

# **THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MINISTRY TO THE ARMED FORCES**

**Presented by**

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Thank you Chaplain Iasiello for that warm greeting. I value it very highly. I value the partnership of you and Chaplain Baldwin and Chaplain Hicks enormously. Thank you. Dr. Langhorne, Executive Committee Members and members of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces—thank you for your invitation to speak to this annual conference. I know of your support for our people through your chaplains and I am grateful for the opportunity to express my appreciation and appreciation of the Department for what you do. Dr. Langhorne, your injunction to the audience this morning to talk through silence reminds me of the executive secretary to the Secretary of Defense, who was asked every morning how he was doing. He said he was perfect and improving, so I am going to add this to my lexicon of slightly contradictory, but important statements you should remember. I do thank all of you for working together with the military services to ensure the religious freedoms for our men and women in uniform, serving far away, are met, and met well.

I know that many of you are veterans yourselves and have personally served your country during times of war or national emergency, and I thank you for that service.

You have asked me this morning to speak about transformation and how transformation initiatives of the Department of Defense might affect the chaplaincy and I am delighted to do so. But, let me begin by setting the context for transformation. One question, of course, that arises when the term transformation is used is, exactly what does the speaker mean by this term. I was trained, as you can see from my biography, as an economist, and I will give you an economist's version of that answer. It is best, I think, illustrated with a story that economists like to tell about their own profession. In that tale, a graduate of a distinguished university returns to his alma mater some twenty years after receiving his advanced degree to visit his favorite professor. She was administering an examination when he arrives and so he takes his seat at the back of the room, opens the exam booklet out of curiosity to see

what questions are being asked these days of the graduate students, and was amazed to discover that they are writing on the same questions to which he offered answers two decades before. This strikes him as being a little unusual, so when the examination was finished, he goes up to his mentor and asks her. “Professor, isn’t it unusual to keep asking the same questions?” The students, after all, are not really tested on the full range of material that was issued in their courses. She simply smiles at him and remarks, “Remember, in economics, we don’t change the questions, we just change the answers.” I know you come from a profession where the answers are in variance, but you will have to bear with us who are trained differently, and I do think that little story does illustrate what transformation is all about.

The questions confronting the military organization, the American military organization, have not in their fundamentals changed all that much, but the context in which they are answered has changed and changed enormously and our institution needs to change with it. Indeed, the President, as you may recall, campaigned during the year 2000 on a platform that focused on transformation in military as one of the tasks he would undertake to the American people were he elected, and it is his central charge—above the war against terrorism, above the many operations which he must manage. It is the central charge from the President to the Secretary of Defense and the focus of his stewardship of this Department.

It affects many elements of how we approach our responsibilities to the Department of Defense. I know that causes uncertainty and to some extent anxiety among different communities in the Department. How is it going to affect my area of responsibility? Let me, on the one hand, assure you about what is constant as far as the chaplaincy is concerned, but also point to the areas of change.

We begin with two issues that I know worry some in the religious ministry. One is that we might give this responsibility, this mission to someone else. That we would outsource this mission with people—that is not in the Department’s plans, let me assure you on that front.

Second question that some might raise is, could we use civilian pastors as opposed to uniform pastors. We are not headed in that direction. I want to assure on that front as well. Our chaplains, as you appreciate, are focused on the primary mission of the chaplain corps in the three military departments and that is to ensure that our troops, wherever they might

be around the world, can indeed engage in the free exercise of their religious beliefs. That does not change. But, there are some other things that are changing. The first of those changes focuses on the governances of the process. I think you have already covered this in some of your discussions earlier, but I would like to touch on just a few key points. We have, as you know, published new core documents in the Department of Defense: they are Directive 1304.19 and the Implementing Instruction 1304.28, and those guide the basic process by which we appoint chaplains to the military services. Even though some changes have occurred in these documents from the previous ones, our dependence on civilian religious organizations to provide ministers, rabbis, imams, priests and other religious leaders to become chaplains is not one of them. We still rely on you. You, as endorsers, are still at the heart of the process for obtaining chaplains. Note that they will bear the title "chaplain". That is a time-honored title recognized by millions of veterans. Publishing these two documents was a major accomplishment. They are not very long, but it did take nine years to come to a conclusion. It may not be long in your view of history, but long in ours. It took us nine years to get to this point. They are, I believe, carefully thought through and they codify and update our procedures. They do change some elements of our process. They acknowledge that the Department of Defense does not have the authority to declare religious organizations as legitimate. Some, in the past, I regret to say, confused our listing of endorsers as those groups that were legitimate to practice their particular faith on military installations. That was not right. Unfortunately, I might also acknowledge, some endorsers were using this reverse thinking to say that they had been endorsed by the Department of Defense as a legitimate organization. As a result, there is no longer an approval process for any organization becoming an endorsing agency. Instead, we have established criteria that when met allow us to place a religious organization on our endorser list. Any religious organization that meets this set of administrative criteria will be added. You may think this is a small change, but in terms of velocity, it is a very important one. The Department of Defense cannot make legitimate or make legal any religious group, just note the ones who have met the qualifications to be endorsers. I will not go into the details. You have had a panel this morning or are going to have a panel on the program that will deal with the specifics of how this actually works.

