

## ***Part Two - The Care and Leadership of Caregivers***

The Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries (BSFM) is a leader who will seek to be a Christocentric agent of reconciliation. Not unlike the experiences of servicemembers and their families during earlier wars, once again we know that the stress of sustained cyclic combat operations exacts a significant personal, emotional, and spiritual toll. Our caregiver military, V.A., and prison chaplains and their families are subject to the very same burdens. Through the experience of frequent long-distance travel and repetitive combat operations I have learned two essentials about life in this stressful environment. The first is that during times of anxiety and trauma Episcopal chaplains are capable of offering unsurpassed pastoral care; pastoral care mediated through the sacraments of our church. Second, our chaplains and their families are among the church's most valuable resources. The BSFM is obliged to ensure that these treasured people receive the best available pastoral care and encouragement.

Accordingly, the BSFM should enable and encourage chaplains to find a creative balance between institutional professional and spiritual centeredness. A strategic leadership challenge for federal ministries is the formation of our chaplains as spiritual leaders within their vocational settings. It is not enough for federal chaplains to exclusively be spiritually centered or exclusively be professionals within their vocational context. Our chaplains must become both, and in so doing become transformational leaders. The preparation and formation of our chaplains as exceptional spiritual leaders will prepare them for assignments to senior positions where they may exert far-reaching positive institutional.

It must be understood that not all of chaplains for whom the BSFM is responsible are of one mind on the critical issues within the church today. For two years I served a corporate sized congregation that was agonizingly divided over issues of church polity and human sexuality. I was not surprised to find that this ministry setting called for the rector to be a reconciling leader. Such purposed leadership was not easily or quickly

accomplished, but rather was achieved over a sustained period of time as I steadfastly led my people with Christ at the center while offering to give every voice a fair hearing.

Currently we are faced with significant challenges to recruit highly qualified priests for all three of the federal vocational settings. To illustrate, the fact that presently we have only one chaplain serving in the Federal Bureau of Prisons is unacceptable. We must seek ways to improve our methods of recruitment. Through my experience of having been responsible for military chaplain officer recruiters and later serving as a diocesan deployment officer I envision a plan to leverage the deployment system within the church through personal contact and presence with the provincial deployment officers. This fresh approach to recruiting will be a helpful change in our ability to attract young, capable and inspired priests for these vital and exciting federal ministries.

The BSFM must be an observant and sometimes challenging prophetic voice to the institution. The day after spending September 11, 2001 at an interrupted morning meeting inside the Pentagon, I struggled to respond to the challenge of reframing the ministry for over 375 fleet chaplains for whom I was responsible into the context of our new realities. Quickly I became aware that our uniformed Muslim Sailors and Marines could become the targets of unearned and illogical religious prejudice. After a couple of hours of communicating with my senior chaplains I found that indeed some of this was already happening. I responded by calling upon my superior, the Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, to ask him to release a statement that such harassment and intimidation would not be tolerated. Though at first he was hesitant to act, ultimately I was able to convince him that he needed to act for the welfare of his people. Federal chaplains must always be an advocate for the most vulnerable in our midst.

Similarly, the BSFM must be an advocate for all Episcopal federal chaplains. This advocacy will be expressed in a variety of ways: as a supporter, an intercessor, a pleader, an encourager, and a confronter, just to mention a few. Though many of our citizens see religious pluralism in the federal milieu as the fulfillment of their First Amendment dreams, still there are others who are threatened and afraid, and who see pluralism as a danger against which they must defend themselves and their country. All too frequently the threatened and fearful will categorize Episcopal chaplains, who often

lead the quest for religious diversity, as a part of the problem. In such situations the BSFM must know all three federal systems well enough to be an engaging and effective voice for the chaplains.

The definitive vision for the BSFM can be captured in four distinct responsibilities:

- Be a transformational agent in the style of God's call to Isaiah (Isa. 6.1-8) thus enabling our cadre of chaplains to confront the evolving challenges of a new century.
- Be eager to engage in new and emerging ministry within the context of the best practices of the church.
- Be a partner with our chaplains, their superiors, the Presiding Bishop, and The Episcopal Church so as to ensure that we always strive for excellence in our ministries.
- Be willing to embrace a ministry of engagement utilizing each and every opportunity as a potential moment in which the lives of the people committed to our cure may experience the life changing power of Christ.