

MISSION MINDED



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE WORK OF BBFI-ENDORSED CHAPLAINS

BBFI and Military Chaplaincy

James G. Smith • Chaplain Endorser — BBFI

For many years the Baptist Bible Fellowship International has had an agreement with the United States Department of Defense. The BBFI is an authorized ecclesiastical endorsing agency for Chaplains serving the Armed Forces.

This gives an amazing opportunity for prepared, dedicated, and conscientious men to serve both God and country. Each branch of the military has its own specific requirements as to the chaplaincy. Once a man has chosen in which branch he will serve, he then must meet the requirements of the BBFI.

While the military chaplain is a member of the Armed Forces and serves as a commissioned officer, he is also a minister of the Gospel, a representative of his sending church, and a representative of the BBFI.

The Armed Forces have physical, educational, and ecclesiastical requirements. The BBFI and the local churches have requirements that have to do more with the spiritual, doctrinal, and experiential.

Each of our chaplains has a sending church and is commissioned and authorized by that church to administer the ordinances. When appropriate and available, our chaplains

encourage the men and women to whom they minister to get involved in local churches.

The chaplaincy offers amazing opportunities for evangelism and personal discipleship. To be a pastor in uniform has its own set of requirements ... and abundant blessings.

We are grateful for the chaplains who have helped us with the interviews to make up this edition of *Global Partners*.

Anyone interested in more information or in the actual application procedure should contact me at the BBFI World Mission Service Center at jsmith@bbfmissions.com or (417) 862-5001



The Chaplaincy, As I See It.

Chaplain (Major) Bill Wehlage, Retired

As I began to look into the military requirements for accessioning as a U.S. Army chaplain, I was stunned at the extent of education and experience required. Looking back, I wish I'd had more! After many years in the chaplaincy, I realized why such requirements exist. Military chaplains are military staff officers, required to remain proficient at every aspect of military training and still find time to minister to thousands of soldiers and their family members. It's normally only after the 15-mile foot march, carrying 80 pounds of equipment, that you find time to gather the soldiers around for a service. If you don't walk with them, they don't come to service. It is, in essence, an incarnational ministry, validating the minister in all points, such as the soldier; yet, insisting he remain a sterling example with a relevant message that is clear, powerful, and evidently from God. Young

men, if you are considering service to God and country in the military chaplaincy there is a formula for ministerial education and experience which you should take to heart: more is better!

As a local church pastor, I served people who

were mostly like me. In the Army, I am faced with soldiers and family members from every economic, ethnic, race, religion, and recently sexual 'preference.' The military is literally a cross-section of America that leaders amazingly develop into a tight-knit culture with a governing sense of duty, honor, and country. Like most mission fields, it is difficult to penetrate without mastering the culture, learning the language, and living among them. Once inside this thick armor, a chaplain's love for the soldiers, personal example, clarity, and relevance in message will exponentially affect the heart through God's transforming power.

Those unfamiliar with the military

chaplaincy often wonder, "How can military chaplains serve among so many of other faiths without compromising?" For me, the prophet Daniel has always been a great example. Exiled from the benefit of his national and faith surroundings, he was placed among religious leaders of diverse faith groups and nationalities. But Daniel and the Hebrew children were the king's choice more than once and were selected and honored above the preacher-politicians of their day. Why? Because God empowers His truth to work. Today, the God-called, Word-trained, Spirit-filled chaplain stands in the midst of many religious leaders who believe and behave differently. You see, as one looks at a clear night sky, he or she marvels at the array of stars and not the blackness behind them. The darkness is designed by the Creator as a backdrop to best display His handiwork. Just as Daniel's dark, impotent surroundings provided a high-contrast setting for God's truth to shine, so our BBFI chaplains stand as powerful beacons of God's truth in a dreary field of compromise.

It is my opinion that if you are interested in the military chaplaincy, please understand God does not require nor desire politically correct, solution-focused, or seeker-sensitive approaches in the chaplaincy. He does not need the media savvy, the psychologically versed, or a puppet that constantly modifies his behavior and message at the tug of any human influence. God still cries, as He did to Moses, "Send thou men!" The chaplaincy is not a preacher-boy playground to rehearse ministerial maneuvers; rather, a spiritual battlefield where our country's finest are pressed to the very envelope of human suffering and cry for the truth of God's Word in the very hour of death. It requires the highest training yet the humblest personality. It demands the clearest communicators with the utmost compassion. A chaplain must possess great spiritual and physical strength, yet be in absolute dependence to God. A chaplain has to be bigger than himself in countless ways, understanding God's campaign of contrast among other ministers, yet never viewing himself as superior. A chaplain must be all things to all men that by any means God might save some while never compromising his call, his message, or his LORD.

