format for the reflections. This was an intentional act, designed to allow a freer expression of the individual's story. It was hoped this method would allow members of the community to express their own story, not the story for which they believed I was looking. This website concluded the preliminary work and the first phase of the project. It was intended to be a gathering place where the community could come together and share reflections and stories about the impact that faith has on the community through the lives of individuals.

In order to gather as wide a variety of writers of these reflections as possible, it became obvious that new ways of reaching people had to be employed. There was and is a big world that chaplains serve, and it is bigger than the community that I was able to draw from at my assignment when the project began. At the time this project was initiated, I was assigned to the Naval Hospital at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, which although large by Sea Service standards was still not big enough to reflect the global community Navy chaplains serve. The breadth of this worldwide parish is not reflected by the limits found in one corner of it. It must be stated that Navy chaplains are pastors to more than just those who are in the unit to which the chaplain is

assigned or to those in uniform. Navy chaplains minister to a dazzling array of communities, they are called upon to respond to the needs of persons from any and all ethic groups, political leanings, faith groups, styles of family, and more. Chaplains can find themselves serving in a Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marine setting. They not only encounter those in uniform, but also families of those service members, retired military and their families, civil servants, contractors, and more. It was to this community that I made my appeal. This project was launched because this community had never been asked to share stories of faith with chaplains.

The recruitment of the writers for the faith reflections began with those persons in my immediate command, the Naval Hospital at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. In addition to emails and personal contacts with members of the command, inviting them to take part in this project. I also asked members of the hospital prayer chain and other persons who had participated in programs sponsored by the hospital chaplains. Next, I expanded the scope from the Navy medical community to the Marine Corps base at Camp Lejeune and two nearby Marine Corps Air Stations (MCAS), Cherry Point MCAS and New River MCAS, which combined account for more than 40,000 Marines and Sailors. Using The Globe, the base newspaper for Camp Lejeune and The Jacksonville Daily News, the local civilian newspaper, I expected that I would have no problem reaching a sufficient number of persons. The next step was to take the project to the wider Sea Service community through an advertisement in The Flagship, a regional military newspaper in Norfolk, Virginia. Between the Norfolk and Jacksonville areas, it was felt that a large number of persons would have access to this project. At the same time I was using print advertising to get the word out, I also placed an advertisement on the Google search engine, so that every time the term "Navy chaplain" was typed, my website appeared in the sponsor section.[5] In addition to my efforts described above, every Navy chaplain was made aware of this project by the Chaplain Resource Board, which asked chaplains to recruit writers from their faith communities and local commands.

In addition, more than thirty faith groups were contacted, in order to spread the word about the project. I contacted hundreds of individuals using email, church bulletins, command resources, and personal contacts for ten months, all in order to make certain that the community

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[5] Unfortunately, no record was kept of the number of Google-related links to the website.

had the opportunity to share what they believed or did not believe. I am certain that some people found me to be a pest, asking and re-asking for help with this project. Sixty people responded, forty short of the hundred for which I had initially hope, and yet, they were exactly the sort of people was looking for: people who cared enough about what they believed to share it with the world.

The "action phase" of the project began with the launching of the website prior to Christmas 2003. At the same time, the above-mentioned advertisements began, calling for participants to share their faith journeys with the Sea Service community. Sixty persons responded with contributions to this phase. As will be seen in Appendix A, the reflections are presented as the individuals wrote the reflection, the only editing being done was in the area of formatting.

In Phase II, individual Navy chaplains were invited to participate in the in the second phase of the project. Phase II was centered on a second website that chaplains were asked to visit, with the understanding that the purpose of the visit was to read and respond to the reflections from the community of faith. Their participation consisted of three steps. First, each chaplain was asked to a five-question "pre-test" designed to gauge his/her attitudes towards religious diversity and pluralism in the Sea Services. Second, she/he was asked to read the collected reflections. This was a daunting task for some chaplains, several of whom balked at the prospect of reading the sixty reflections. Third, each chaplain was asked to take a five-question "post-test" which sought to determine the impact the stories of the faith community had on the ministry and attitudes of the chaplain. The intent of getting the chaplains involved like this was to help each chaplain move himself/herself from an understanding based solely upon intellectual considerations of diversity to an understanding based upon his/her experiences and the experiences of others.

