

Somewhere in the World...

prepared by the Very Rev. Rich Martindale

Somewhere in the world, a soldier is fighting for another square foot of freedom, or stands a post to maintain a hard-won peace. Somewhere in the world, a sailor is living away from home for half a year at a time, and a Marine is waiting for the next order to stand in the gap. Somewhere in the world, a pilot is flying at the very edge of a frontier, with an army of technicians preparing for the pilot's return. Somewhere in the world a doctor or a nurse tends to the needs of a veteran whose health has been the sacrifice of this war or the last or the one before that... Somewhere in the world, a prisoner whose trespass against society has risen to the level of federal crime is saying a prayer into another dark night, while a guard defends the prisoner and the society. Somewhere in the world there's a child of God trying to live a life of faithfulness and grace in spite of incredible obstacles and hardships and dangers.

From coast to coast and around the world, there are children of God in every branch of federal service, and some are Episcopalians. Many of them become very active participants in the parishes and dioceses they call home for however long the government lets them stay. Some are part of vibrant worshipping communities like St. Alban's at Kapaun Air Station in Germany, where my own family became Episcopalian, far from the structures of traditional parish and diocese. Still others find a way to pray and serve and grow by the handful or on the move. Though the number changes with every enlistment, discharge and deployment, at any given time there are over 18,000 Episcopalians in federal service somewhere in the world.

Somewhere in the world, a Chaplain is leading a Bible study, praying the Morning Office, or celebrating the Eucharist. Somewhere in the world, a Chaplain is helping someone make moral and ethical decisions in the midst of some of the most challenging conditions imaginable. Somewhere in the world, a Chaplain is marrying our daughters and sons, baptizing our children, visiting our friends in the hospital or in a prison cell, burying someone we love. Somewhere in the world, a Chaplain is reaching out with the love of Christ to the lonely, to the frightened, to the mournful, to the sick, and to the dying.

The work Chaplains in the Armed Forces, in Veterans Affairs hospitals, or in the Federal Bureau Prisons is every bit as varied as that of any parish priest. Perhaps more so, since the people they serve come from every branch of the Body of Christ, and from other faith traditions as well. Like *any* Priest of the Episcopal Church, a federal Chaplain is canonically resident in one diocese and absolutely responsible to its bishop, even though their ministry often takes them across or well outside of diocesan boundaries. In addition, Chaplains are also responsible to the leadership of the unit or institution to which they are assigned and often to an institutional chaplaincy hierarchy as well. Somewhere in the world, day after day, Chaplains engage their ministry with courage and perseverance, in spite of sometimes competing demands, and in some of the world's most demanding, complex, and hostile environments.

To coordinate and facilitate its ministry to those in federal service, the Constitution of the Episcopal Church provides for a Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries responsible to the Presiding Bishop for the work of federal Chaplains, for the vitality of worshipping communities, and for the spiritual formation, growth and nurture of individual Episcopalians in federal service.

The Office of the Bishop Suffragan most visibly carries out this mission through the recruitment and certification of Priests for federal chaplaincies. The Episcopal Church provides our proportional share of Chaplains, with nearly one hundred, fifty in federal service, but we could, and probably *should* raise up more Priests to bring both Word and Sacrament to men and women in federal service. But the Bishop Suffragan also exercises ministry to Episcopalians in the federal system more directly by producing education materials, certifying lay ministries, and by bringing episcopal oversight and direction to sometimes thriving, sometimes struggling congregations around the world.

By carefully building relationships that bridge the gap between the often dangerous world in which they live and the Church into which they have been called to ministry in Christ's name, the Bishop Suffragan confirms, strengthens, and equips these dedicated servants of Christ and his Church.

Somewhere in the world, an Episcopal Chaplain is bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ into the brightest mornings, into the darkest nights, and into the everyday lives of anyone our Lord puts in his or her path. Somewhere in the world, an Episcopalian in Armed Forces of our nation, in the VA hospital system, or in one of our federal prisons is trying to live a life of faith and integrity. Somewhere in the world, a Christian is fulfilling Christ's command to love God with all they have, and then to love their neighbor. Somewhere in the world, a child of God is weeping, or praying, or waiting.

And day by day, the Office of the Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries is encouraging and enabling and empowering Episcopalians to reach out to those children of God – somewhere in the world.