I do want to turn to three new substantive areas in which we seek your partnership, more accurately the partnership of the chaplains you provide us, because each of them is emblematic of the new things the Department is doing. First, Chaplain Iasiello touched on this very briefly. We are engaged in a dialogue with the chaplains about the degree to which

they, when they serve on the staff of a combatant commander, could be one of the voices that helps that combatant commander understand other cultures and other culture's practices, because as religious figures they bring a different perspective to those issues and it is a perspective that the Department increasingly needs to have as it operates in areas around the world. One of the sub-issues this raises for you to advise us on is, should we encourage chaplains to have a greater linguistic competence just as we are encouraging linguistic competence in all other elements of the Department of Defense.

Secondary on which we need your partnership, advice and assistance is how we deal, again, Chaplain Iasiello touched on this in his opening remarks, how we deal with the stresses that affect our people. Not just in the theatre where you already apply your role and have long played a role, but after they come home from that theatre and reengage, reconnect with the family life that they have left, which of course, has changed by the very fact of their absence in the meantime. This is often a difficult period for many of our personnel. You have long helped with this issue. We would like to hear from you how you can help us with this readjustment process in an even more energetic and effective way as we move forward. We recognize that the reengagement, the reintegration of our personnel into the civilian life they left, is one of our responsibilities.

The third area that you can help us is, again, in an area where you have (You have provided some of that in a conference assembled on a similar subject just a few months ago, but we look for you to provide some additional advice and assistance in the future.)—that is the subject of sexual assault. The American military is no different than the larger society. This unfortunate crime does occur; it occurs more frequently than people like to believe because it is often not reported. In one of the specific areas where you have helped us in the past, and we are going to extend the privilege that you have had, is this whole question of confidentiality. Is there someplace where someone who thinks he or she is a victim can come to, a sanctuary, so to speak, where they can unburden themselves of this terrible event and seek assistance and guidance as to how they proceed? Except for the chaplain, the Department does not support anyone else. We are going to change that in the next few months. We would like your advice on how best to proceed. You did already engage in the conference, which started to assemble thoughts on this matter. We also seek your partnership as we go forward because we seek to achieve within the Department much better reporting, much greater trust, which is ultimately the issue here between ourselves and our people on this matter. We know that we can count on your support and assistance in this

regard. You and your colleagues have a distinguished history in this Department. There is, as you know, a series of photographs in the Chaplain's lounge in the basement of the Administration Building at Arlington National Cemetery. In those rooms where chaplains have consoled and encouraged families during their loss, there are photographs of chaplains doing their ministry from wars in the past. There is one of a chaplain conducting a burial service from the deck of a Naval warship. Another is chaplain standing on the wing of a bomber where he is conducting a service, and another is in front of a makeshift altar in the shell of a bombed out building in the Second World War. Chaplains have, throughout their history, thought creatively and practically, and we seek your assistance in continuing that tradition on these new issues. They have thought through their mission, their ministry, and recognized that meant bringing God to our service people whenever the need arose. The trends for military will reward this creativity and flexibility, and reward it in a different context than we have operated within before. Before we conduct operations, usually a single service at a time, now as you can see in both operations "Enduring Freedom" and "Iraqi Freedom," it is a joint world that we operate and we need chaplaincy to adjust to that reality as well. Our world continues to shrink, yet becoming even more complex at the same time. Whereas in the past, chaplains would probably be called upon to function as practitioners in their individual faith traditions; in the future, they will increasingly be called upon to be consultants and advisors, as I suggested, to their commanders on the precepts of other world religions. Having a solid background on comparative religions allows them to fulfill their role as advisors in a sensitive, intelligent and discerning way. In some ways, even though our society is becoming more tolerant and more knowledgeable on other religious positions, we have still a long way to go. For the chaplains that you send, not only should their education be broad, but also their conceptual picture of ministry must clearly depict a very pluralistic mindset reflecting pluralism in their own ranks and in the world in which we function. As you are aware, the military chaplaincy ministry is not for everyone. Please stress to your candidates how important this cooperative, pluralistic mindset is for working alongside chaplains of many different traditions. If this presents a problem, perhaps you could suggest other ministries for them.

