

Military Chaplains

Military chaplains are trained to provide assistance to service members and families of all faiths.

The current form of military chaplain dates from the era of the First World War. A chaplain provides spiritual and pastoral support for service personnel, including the conduct of religious services at sea or in the field.

Chaplains are nominated in different ways in different countries. A military chaplain can be an army-trained soldier with additional theological training or a priest nominated to the army by religious authorities.

According to the Geneva Conventions chaplains as well as medical personnel are non-combatants: they do not have the right to participate directly in hostilities. The widely held view that the Conventions require chaplains to be unarmed is untrue.

Captured chaplains are not considered Prisoners of War and must be returned to their country of origin unless retained to minister to prisoners of war. Inevitably, serving chaplains have died in action. Many have been decorated for bravery in action.

Wherever the military is, chaplains and enlisted religious support personnel are there to help and serve military members and other authorized personnel. Chaplains are ordained by individual religious denominations before they join the military. Once commissioned as officers in the Army, Navy or Air Force (Navy Chaplains serve with the Marine Corps and Coast Guard), they provide religious worship services, rites, sacraments, ordinances, and ministrations to military members and their families worldwide. They state their mission is to "nurture the living, care for the sick or wounded, minister to prisoners or prisoners of war, and honour the dead."

Chaplains also assist military personnel and family members in dealing with personal concerns such as faith issues, stress, anxiety, redeployment or reunion issues, moral and ethical values, and social concerns.

For many service members, chaplains are the first person they can turn to for help outside their chain of command. In this role, chaplains help to resolve problems by making appropriate referrals to command channels or social service agencies. They also assist military personnel in requesting emergency leave, compassionate reassignments, and hardship discharges.

Note:

For over 200 years, military chaplains have accompanied U.S. forces wherever they have served.