

# What Right Looks Like

**How Navy Chaplains are helping develop toughness  
in the 21st century warrior**  
by CAPT Brian K. Waite, CHC, USN

In the foreword of the recently released *Department of the Navy Strategic Plan for Religious Ministry Version 2.0*, Chief of Chaplains RADM Brent Scott articulates why the Chaplain Corps is vital to the Navy and Marine Corps Team. He highlights how the chaplain, even as a noncombatant, supports the warfighting mission by supporting our greatest resource—our people. Religious ministry teams (RMTs) encourage and equip Marines to fulfill their honorable commitments in peace and war. Chaplains build personal, unit, and family readiness. They strengthen spirit, moral character, and toughness. The *Department of the Navy Strategic Plan for Religious Ministry Version 2.0* lays out how RMTs will help Marines recognize what right looks like. The *Strategic Plan* is organized into four goals which focus the efforts of Religious Ministry Teams and the entire Chaplain Corps:

- Goal 1: Operationalize Religious Ministry.
- Goal 2: Sharpen Core Capabilities.
- Goal 3: Develop Chaplain Corps Leaders with Intentionality.
- Goal 4: Champion the Spiritual Readiness of Marines and Sailors.

## Goal 1: Operationalize Religious Ministry

Acting Secretary Modly is clearly

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***We as a Navy and Marine Corps Team must focus our collective confidence in the goodness of the nation we defend, and on our ability to defend it with vigilance and agility. We must continue to be grateful for, and mindful of, our Sailors, Marines, and the families, who make sacrifices daily across the globe to keep the light of freedom bright. We must honor them with how we approach our jobs and in what we do everyday to make our Navy and Marine Corps the finest and most powerful in the world—both today and into the very competitive and unpredictable future.***

**—Thomas B. Modly,  
Acting Secretary of the Navy**

articulating that our mission as a naval Service is to be ready for combat operations. No one knows this better than the Marine Corps.

The guidance is clear: our warriors must be ready *now!* There is an urgency in tone because lives and the mission are at stake. To be ready now for the types of conflicts that may be on the horizon, the Marine Corps is return-

ing to its amphibious roots: preparing for combat at and from the sea. Special emphasis is needed because large-scale amphibious operations have not been seen since World War II. When we look at the history of such combat operations, immediately the battles of Tarawa, Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu, and Okinawa come to mind, battles that show the progression of am-

***Our competitors see the landscape as continuous; we will do so as well. Restoring agility means realizing that operating in the spectrum can be non-linear and simultaneous—our adversaries can operate at different levels of intensity in different domains at the same time. We will not let rigid thinking or self-imposed structures prevent us from operating in creative ways.***

**—A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority**

**We should take pride in our force and recent operational successes, but the current force is not organized, trained, or equipped to support the naval force—operating in contested maritime spaces, facilitating sea control, or executing distributed maritime operations. We must change. We must divest of legacy capabilities that do not meet our future requirements, regardless of their past operational efficacy.**

—Commandant's Planning Guidance 2019

phibious warfare during World War II. Chaplains were a vital part of each one, not just because they served alongside the Marines during these amphibious assaults but because they were able to help prepare the Marines for life and death. Chaplains were there when the Marines were training and preparing for the fight. Chaplains were there as the Marines faced their toughest challenges. Chaplains were there, for some, in their final moments.

In the same way today and in the future, chaplains will contribute to the refocus on combat at and from the sea by cultivating preparedness in themselves and those they serve. Chaplains serving with Marines are *Navy* chaplains. They understand both Marine Corps and Navy cultures. The chaplain can help bridge some potential cultural gaps—improving communication and efficiency. To be an effective bridge, the chaplain must be fluent in the language of operations. RMTs will sharpen their operational skills and acumen. Training will prepare teams to operate independently or in conjunction with other teams in joint, combined, and coalition formations. The Chaplain Corps will maximize agility by evaluating and aligning ministry delivery models and administrative authorities. Chaplains can help warfighters be their best selves by coaching them before, during, and after challenging times. They do this by “being there” and having a ministry of presence. There is something profound in shared hardships: eating the same meals, sleeping in the same spaces, encountering the same difficulties. Oftentimes, being there earns the chaplain the opportunity to be listened to. Chap-

lains certainly use that opportunity to preach, but they also lead by example in dealing with the myriad challenges of military service. Chaplains change lives by teaching life skills. Wherever RMTs serve, they use their credibility to build up their Marines. Combat at and from the sea requires strength and agility which are cultivated beforehand in daily life. Whether in the chapel, the hospital, or the training environment—both in the field or garrison—chaplains and Religious Program Specialists (RPs) operationalize every aspect of their efforts in order to support ministry in combat.

#### **Goal 2: Sharpen Core Capabilities**

Naval chaplaincy exists to support the free exercise of religion in the unique environment of the military. For this to be accomplished properly, Department of the Navy policy identifies the Chaplain Corps’ four core capabilities: provide, facilitate, care, and advise. The core capabilities will be sharpened to achieve the greatest positive impact on those served.

