

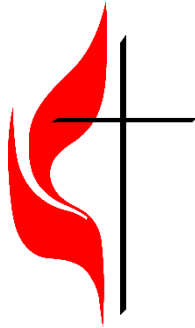
CHAPTER VII

ONE APPROACH TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IN THE SEA SERVICES

“...the minister of God, remembering the golden cross upon his sleeve, was there to serve.”¹

The Rev. Haines H. Lippincott

In trying to describe a systematic theology that is at work in the context of my ministry in the Sea Services, I would begin my referring to what I call “The Alkula Quadrilateral” or “The Four Pillars of My Military Ministry.” The four area are symbolized as follows:



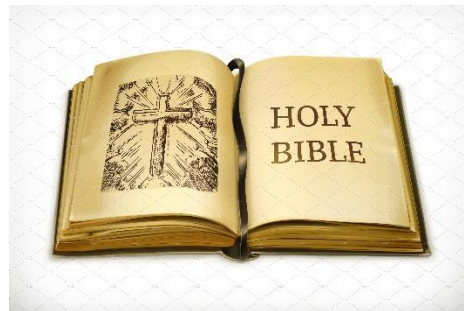
The United Methodist Church



The United States Navy



The Navy Chaplain Corps



The Bible

¹ Haines H. Lippincott, “The Navy as a Parish,” *Methodist Review*, Vol. 107, July 1924, page 579.

Each of these areas has a direct bearing on how I go about providing ministry, and each must be given the proper respect left I become unable to function in the demanding setting that I find myself on a daily basis. Each of these four areas may be summed up in the following quotes:

Elders in effective relationship may be appointed to serve in ministry settings beyond the local United Methodist Church in the witness and service of Christ's love and justice. Persons in these appointments remain within the itinerancy and shall be accountable to the annual conference. They shall be given the same moral and spiritual support by it, as are persons in appointments to pastoral charges. Their effectiveness shall be evaluated in the context of the specific setting in which their ministry is performed.

**The United Methodist Book of Discipline 2000, ¶ 334, subsection 1:
“Appointments Extending the Ministry of The United Methodist Church”²**

I (full name) do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental or reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

U.S. Military Officer's Oath of Office³

Devoted to God and Country, we unite to deliver innovatgive, life-transforming service throughout and beyond the Sea Services.

U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps Vision Statement⁴

Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. Then He said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor's.” Then He said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.”

Matthew 22:19-21 (NRSV)

I conduct the ministry which I have been called within the parameters of this quadrilateral or “four pillars.” The first “pillar” is that I am an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church

² *The United Methodist Book of Discipline 2000*, (2000). Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, page 221.

³ James Toner. (1995). *True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics*, Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, page iii.

⁴ United States Navy Chaplain Corps. (25 Mar 2005). <http://www.chaplain.navy.mil>

and am appointed by my bishop to serve in the capacity of a Navy chaplain. I understand that I am answerable to the bishop. In my annual report to the Annual Conference, I include items that reflect my commitment to fulfilling my ordination vows to word, order, and table. The second “pillar” is that I am a commissioned officer in the United States Navy and am bound to uphold the oath of office I took when I accepted this ministry setting. The third “pillar” is that I am a United States Navy chaplain. As such, I see myself as part of a community of chaplains who are charged with ensuring that religious freedom is more than just a cliché. The Chaplain Corps vision statement springs from the belief that wherever the chaplain calls his or her spiritual home, we are all charged with providing the members of the Sea Services with the most comprehensive ministry possible. Finally, the fourth “pillar” is the scriptures, i.e., the Bible. I am a Christian and as such, I must serve the Lord who first called me into ministry.

There is a tension for military chaplains in that we are expected to serve two masters. The juggling act that chaplains are expected to manage is demonstrated by using myself as an example. I am a United Methodist Elder, a liturgical Protestant chaplain, a Protestant chaplain, a Christian chaplain, a chaplain to all personnel, and finally, a naval staff officer. A further illustration of this tension involves the Navy chaplains wearing rank and service community devices on their uniforms, other members of the Navy, thereby signifying their place in the Navy as an institution.⁵

