

CHAPTER IV  
PROJECT PHASE II: NAVY CHAPLAINS RESPOND

*“Provide for our own, facilitate the 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 this 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 chaplain’s responsibility to then to understand and respond to the needs of the community that they serve. In order to serve the people in the community, the chaplain must first get to know the community, this is why the reflections are so important. Phase II was comprised of 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 subsequent joys and struggles s/he had encountered along the way. It was believed that chaplains, along with rabbis, imams, priests, shamans, and other 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 Chaplains School in Newport, Rhode Island. The chaplain may also expect to encounter these terms throughout their career in such diverse forums as the Chaplain Corps magazine, *Throughout and Beyond*, the official Chaplain Corps website,<sup>2</sup> 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 each chaplain, 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 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 frequency is the lack of mention of the communities of faith that are being served. For if the formation of communities of faith is to be a primary issue and a deep and heartfelt concern to all those in ministry, then it is even more so an issue 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 the 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

---

<sup>1</sup> Glossary, page 243.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.chaplain.navy.mil>

I was working with at the time, both of whom 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 of the Doctor of Ministry degree program would not have gotten as far as it did without them. One of these chaplains even accepted my invitation to join the Advisory Team. Despite their initial enthusiasm for the project, following my departure from NHCL in February 2004, their participation ended. Neither of these 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 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 a key 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>3</sup> That there are several lawsuits working through the courts at this time is a glaring example of the fact that the Corps is not the unified body that those outside the institution may perceive it to be.<sup>4</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 a critical 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. That appeared to me to be at the core of their arguments, that the Corps had for too long ignored their

---

<sup>3</sup> This is discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of this facet of the Corps may be found in *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2001, Vol. 45, Issue 7, page 19. Lieutenant Commander David 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 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.

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.

Following the gathering of the reflections in the spring of 2004, a chaplain from every one of the more than more than eighty faith groups<sup>5</sup> currently on active duty in the Navy Chaplain Corps 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 on 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 chaplain who were contact in this effort, only five responded with negative replies and only one gave a positive reply.

Each year, a PDTC is conducted for Navy chaplain. The one I attended in May 2004 was at the Naval Support Activity in Naples, Italy. Thirty chaplains, the senior Chaplain Corps detailer (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

---

<sup>5</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 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.

enthusiasm as I could muster. Six chaplains responded from that effort, and their comments as well the other five chaplain who took part in Phase II are to be found in Appendix B.<sup>6</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 dimension, but spiritual dimension, 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 contacted, only a few had what I considered to be 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 the time to read the reflections. But the simple fact is that to 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 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 number, with nine of the eleven responses coming from male chaplains. It should be noted that while the role and influence of

---

<sup>6</sup> Appendix B, Pre- and Post-test Questions, page 192.

female chaplains has grown tremendously over the past twenty-five years, they still represent a small number of the total Chaplain Corps.

**Faith Groups:** The eleven chaplains who did respond were members who demonstrated the diversity of the Chaplain Corps well enough with the following faith groups represented: American Baptist, Episcopal Church, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), National Baptist, Pentecostal Holiness Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Southern Baptist, the United Methodist. 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 the chaplains tend 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 their 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 with many approaching forty when they enter 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>7</sup> None of the responding chaplains were 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 the 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 particular, one is struck by the earnestness of the responses. Most chaplains

---

<sup>7</sup> The term "operational unit" refers to combat-orientated units. For the Navy, it refers primarily to ships and Naval aviation units. For Marines, it is the ground combat units: armor, artillery, and infantry, as well as Marine Corps aviation units.

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>8</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 compelling case could be made that there was never really a time in their journey when the call to ministry was not going to include the military setting as the next phase of ministry. Each chaplains describes the circuitous route to the Navy chaplaincy which typically included roadblocks 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."<sup>9</sup> 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. 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 fourteen years before God placed before the chaplain an opportunity for him to serve in another setting, the Sea Services.<sup>10</sup> Each of these 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 have been called to perform as Navy chaplains. They start their answers to this question with comments such as "My

---

<sup>8</sup> Appendix B, Question 1, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #9, page 194.

<sup>9</sup> Appendix B, Question 1, Pre & Post-test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #2, page 192.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix B, Question 1, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Chaplain #4, page 192.

faith very much influences the ministry I provide.”<sup>11</sup> “My faith controls my ministry completely.”<sup>12</sup> “I serve at God’s will.”<sup>13</sup> One catches a glimpse of the powerful pull that the gospel<sup>14</sup> has on their lives, upon their work, and the yearning that 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 be 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 minister pay in their work.<sup>15</sup> It is a well-known axiom of ministry that building friendships while working in a pastoral role is not only challenging, but also 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 whom they come into contact with during 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 life of their communities, they

---

<sup>11</sup> Appendix B, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Question 1, Chaplain #4, page 192.

<sup>12</sup> Appendix B, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Question 2, Chaplain #2, page 195.

<sup>13</sup> Appendix B, Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Question 2, Chaplain #4, page 195.

<sup>14</sup> Each of these eleven chaplains identified him or herself as a Christian.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix B, , Pre & Post-Test Questions: The Chaplains Respond, Part 1, Question 3, Chaplains #1, 2, and 4, page 197.



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 wants to befriend. That this observation is made here should not be surprising as a similar example made 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 toward 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 community members.

A significant revelation that arose from this question came from the responses from four of the chaplains who referred to the politics and lack of cooperation between chaplains.<sup>16</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 with 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>17</sup> An example of this professional indifference to their fellow chaplains may be found in pages of the forum set up to dialogue about the Chief of Chaplains 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>18</sup>

All Navy chaplains are expected to adhere to the tenets of their faith group, this 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 to all members of the military services and their families. Chaplains

---

<sup>16</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 3, Chaplains #6, 8, 9, and 10, page 210.