The project concluded with a third website, this one is a resource for seekers, pilgrims, skeptics, and Navy chaplains, it was the culmination of this educational experience. This third website, www.seaservicefaith.com, was created to be a place where the Sea Service community (and others) could go to read faith reflections from the community and find links and other reference materials.

Biblical and Theological Component

John Wesley's statue in the courtyard of the City Road chapel in London, United Kingdom, bears the inscription, "The world is my parish." For all Navy chaplains, whether they are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or, as of July 2004, a Buddhist, these words continue to ring true with the same power and clarity now as they did in eighteenth century England. A unique feature of this project, and indeed of my ministry setting, is that this project was not conducted in or for a "Chrisitan" community. Thus for this project, the Bible is not utilized as a primary source document. The Bible is utilized however as a means of understanding my own place in this ministry setting.

What is at the heart of the theology that is my understanding of ministry in the Sea Services is that chaplains must be missionaries in a new way, missionaries that are able to break free from the chains of an orthodox past into a brave new world. It cannot be denied that the residents of this brave new world desire the presence of God. What a chaplain would have to understand, and this of course applies to chaplains of all faiths, is that our outreach to the community is far more inclusive than previously considered. In my case, since I am a Christian and ordained to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, am I expected to reach out to the "lost" of the Sea Services? What is my duty to the Wiccan, the Jew, the Muslim, the Buddhist, and those who have rejected religion in any form? Am I there to "save" them, to convert them from the path that leads to damnation or is there something else, something that will assist them in their journey, wherever that journey might be destined to take them? Chaplains are missionaries who reach out to the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, and the disgusted not in the name of denomination or faith, but in the name of compassion, mercy, and grace. Our task is not to make others like us, but to show that The One who sent us cares about them.

The thoughts of theologians such as Bishop John Shelby Spong (*Why Christianity Must Change or Die*) and Leonard Sweet (*Soul Tsunami*) call us insistently from the other side of this postmodern veil to consider mission and ministry in an entirely new fashion. If the era of theological consensus is indeed gone for good, then our mission must be more than trying to convince people that we have the right answer for them, based on our understanding and experiences. Our theological mission is to transcend those traditional systems of religious though that we have known for so long. These manners of thought and practice that nurtured us, trained

us, and sent us into the world no longer matter to those to whom we are sent. It for those persons that we, the chaplains of the Sea Services, must change or die.

The theological language that this project is seeking to articulate is not that of the church that ordained me. It is essential that we understand the tension that exists between the Sea Service faith community and the Chaplain Corps in order for this project to have any relevance and impact on either the community of faith or the Chaplain Corps. One way of understanding "Faith" is to see it as the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and "the faith" as the established practices as understood and practices by each tribe of believers. If this is true, then a means must be found to discover and claim a new way of speaking about the inexpressible nature of God.

The Research Component

Research began with the experiences of an individual chaplain and continued in the form of a bibliographic study, especially in the areas of religious diversity, pluralism, and civil religion. The members of an advisory group, the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) colloquium, and project advisors provided ongoing consultation throughout the course of this project.

The preliminary planning entailed conceiving a worthwhile project and formulating a realistic timetable. The D.Min. colloquium and advisors assisted in the formation of the preliminary details of this project. Also, the development of the project was channeled through the Lay Advisory Group, though that turned out to be less of a benefit than had been expected at the onset of the project. I had expected the advisory group members to offer insight and guidance, instead what I got was mostly silence. With the range of experience present in this group, I had the belief at the beginning that the project would reach a far wider audience and have an impact beyond the life of the project. Fifteen persons representing a wide assortment of ethnic and faith groups were contacted about becoming a part of the advisory group, although in the end, only seven persons accepted the invitation to participate. The pool of individuals asked to take part in the advisory group was comprised of Navy chaplains, active-duty Marines and Sailors, family members of service members, and others whose faith journeys had brought them into frequent and personal contact with the chaplains of the United States Navy. I felt certain that the final group, people who accepted the invitation to participate, were committed to diversity. I was sure that they appreciated the dynamic faith community in the Sea Services. Their experiences were varied: chaplains and pastors, military and civilians, men, and women, and from different ethnic

and religious groups. I believed they would want to assist me in the exploration of that amazingly complex idea of people of faith listening to each other. Sadly, this did not occur, and the impact of the advisory group upon the project was minimal.