Initially chaplains were not given rank in the Navy. They functioned as schoolmasters and were responsible for, among other things, rationing grog aboard ship. Their selection as chaplain was solely the prerogative of the ship’s captain. Over time, chaplains became accepted as full-fledged naval officers, albeit with limited scope of duties and functions. While the beginning chaplains were there because everyone was thought to be a Christian and the crew needed moral guidance,⁶ now the chaplains have become the guardians of religious liberty. They ensure that those who wish to worship, regardless of religious orientation, are allowed to do so and those who did not wish to worship were not required to do so. Chaplains are expected to be

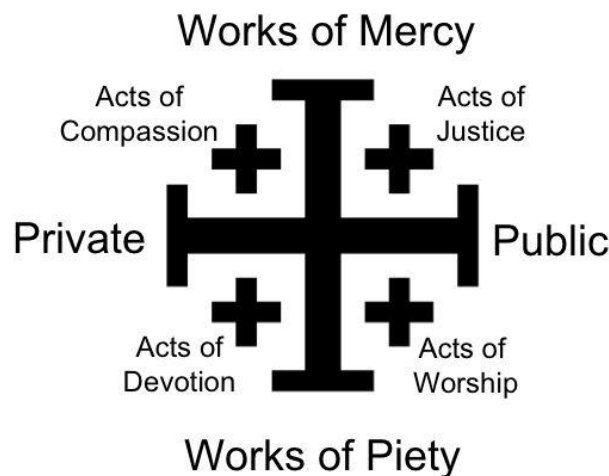
⁵ The place where the rank and service community, that is, the area the service member specializes in, is shown varies by uniform. On the khaki or work uniform, the rank device is worn on the right collar and the service community device is worn on the left collar. On summer whites, the rank and service community devices are worn together on shoulder boards. On the dress blue and mess dress white jackets, the rank as well as the service community indicator is found on the jacket sleeve cuff.

⁶ Walter Wink. (1998). *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millenium*, New York: Galilee Books, page 60.

representatives of the faith group that sent them but must also be approachable to those persons of other faith groups (or no faith group).

Managing these roles may seem easy, but it is not. The competing claims that each of these communities make upon the chaplain is very real. How well the chaplain maintains this balance goes far in determining the relative success he/she has in the United States Navy. On the one hand, I serve as a Navy chaplain who is an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church. On the other hand, that faith group is irrelevant to those outside of the group currently serving in the Navy and to the Navy as an institution. I am being faithful to my calling and to my ordination in that as a preacher and a teacher, I know that I am needed in this setting. This allows me the freedom to give of myself, while knowing that the success of my ministry does not depend upon the approval of the Navy, but rather my faithfulness to God who first called me into the ministry.

Using a model of church that I first learned from Dr. David Lowes Watson⁷ at Wesley Theological Seminary and mentioned again in Bauknight's book, *Body Building*,⁸ I have approached my ministry in each Navy command to which I have been assigned as I did in my parish work. The model may be illustrated below:



⁷ David Lowes Watson, Lectures on Wesley Covenant Groups, Fall semester 1992, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC.

⁸ Brian K. Bauknight. (1996). *Body Building: Creating a Ministry Team Through Spiritual Gifts*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, pages 62-63.

There are aspects of the faith that are done in public and there are some done privately. There are those aspects that take on a mercy focus and others that are focused on the pious nature of faith. The key is keeping Christ at the center; too much focus on any one area affects the balance of life and of faith.⁹ This is in keeping with the idea of spiritual toning that Leonard Sweet spoke about in *A Cup of Coffee at the Soul Café* in 1998.¹⁰ In this model of ministry, Christians are called to actually live their faith 24.7/365! This is the essence of what being a military chaplain is all about: finding the means and the method, reaching beyond the typical “church” to be the embodied gospel, even to those who would not accept the gospel were it presented to them plainly.

A way to show one means of sharing the gospel with the diverse community that is present in the Sea Services is by describing the development of a Lenten Devotional that was offered to the Naval Hospital – Camp Lejeune (NCHL) community during my assignment there. It is important to keep in mind that the primary purpose for hospital chaplain in general, and in a military hospital in particular, is to respond to crisis: physical, emotional, professional, and occasionally, spiritual. So long as this fact is kept in mind, the ministry is extremely rewarding. Lose sight of this essential fact, and the frustration of not being able to openly “win souls for Jesus” can make even the strongest prayer warrior weep.

