

AFFM Document #1The Venerable Carl Walter WrightMy assessment of the AFFM episcopacy and my vision for carrying it forward:

Disclaimer: my assessment of the Armed Forces and Federal Ministries (AFFM) episcopacy, in its present form, is slightly biased in that I am a member of Bishop Jay's Advisory Board whose task is selecting new chaplains to represent the Episcopal Church in the Armed Services, Veterans' Administration Hospitals, and Federal Prisons. Additionally my impressions are those of a constituent/beneficiary of this office, not as an expert. I have no idea about the inner-workings of the AFFM episcopacy. Therefore my comments are limited to how it is perceived.

That said, if I were to give a one-word assessment of this episcopacy it would be *strong*. I have served under and personally known each of the "Armed Forces Bishops," as they were previously called, since Charles Lee Burgreen; that covers a span of 38-years. Additionally, I have served at every General Convention of the Episcopal Church since 1982, most often working the AFFM booth, and enjoying every minute of it. With those experiences coloring my judgment, I can honestly say that Bishop Jay has restored dignity to the office. The Bishop is widely travelled and well known. The Bishop and his staff members are highly organized and efficient. I suspect that Bishop Jay's greatest accomplishment has been the strong relationships he has forged in the Episcopal Church, with the DoD establishment, and with his people. Because of these things this episcopacy now enjoys the respect of the Armed Forces Chaplain Board, the Chief of Chaplains, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Veterans' Administration, and most importantly, the chaplains and military personnel and their families.

Perhaps more than a diocesan episcopacy, the AFFM truly reflects the personality and priorities of the incumbent. In has served us well. Federal chaplains are often in isolated situations, separated from fellow Episcopalians, and sometimes from fellow Christians. So this episcopacy ideally should be a "lifeline" for its constituent members.

Also, unlike bishops whose episcopacies have a geographical see, boundaries, and constituents in a set location, this episcopacy is global and itinerant. In my opinion the AFFM Bishop must be a missionary with energy for ministry and a heart for young people.

From my perspective, the AFFM is yet another example of how the Episcopal Church continues to have an influence in government and society that far exceeds our relatively small numbers. My limited experience with Kairos prison ministries, both in the Diocese of Maryland and South Carolina, has shown me how ripe the mission field is and how receptive suffering people are to experiencing God's saving love. Episcopal chaplains have this in their tool kit. This is a blessing.

As for my dream for this episcopacy, it is that it would become more diverse and more representative of the diversity of the Episcopal Church. Liturgical Christians in general and the Episcopal Church in particular have unique gifts to offer the federal ministries in which we serve (e.g. a healthy spirituality; inclusiveness; attractive worship, etc.) Yet we continue to be somewhat invisible and unknown. Therefore, my #1 priority would definitely be recruitment. Even as a retired chaplain, this is a priority for me. As I look at our present chaplain numbers I see they have been almost cut in half in the past 25-years. While this is obviously attributable to the down-sizing of the American military, we can do better. Even in a down-sized military and an insider-driven Veterans Administration, we still need to redouble our efforts to get more Episcopal presence.

A second priority for me would be clergy collegiality. I have come up through the ranks, working closely with leaders of many religions. My most educational Air Force assignment was that of "Branch Chief" to the chaplains who serve the young Airmen in Basic Military Training (2002-2005). In that position I was privileged to serve with and learn from the widest possible variety of faith groups. We met monthly, formed strong alliances, and accomplished incredible things – such as building a mosque; finding an on-base worship location for Latter-Day Saints Airmen; and creating a contemporary worship service for hundreds of worshipers - all on behalf of our Airmen. I witnessed Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Ba-Hai, Christians, and Wiccans unite with mutual respect behind a common cause. This was an unusual assignment in that I supervised 9! Chaplains, each of a different faith or Christian denomination. But all assignments afford us the opportunity to get to know and respect people of other creeds. This Basic Training ministry taught me the value of clergy collegiality. I have subsequently applied this lesson everywhere I've been since then. And this would be a priority for me in the House of Bishops, the Chaplains Board, with judicatories, and with my fellow chaplains with whom I minister.

I suppose my third priority would be visitations. The AFFM Bishop needs to be an outward and visible sign of God's love to all members with whom he or she comes in contact – which in this case is a lot of people. The AFFM Bishop should, in the words of St. Francis, "preach the Gospel always; and when necessary, use words."

When I was a 19-year old Airman, sewing wild oats and rebelling against the Episcopal Church (and all things traditional), it was a pastoral visit by the late Bishop Charles Burgence to our remote location in Turkey that brought me back to my senses. Bishop Charlie was the pastor's pastor; Airmen loved him. He is one of the reasons I became a military chaplain. I was honored to be confirmed by him at one of our Episcopal European Family Conferences in 1980. As a chaplain, both active duty and retired, I have had the privilege of paying pastoral visits to former constituents, especially when they were in-between chaplains. For example, my pastoral relationship with the military and DoD Episcopalians at Ramstein Air Base, Germany has endured 20-years. And I must add that I have been a "listening ear" for

several Episcopal chaplains stationed there. As AFFM, I would also want to keep a rigorous travel schedule, meeting our folks wherever they are. As the American military overseas “footprint” continues to shrink, the AFFM Bishop’s presence in the various locations will be even more needed and appreciated.

A fourth priority would be to continue our efforts to exploit social media in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to veterans, Armed Forces members, and the incarcerated, when allowed to do so. One societal change that has only accelerated in my life-time is the large number of young people who are unchurched and have no religious foundation. We need to figure out how to translate the Good News into their language and media. We also need to redouble our efforts at closer communication with our military chaplains in diaspora. The various social media are key to accomplishing these things.

In sum, I see the AFFM episcopacy as an exciting missionary opportunity. I believe it is presently stronger than it has ever been; and now needs someone who can take it to the next level that God has in store for it. Thank you.