Today, as you know well, there are hundreds of chaplains who have left their families and the comfort of their homes to be with our troops in combat. This sacrificial ministry has been the hallmark of the chaplaincy, the military chaplaincy, and its ministry for years. We all remember the brave sacrifices of the four chaplains of the *Dorchester* in 1943, just 61 years ago. There was a Catholic, Jewish, and two Protestants. They stood arm-in-arm on

the deck of the sinking ship after they had given up their own life jackets so that others could be saved. The impact of their love and sacrifice was not lost on the men that survived nor on the nation they served. Father John Washington was Catholic, Reverend Clark Poling was Dutch Reformed, Rabbi Alexander Goode was Jewish, and Reverend George Fox was Methodist. They have been honored by Congress and Presidents. It is an intensely moving mental picture of a sacrificial mission in nature of chaplains. These were your chaplains. We owe you a debt of gratitude for them. Today, the reports continue to come sharing with the world the ways in which military chaplains continue to sacrifice and minister, now again, in yet another war. One of these current chaplains, a Roman Catholic Priest, wrote to his friends and family and I quote, "One of my main ministries is at the medical center. Yesterday was my first day there. The medical staff and our injured troops are inspirational. The young men and women, who are transported here from the field, often suffering from serious injuries, are strong and brave. When I met one patient, I told him we prayed and ministered to everyone, but did he have a religious preference. He said he was Catholic. I said, 'I am a Catholic priest' and with a smile on his face he said, 'super.' I anointed him, stayed with him, counseled, him and consoled him until he was transported. It is a privilege and honor to serve the Lord and our troops here." Other chaplains have even added nation building to their ministry within the units in the field, working with schools, orphanages, and the Iraqi society helping to do this most important job of reaching out in a way perhaps only religious leaders can do. Your chaplains are essential in this endeavor.

A newspaper article from Raleigh, North Carolina, described the ministry of one chaplain: "He conducted pre-battle blessings, ministered to the wounded and dying soldiers, held Palm Sunday Services while soldiers waved fresh cut palm branches. Another time, he led soldiers walking through the ruins of Babylon." Chaplains are praying for peace and preparing our brave men for war. A chaplain who served just minutes from here at Arlington National Cemetery is emotional when he describes the incredible privilege of representing his country to families of veterans. The chaplain is often the last official representative of our country as the flag is passed. They repeat those sacred words, "On behalf of the President of the United States and a grateful nation," you know them well.

These are your chaplains—with our people from birth to death, in high points and in low, in rejoicing and in anguish. You know all this already. I share this not to inform you of these accomplishments, but that you might know that your Department of Defense is aware of it. The leadership of our military and our country knows what you do and we all appreciate the ministry of the chaplaincy.

There is one other point I would like to make. One other area which we need your assistance as representatives of your religious organizations. You know of the extraordinary contributions being made by reserve and guard personnel. They have put on the uniform to fight and serve with our total force. What a force! Not a few of these are chaplains. Indeed the chaplains and reserve chaplains began to respond on September 11<sup>th</sup>. They have left, in many cases, their church congregations for extended periods of time and they are doing wonderful work. This, of course, has created a hardship on their church congregations just as it does for Guards and Reserves leaving their civilian employers to serve their country. In some ways a pastor leaving a small congregation in which he or she is the sole pastor is more like a business losing their President or their Chief Executive Officer. I understand and appreciate that. But we face the same challenge with these reserve personnel as we do for any other reserve or guard member coming to active duty, and that is assuring them of an appropriate post when they return. For any particular problems with small congregations, I invite your partnership on how we make sure these individuals are celebrated and welcomed on their return to their civilian life. We need to help fix any problems out there and we are counting on your assistance in doing this.

I thank you for the opportunity to address you today. The ministry that your chaplains provide to our people is absolutely vital. I have seen their work. It is crucial! Thank you for the partnership you share with us in the military. I am confident the cooperative work of the chaplaincy that is so vital to this country for hundreds of years will continue all the stronger. Thank you. God Bless you and your work. May God Bless and protect our Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, Marines and Coast Guard personnel and especially our Chaplains wherever they serve. May God Bless every one of them. Thank you very much.