The journey of a devotional

In the fall of 1991, Dr. Tom Brunkow, the senior pastor of University United Methodist Church in College Park, Maryland, asked the congregation to contribute to the writing of a Lenten devotional that would be distributed to the entire congregation as a means of sharing the Lenten journey together. I was one of the congregants who responded. The fruit of that effort was a great blessing, not only for those who wrote the reflections, but also to those who read the entries. The idea behind the devotional booklet was that every Christian has a story to tell and that we Christians are meant to share our story, not only with our fellow pilgrims, but with the whole world too. When we engage in this type of effort, we go from being hermits to sojourners to evangelists.

⁹ John Shelby Spong. (2001). *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith is Dying and How a New Faith is Being Born*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, page 227.

¹⁰ Leonard Sweet. (1998). *A Cup of Coffee at the Soul Café*, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, page 49.

Fast forward to December 1996. I had been appointed as a parish pastor in rural northeast Nebraska. I asked my two congregations to take part in a similar effort, to share something about their faith that was important to them. The reaction was much the same as it had been at University UMC. At first, I heard things such as “I can’t write,” “I don’t have anything to say,” and “My faith is a private thing.” Many of the congregants in this rural parish were unaware that they were already in ministry as storytellers and teachers. The only thing missing was a dynamic forum for this sharing and teaching. When they were encouraged to take an active voice in proclaiming their faith, they did so with a vigor that had not been seen for many years in those parts. No longer passive recipients of religion, they became vocal proponents of faith. Their faith transformed two typical churches into two potentially EPIC¹¹ ones.

Fast-forward again to December 2001, this time to the Naval Hospital – Camp Lejeune where I was assigned as a chaplain. Having been assigned to a place where the focus of ministry is on responding to various sorts of crisis, I began to seek opportunities for expanding what chaplains were seen to offer to the community. Naval chaplains are charged with facilitating the free expression of religious expression and cannot be seen as promoting a particular religious agenda. That being said, I am, in fact, a Christian; my faith is part of the work I am doing. I knew that in the military-health-care environment, faith could not come across as being the primary focus of my work. I also knew that there were others like me throughout the command that understood their faith as being an important part of their lives and their work and sought to means to understand that faith in the context of a setting that is at best, faith neutral.

And so, when I began to think about how I might address the spiritual needs of the community, I remembered the Lenten devotionals and proposed to the hospital’s Command Chaplain. In December 2001, with his approval, I set out to recruit the forty-six persons needed. It was important that the project not be seen as something the chaplains alone were doing but was something that came from and was being given to the members of the command. In order to understand the challenge of recruiting from a faith community of this sort, it would be helpful to understand the nature of the community in question.

¹¹ E.P.I.C. Experiential – Participatory – Image-rich – Connective

The first factor in addressing ministry in this context is that there is no regularly scheduled worship services in the hospital chapel. There are a large assortment of worship opportunities available both on-base and off-base for those so inclined. In this setting, the opportunities for gathering as a community of faith, for teaching, or any activity for that matter which could be construed as contributing to the building of a community of faith are rather limited. While the majority of the personnel might consider themselves Christian, the setting is a professional/medical one and coupled with the military aspects of life, the setting does not lend itself to communal expressions of a spiritual nature. The second factor to be addressed is that the hospital community at Camp Lejeune is a diverse one being comprised of 861 active-duty personnel, 395 civil service employees, 245 contract employees, and 130 volunteers. The racial and ethnic composition of the command is also complex and far exceeds that of the typical US America neighborhood. And there is the third factor which is the location of the command. While the bulk of the personnel are assigned to the main hospital, the command also has personnel located at twelve satellite clinics that are spread around Camp Lejeune and the surrounding county. In addition to those serving in North Carolina, there are some personnel at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, and on ships headed to points unknown.

It is important to note that the community with which I came into contact with during the course of my ministry at NCHL is even more diverse than the description shown in the preceding paragraph. NCHL services more than 42,000 Marine and Navy personnel attached to the main base at Camp Lejeune, the Marine Corps Air Station - New River, families of those Marines, along with retirees in the surrounding counties and other civilians brought to the hospital through the Emergency Room. Overall, this is a community that is changing on a day-to-day basis. One never knows from one day to the next who will be encountered within the course of that day. This is to say that creating a community of faith is not as simple as starting an EPIC worship service or Never Underestimating the Spirit (NUTS). In the Navy, NUTS is normal.