There was a glitch in Phase II which may be attributed to two factors. I had just moved to a new duty station in the United Kingdom which disrupted the support system I had in place at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Also, the lack of response to Phase I seriously impacted my ability to complete that phase and launch Phase II. This should not, however, have delayed the project to the extent it did. It would have been better to launch Phase II with a smaller sample than to delay the project by as much time as I did. Furthermore, Phase II should have been initiated earlier through the specific recruitment of chaplains as readers of the Phase I reflections. This would have assisted in the execution of Phase II. It would have also been advisable to scale back the scope/numbers of the project goals, focusing on a smaller response, rather than waiting for a set number to be reached.

The initial goal of one hundred faith reflections was not an overly ambitious goal, given the vast numbers of potential contributors and the nature of the project. In some cases, it may have been the result of email proving to be as much of a barrier as a tool. It is often easier to ignore or put off answering an email than it would be a phone call or a personal visit. Also, it may be that the "literary" nature of the request to compose a faith reflection served as a barrier. Some people do not feel that they write all that well and are unable to put their thoughts down effectively on paper. These people may have benefited from the chance to participate in a personal interview, recorded on tape, and then transcribed at a later date for inclusion on the website. That being said, it was an effort to do a new thing, i.e., to use the technology of the web, which discouraged more one-on-one contacts. In addition, the global nature of the project worked against more personal contacts. Had I limited myself to those persons I could physically reach, I would have had a far shallower pool from which to draw, and the impact would have been dramatic in the assortment of reflections were gathered.

The tremendous struggle in getting responses to my frequent and personal appeals was a source of great frustration for me. I had been told that this is an important project and that it would a real contribution to the Navy. That being said, the faith reflections in Phase I wee exactly what I had hoped for in terms of getting people to tell their stories. I was disappointed

that I could not get more responses , particularly from those in the Marine Corps, from Catholics, Jews, Muslims, "minority faiths," and conservative Christians. People who I thought would jump at the chance to tell their stories responded all too frequently with silence. It is difficult to explain why people whose faith lives were dynamic and very often public, chose not to participate. Here was the chance to have their voice heard in the wider community, and yet, when given the chance to share their faith, they chose not to. It was extremely hard to understand. My desire was to provide the opportunity for people to share why they believed as they did and how they chose to practice that belief.

Of the more than 150 chaplains who were contacted, only eleven responded in the Phase I part of this project. It appeared that when chaplains talk about being open to other people, that this did not extend to being willing to read their stories. I though that chaplains of faith groups who may have felt that they were marginalized, either in the past or in the present Chaplains Corps, would want to offer their views. It is hard to understand why so many chaplains who are, by virtue of their role, leaders of the faith community would not leap at the chance to share their stories. As with the members of the community who were asked to write the reflections, understanding why people such as chaplains, who claim to have a strong faith, would not want to write about that faith is more than puzzling, it is disturbing.

The Phase III website will be a useful resource for the Fleet, given sufficient time to build an audience. At the time of this writing, I am uncertain how much, if any, impact this project has had on the "congregation." Those who have taken part have reported great satisfaction in recounting their faith stories and have shared their feelings with others with enthusiasm. This project has led to personnel coming forward to ask for new ministries from me here at my present command, certain in the belief that their chaplain is open to their needs. I had envisioned a project that would open doors to the discussion of diversity and pluralism, and yet the lack of response from the chaplains I contacted makes me wonder if they care about this topic as much as the leadership of the Chaplains Corps does.