<sup>17</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 3, Chaplain #9, page 197-198.

<sup>18</sup> The Chief of Chaplains has taken it upon himself to promote an environment where dialogue between chaplains is of paramount importance. The first three White Papers dealt with topics relevant to this project: *Constitutional Foundations for Military Ministry, The Call, the Endorsement, and the Oath*, and *American Religious Pluralism and Cooperative Ministry in the United States Sea Services*.

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 chaplain's 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 the military chaplaincy a flavor and a passion different that that found in the civilian faith community. "I will do whatever it I can do to facilitate the meeting of their religious needs."<sup>19</sup> "Those requests are frequent and an important part of my ministry."<sup>20</sup> "I have responded to requests for prayer and services from many faith groups."<sup>21</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 cease 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>22</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 those "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 chaplains to consider several terms that are part of the discussion before them, and the Navy Chaplain Corps and o offer their own definitions. The terms or phrases used were pluralism, civil religion, meaningful worship, free exercise of religion, "cooperation with compromise," and faith. The thoughts offered by the chaplain respondents made some significant contributions to my understanding of these critical terms and phrase and are included in the definitions in the Glossary.<sup>23</sup> I chose these six 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,

---

<sup>19</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplains #2, page 198.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplains #4, page 198.

<sup>21</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplains #8, page 199.

<sup>22</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 4, Chaplains #6, page 198.

<sup>23</sup> Glossary, page 243.

it appeared to me that these terms are at the heart of the formation of a new understanding of Navy chaplains and 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 toward that effort.

To begin this section, *pluralism*<sup>24</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 and 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>25</sup> It is important in reading these definitions to remember that all eleven chaplains who responded are Christians and that their understandings 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 result of the ministry that is presented in the Sea Services.

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 that state in which varying religious viewpoints co-exist in harmony for a purpose outside of each of their respective messages.”<sup>26</sup> While perhaps harmony might be a bit of a reach, given the internal conflicts with 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 am not a pluralist or even much of an ecumenist... I see pluralism not so much in theological terms but in terms of social policy.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Glossary, page 245.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 1), Chaplains #10, page 200.

<sup>26</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 1), Chaplains #2, page 200.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 1), Chaplains #1, page 199.

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<sup>28</sup> and has chosen to respond with a realist's response. Clearly this chaplain would prefer to chosen a more firm 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 food 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 to provide ministry in settings that do not contain an overly religious meaning. Chaplains will say that in the parish everything they did was part of their faith community, but this is simply not so. Speaking from personal experience, particularly in small communities, a pastor is every bit as much a civic figure as h/she is a religious figure. Chaplains are expected to provide spiritual comfort, religious services, and moral guidance, all from a personal understanding 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 not inherently religious in form or substance. "A generic act of worship which may or may not provide any real meaningful worship"<sup>29</sup> is how Chaplain #9 describes his role in these ceremonies and events. Examples of these ceremonies or events of 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>30</sup> It is this interaction between a governing

---

<sup>28</sup> The right side of the uniform shirt has the individual's naval rank, the left side has the religious insignia of the chaplain's general faith community.

<sup>29</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 2), Chaplains #9, page 201.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 2), Chaplains #8, page 201.

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 personal stake 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 purposes of this project, the chaplains who are charged by two institutions with seeing that it both defined and accomplished define the term. How difficult this task is will be seen later in the paper in Appendix C.<sup>31</sup> It is necessary to first define what worship is and then 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 one that every pastor (and chaplain) 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 on 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 was 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>32</sup> Meaningful worship is not what I prefer, but rather that which bring 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

---

<sup>31</sup> Appendix C, One Navy Chaplain’s Experience, page 212.

<sup>32</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 3), Chaplain #7, page 202.

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>33</sup>

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 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>34</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 rages 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>35</sup>

As has already been alluded to elsewhere in this paper, Navy chaplains wear to 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 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>36</sup> “Sometimes I sense that chaplains are more concerned about their 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>37</sup> This leads directly into the next term, “*cooperation without compromise.*”

---

<sup>33</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 2), Chaplains #6, page 201.

<sup>34</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>35</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 4), Chaplains #4, page 203.

<sup>36</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>37</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 4), Chaplains #1, page 203.

The Navy Chaplain Corps has as one of its mottos the phrase, “cooperation without compromise.”<sup>38</sup> The response to this phrase overflows with diverse opinions as to its meaning and use. As was explained to me during the Chaplain Basic Course, chaplains are expected to cooperate with other chaplains and with those with whom they are in ministry 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”<sup>39</sup> is prayer-filled endeavor, and one to which chaplains must commit themselves to with all their heart, 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>40</sup>

For most chaplains, this issue is 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 those 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.

What the Corps can do to prevent such abuses from occurring or to reform itself is the subject of legal action.<sup>41</sup> What individual chaplains can do is to simply have a good relationship 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 the 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>42</sup> Sounds simple, right?

---

<sup>38</sup> Glossary, page 244.

<sup>39</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplains #7, page 203.

<sup>40</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplains #6, page 203.

<sup>41</sup> This legal action is dealt with in Chapter 1. The first major case involving a non-liturgical chaplain suing the Navy is *Sturn vs. United States*. For a glimpse at the issues involved, see *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2001, vol. 45, Issue 7, page 19.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix B, Pre & post-Test Questions, Part 1, Question 5 (part 5), Chaplains #8, page 204.