I saw the hospital's Lenten devotional as an attempt at demonstrating the reality and vitality of that unusual faith community. It is not a church, even though there is a chapel. There is not a pastor, even though there are chaplains. There is no regularly scheduled worship services, even though services are held to meet the special and occasional needs of the people. For example, throughout the year, there are services in observance of special holidays, e.g., Ash Wednesday,

the National Day of Prayer, All Saints Day, and Thanksgiving; there are funerals and weddings; there are retirement ceremonies. The hospital never closes. The opportunities to pray in the chapel or to meet with a chaplain and other community members is an on-going and ever-changing reality. I cannot stress the fact enough that this is a diverse religious community. While I am a Christian, I am also the chaplain for the Muslims, the Jews, the Wicca's,' and more. My ministry to my denomination cannot be seen as exclusive or proprietary. This is truly "a church for others."¹²

The recruiting of contributors at NHCL met with the same resistance as it had in the local church, with the added reluctance of personnel being of different ranks, occupations, and faith groups. The recruiting took place using email, the hospital's internal communications network, and the most dependable of all: face-to-face contact. Each year, I became a relentless pursuer of people who were at first, reluctant to share their faith. Only after showing them examples of other devotionals and offering assurances of their ability to share their faith was I able to gather the requisite forty-six contributors.

The Lenten devotional for 2003 expanded the impact of the previous devotional reaching the community through the **EPIC**¹³ model that had been introduced in 2002. First, the community was able to continue to **E**xperience the empowerment of their faith by sharing that faith. In the military hospital system, there is not a "pastor" to direct the faith community as much as there are chaplains who facilitate the community's faith journey. Second, the community **P**articipated in the creation of a living document, a devotional that changes with and through the community which creates it. By this I mean that everything about the devotional changes from year to year: the people who write it, those who read it, the size of the community, and the demographics of the community. This is a transient community, one that is constantly being formed and reformed. This devotional brings people together to participate in the sharing of the gospel message in a new form, different from any faith community that was formed previously. When a group of people take an active role in telling their story, they are liberated. When the people see their story

¹² Walt Kallestad. (2001). *Turn Your Church Inside Out: Building a Community for Others*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, Page 9.

¹³ Jerry Haselmayer, McLaren, Brian, and Sweet, Leonard. (1998). *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church*, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, page 111.

as coming from and being a part of the living work of the living God, they are participants in the on-going creation of The Way.

The faith community uses words to create an Image of God that comes from the life experiences of the community. The using of words that are formed through time, and the using of pictures to accent those words, creates as new image of God through the interaction of both the author and the reader. These images are the result of a new understanding brought about when the reader encounters a writer previously known in only one dimension. By bringing author and reader together in this fashion, the Word is transmitted in a new way; and in turn, it becomes new repeatedly with each new sharing.

The Connective nature of this project is found in the created of a faith community that was not aware of the fact this was and is a faith community. Since the community did not come into being for the express purpose of worshipping God, any encounter with God is not worship as the world understands it, but as the church experiences it. By taking the project to the people, getting them to take ownership of its creation, and to realize that despite the fact that there are none of the trappings normally associated with organized religion, the community of persons who comprise the NHCL community is in fact a faith community. They were connected through the faith that does not recognize rank, position, ethnicity, gender, or length of residence. This is a faith that is shared one on one, through any means possible and by any means necessary.

In 2003, the NHCL Lenten Devotional once again was written by an amazing assortment of people. Once again, it was printed and distributed, although this time it went to a much wider audience. That year, we added the devotional to the web, increasing its potential to reach a wider audience. By using this means of sharing the faith, the Directorate of Pastoral Care was able to reach not only those persons associated with the hospital and the constituent communities, but also personnel assigned throughout the world. Suddenly, people who had no relation to the NHCL community of faith became part of this extended family of believers.

The project was a bit NUTS. After all, why ask people to risk exposing themselves and their faith outside of the NHCL “church?” Because that is where the mission field is! To take on such a task, which if it were not done would not have reflected badly on my Naval fitness reports, is NUTS! And yet, it is because the people of God are out there, doing the work of taking care of people every day that I have to be out there too. To share this means of conveying the gospel

twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is to realize that while I was not preaching in a traditional sense, that is from a pulpit on a Sunday morning, I was proclaiming the Good News by taking the power of NUTS to the people, empowering them to tell the story of what God has done and is doing in their lives with the world. Experiencing this living faith, Participating in the sharing of the Good News, creating a new Image of the faith and of God, and Connecting with this dynamic community is a crazy way to do ministry, but it sure was fun! While I do wear a uniform and am not seen by most of the command as a representative of only one church, I am a representative of the One God whose people need the assurance of God's presence, in their personal space and beyond.