The project has an immediate and long-lasting value to the Chaplain Corps and to the Sea Service community by highlighting the diversity and richness present in the faith community. The impact was present from the very first. This project flows from my firsthand experiences as a Navy chaplain and is a direct result of my desire to contribute something of a lasting nature to

the Chaplain Corps and to the Fleet. The impact upon the Chaplain Corps and upon the community is more difficult to ascertain. There is little doubt that the issues of religious diversity and pluralism are of importance in an institutional sense. The issue becomes how to impart this importance to individuals. The real impact of this project will be almost impossible to quantify or describe other than in the words of reflections themselves. In the words of on the advisory group members, the project was not only praiseworthy in its concept and objectives, but it is necessary. Religion and religious people are changing in ways that the Chaplain Corps is failing to notice and with which it is failing to keep pace. Projects such as this are vital to the Chaplain Corps' relevance. One of the many disconnects that this project has beautifully demonstrated is the one that exists between the chaplains and their people. Increasingly, as the faith reflections show, people are less interested in denominational identity and theology. They just want help in living a godly (and happy) life. At the same time, there are chaplains who demonstrate more and more by their words and actions that they think the Chaplain Corps hired them to be denominational chaplains, e.g., they are "Lutheran" chaplains, "Catholic" chaplains, "Pentecostal" chaplains, etc. with only a minimal sense of calling to help others not of their own faith group.

A senior Navy chaplain, who wrote a response in Phase II, commented that the lack of response from other chaplains was part of a well-entrenched attitude among all too many Navy chaplains not to help each other and among other Navy chaplains who have a prejudice against advanced degrees. Several congregation members who offered faith reflections stated that this was a salutary exercise for them. They appreciated the opportunity to do it and are enthusiastic about seeing what comes of it all. How sad that more chaplains failed to read these reflections when offered the opportunity to do so. Admiral Iasiello has expressed a desire to see the final product as it fits in with the first three White Papers he authored as Chief of Chaplains.

Other Lessons Learned

After a long and difficult prospectus period, I was able to gather what I believed to be a supportive and exciting advisory team and I began to work on the project in earnest, following the prospectus timetable. The breakdown of the advisory group was as follows: Four men and three women, two laity and five clergy (including three Navy chaplains), three civilians and four military members, five Christians and two Jews. I was unsuccessful in my efforts to gather other

members who were not of Judeo-Christian heritage.[6] Each member of the advisory group was given pages from the D.Min. handbook[7] dealing with the advisory group role, the prospectus, and a paper I wrote for the DMIN 915 course[8], outlining my "charter" as a Navy chaplain. I made more than twenty-five contacts with group members via email and gave them the chance to have input into each website prior to its being published, their suggested changes were incorporated. It was a real surprise that people who responded to a voluntary appeal in a positive way responded with such silence. I knew that the people I recruited were busy people, but each possessed a quality that I felt would contribute to a well-rounded and productive project. Three group members provided absolutely no input, a great disappointment to me. Enthusiasm will take a project like this only so far, as was demonstrated in my numerous communications with the group as well as the community that I was trying to reach. Leadership and ministry must be adaptable, and this realization alone is a valuable by-product of this project.

A strength that has been highlighted has to be the enthusiastic belief on my part that this project, the building of a community of faith in the Sea Service community, has its beginnings in the awareness that there is, in fact, a diverse community already in place. A weakness was my reliance upon the goodwill of others to respond to my requests. The project was ambitious which could appear to a positive factor on the surface. At the same time, I misjudged the necessity to adjust quickly to a changing dynamic once it was identified. Seeing that the congregation is not a traditional group following a parish model, this was difficult.

Was the project a success? Time will be the judge on this score. While the project did not go exactly according to plan, the project was worth the time and energy that it took to take from a concept to the utilitarian website of Phase III.[9]

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[6] Here, the term Judeo-Christian heritage refers to those whose faith traditions look to the Jewish or Christian scriptures as their spiritual source documents.
[7] *2002 Doctor of Ministry Handbook*. Drew University Theological School
[8] Course taken as part of the Global Online Program through the Drew University Theological School. See Chapter VII to read my understanding of my role as a chaplain in the Sea Services.
[9] https://www.seaservicefaith.com.