*Provide.* Every chaplain serving in the United States Navy is sent by their religious organization to *provide* faith-specific ministry. Chaplains will consistently offer their divine services, making them available and relevant to the circumstances while always honoring the manner and forms of their religious organization. Many people of faith believe that the *provision* of religious rites brings an empowerment that cannot come in any other manner. It is something special—something beyond this earthly realm.

*Facilitate.* Chaplains must also know their limitations. If they cannot *provide* for the particular religious needs of others, it is incumbent upon them to find someone who can. A chaplain marshalling resources in support of a faith not shared by that chaplain is at the core of *facilitation*. The willingness to *facilitate* is required in order to serve in the pluralistic environment of the military while remaining faithful to both clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution: free exercise without the establishment of religion.

*Care.* Every chaplain must have compassion and concern for those they serve. Chaplains *care* whether one has the same religious beliefs, different religious beliefs, or no religious beliefs at all. *Care* is essential to a chaplain’s credibility. People are much more interested in what you have to say, when they know that you *care* for them no matter what. RMTs will collect and share ministry best practices, developing templates, SOPs, and inspection regimes that enhance ministry across the board.

***Be brilliant in the basics. Don't dabble in your job; you must master it ... battles, conventional or irregular, turn on the basics of gaining fire superiority and maneuvering against the enemy. Fire and maneuver—block and tackle—decide battle. The Corps exists to win battles. That is inseparable from making Marines who stand for its values in tough times. Anything that doesn't contribute to winning battles or winning Marines is of secondary importance.***

—Call Sign Chaos by Gen James Mattis, USMC(Ret)

*Advise.* Chaplains are uniquely qualified and positioned to deliver advice to individuals and the chain of command. Chaplains help individuals through wise counsel. They help the chain of command check itself as to what right looks like. Chaplains must have a *prophetic* aspect to their ministry. They must be prepared to speak truth to power as advocates of the individual. They must be prepared to speak the truth to individuals in order to help them be their best selves.

#### **Goal 3: Develop Chaplain Corps Leaders With Intentionality**

The Chaplain Corps is made up of teams of chaplains and RPs who work together to serve their people. The sum of that effort is the system of Professional Navy Chaplaincy (PNC). For PNC to work, leaders must be developed not only in the area of technical expertise but also moral character. Chaplains and RPs can be experts in a given field, but they are worthless if they lack moral integrity. The question is not *if* a chaplain will be needed to lead, but *when*. Moral integrity is the linchpin of leadership—especially during a crisis. The Marine Corps and Chaplain Corps develop talented and ethical leaders who can lead from the front no matter the conditions. The Chaplain Corps will intentionally develop leaders by aligning periodic mandated PNC training, expanding the circle of leadership within the Chaplain Corps, building continuity in on-the-job training, using data analytics, and emphasizing both character and competence in all training regime.

#### **Goal 4: Champion the Spiritual Readiness of Marines and Sailors**

For many Marines and family members, faith and religious practice are indispensable to readiness, being unique and crucial sources of strength and stability. The Navy Chaplain Corps exists to promote religious freedom in the unique environment of the Sea Services and to strengthen the spirit of all who defend our freedoms at and from the sea. The Marine Corps invites Marines into dialogue about the spirit through *spiritual fitness*. Spiritual fit-

***As we deliberately work to develop each aspect of leadership, over time, competence, character, and connectedness become three inseparable lanes of the path we travel. Moving down this path becomes the most challenging journey we can take as Navy leaders.***

—Navy Leader Development Framework 3.0 2019

ness is tested in combat. What is it that gives Marines strength to carry on in the midst of adversity? What is it that allows one to grow and be strengthened in traumatic events, rather than becoming debilitated? The answer is in the *spirit*. Religious ministry offers a ray of hope in the midst of despair. It draws attention to *something greater than ourselves* during the most difficult circumstanced imaginable—literally, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

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We can have the greatest armament, munitions, and technology in the world, but their effectiveness can be degraded unless Marines are honorable, tough, courageous, focused, and committed. Chaplains come alongside to coach warriors on excelling at the basics of life, helping them develop the skills which make for better Marines and better citizens. Through shared hardship, well placed words of wisdom, and by living in a way that epitomizes *honor, courage, and commitment*, chaplains show Marines and their families what right looks like.

History offers an example of what right looks like when chaplains and Marines serve together in combat at and from the sea. During World War II, Chaplain John Craven accompanied his Marines on combat amphibious landings in the Marshall Islands, at Saipan, and Tinian. He witnessed firsthand the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima. His Marines referred to him as “John the Baptist” from the Christian scriptures. They spoke of him in laudatory terms, not just because he was with them in the darkest of days but because he was a person of moral courage and wisdom. The Marines said he made all the difference in the world as they faced almost certain death. They said the noise of combat faded as they thought of his numerous sermons, his words of wise counsel, and when they experienced his heroic acts of kindness. On Iwo Jima, he often was seen wiping the volcanic ash from their blood-soaked faces with a moistened gauze so they would have some sort of comfort and peace in their final moments. Chaplain Craven was eventually awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star for his bravery. When chaplains and RPs demonstrate such selfless action, the warfighter is empowered in a way that cannot be accomplished by any other means.



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