So, is it possible to do EPIC ministry while serving as a Navy chaplain? Just what does happen when church is done outside of and beyond the box? Each spring I send to my bishop a report that provides the details of what I am doing as an ordained pastor and as a Navy chaplain in support of my being reappointed to this extension ministry. The report details how I am being faithful to my ordination vows as a United Methodist elder and to my oath a Naval officer. I am functioning as a pastor, a Navy officer, a chaplain, and as a Christian, 14/7/365.

The question may be fairly asked: "Could what I am doing be considered as doing church?" This is a fair question, since there are no new members being assimilated, no evangelism is permitted; and no overt missionary activity is allowed. However, there are sacraments being offered; worship is being conducted; and there is a keen emphasis on ecumenical activity and pluralism. Church is being done beyond any doubt and beyond the box, because in this setting at least, church is what the people make of it. The church is being made anew every day.

Reports such as the one I send to my bishop are more than a listing of events and raw numbers. The reports represent the lives that are transformed because of the church cared enough to engage those people where they were. The report details the efforts of one pastor/chaplain to meet the needs of people in ways that were meaningful to the people. This meaningful ministry is not just in the comfort zone of this chaplain, but in the lives of the people with whom I am in ministry: the denomination that ordained me, the institution that commissioned me, and the Corps that assigns me.

Issues of theology, worship styles, politics, and the ever-changing dynamics of working with the diverse collection of people who make up the Sea Service community will continue to

challenge Navy chaplains in the years to come. It is imperative that the experience I had during my first tour as a Navy chaplain¹⁴ not be endured by others in the Corps if the Chaplain Corps is to have a future that exemplifies not only the Navy's core values, but that of our common calling to serve God's people. What sort of Chaplain Corps will emerge to lead the Sea Service community in the years to come? The Religious Requirements Oversight Council (RROC) set out to offer to all Navy chaplains a viable understanding of what it will mean to be in ministry: "The RROC engaged in a dynamic discussion of transformational ministry, the states of the Chaplain Corps, and the most effective means of meeting the ministerial needs of the people of God in the Sea Services."¹⁵

The RROC offers four initiatives¹⁶ that focus upon changing ministry to an operational focus:

Facilitate operational readiness by transforming all Sea Service ministry.

Enhance operational readiness through spiritual and moral/ethical advisement and training.

Enhance operational readiness of combatants through holistic renewal and transformational ministry.

Transformational alignment of all religious ministry to an operational emphasis.

Regardless of the faith perspective of the individual chaplain, these guidelines offer a viable roadmap for engaging the Sea Services with what we do best, serve people while serving God. From my perspective as a Christian, it is exciting for me to imagine a Chaplain Corps which might personify the message of this amazing paraphrase of the Sermon on the Mount:

When you enter into an Intra-religious dialogue, do not think beforehand what you have to believe.

When you witness to your faith, do not defend yourself or your vested interests, sacred as they may appear to you. Do like the birds of the skies: They sing and fly and do not defend their music or their beauty.

When you dialogue with somebody, look at your partner as a revelatory experience, as you would – and should – look at the lilies in the fields.

When you engage in Intra-religious dialogue, try to first remove the beam that is your own eye before removing the speck in the eye of your neighbor.

Blessed are you when you do not feel self-sufficient while being in dialogue.

Blessed are you when you trust the other because you trust in Me.

¹⁴ Appendix C, One Navy Chaplain's Experience, page 212.

¹⁵ United States Navy Chaplain Corps Strategic Initiatives, September 03 to September 06, 18 September 2003.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Blessed are you when you face misunderstandings from your own community or others for the sake of your fidelity to truth.

Blessed are you when you do not give up your convictions, and yet you do not set them up as absolute norms.

Woe unto you, you practitioners of religions, when you do not listen to the cries of the little one.

Woe unto you, you religious authorities, because you prevent change and (re)conversion.

Woe unto you, religious people, because you monopolize religion and stifle the Spirit, which blows where and how she wills.¹⁷

¹⁷ Raimon Panikkar. (1999). *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, page 1.