The Military never leaves the soldier in one place too long — and the chaplaincy exposes

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their officers to every possible genre of military ministry. For me, this exposure began with the privilege of serving in Initial Entry Training units, consisting of 1,200 recruits, most of whom were overcome with anxiety when exposed to their new surroundings and the upcoming demands of training. In this high-stress environment, thousands came to Christ. Besides the dozen who would get saved in weekly counseling sessions, it was not unusual to have 10-15 percent of the 400-500 in attendance pray to receive Christ in weekly chapel services.

Desperately needing a break after my first three years, we were excited to receive overseas orders to Hawaii where I served with a Combat Service Support unit consisting of Transport and Logistics assets. This was a much smaller unit with 400-500 personnel that only rotated out every three years. In this environment, I was forced to learn Army staff work. The military, unlike some aspects of civilian ministry, has very

specific staffing loopholes that a chaplain must master in order to gain ministry approval and funding. Learning these intricacies early in my career proved to be one of the greatest ministry multipliers and enabled me to spend millions of dollars of Army money on religious support programs and supplies for our soldiers and family members.

During this tour, I was also introduced to deployments, perhaps the most demanding yet most fruitful times of military service. These periods of ministry are why chaplains legally exist, with all times between being either training for or recovering from these critical events. Once deployed, many soldiers quickly find the real value of a relationship with God; others run from it. Combat deployments are very stressful. In the moments before the battle, a very real sense of mortality shadows even the most seasoned warrior. None would speak of fear but all know it. The chaplain is there by their side,

bringing soldiers to God and God to soldiers. In most ways, serving while deployed is one of the easiest assignments as the importance of the chaplain's role is thrust forward in the military operation. Separation from family members is a serious weight while deployed. For me the opportunities to serve in deployed capacity were many, serving in Bosnia, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Horn of Africa, and Qatar.

One of the greatest aspects of a military career is the training one receives. Besides the many counseling certifications and the opportunities to gain additional master's degrees in ministry-related subjects, the Army periodically pulls chaplains aside for professional military education for courses lasting anywhere from a few months to over a year.

After a few troop assignments, chaplains are ready to lead other chaplains as ministry supervisors. Supervisory chaplains are simply experienced chaplains who work for

How and when did you know you wanted to be a chaplain?

Jeremiah Catlin *Major (Army)*

I was serving as a senior pastor at a local church when I surrendered to God's call to serve the Army as a chaplain. I remember hearing from a few chaplains in our graduate school chapel ... but none impacted my consideration of this ministry

quite like hearing from Navy Chaplain Ken Amador. I remember him saying he could hardly keep his schedule open enough to accommodate all the requests for counseling. I had such a strong desire to be

involved in biblical counseling. I could not imagine such a ministry as he described and the call for this seemed to overwhelm me. I had brought several of these "chapel message callings" back to my wife over my undergraduate years with no similar calling on her part. This one generated a different response in her. Once she and I prayed a few days over this ministry, it was clear God was calling us as a family to enter into this ministry.



Charles Fields *Lieutenant Colonel (Army)* (see photo on page 11)

During my last year of seminary, God called me to return to military duty as a minister of the Gospel.

Herman Cheatham *Major (Army)*

This is an embarrassing question for me. I knew when I went through Basic Training back in February 1989 that the Lord wanted me to be an Army chaplain. I talked with my Basic Training chaplain about it and found out what the educational requirements were to become an Army Chaplain. I would have to say that is when my Jonah days started.

I barely made it through Bible college the first time. Becoming a chaplain would mean I would have to go back to college to get an accredited BA degree plus get a master's degree that included Greek and Hebrew. I was an average student in English, there was no way I would be able to understand Hebrew or Greek. Besides that, as a Baptist, I would need to deal with other religious leaders that were in direct opposition to my belief system. So I said no to the Lord and went on my merry way.

God allowed me go on my merry way. My merry way led me to a hospital bed with my life crashing all around me. Long story short, I knew the Lord called me to be an Army chaplain once I passed all my Hebrew and Greek classes.



Stephen Jimenez *Captain (Army National Guard)*

After I began my education at Baptist Bible College, I began to realize that I was called to something other than local church ministry in the U.S.A. I finished my education and had a great opportunity to join Rick Carter when he was pastoring Canyon Creek Baptist Church in Richardson, TX. My time there provided invaluable ministry experience as I continued to seek the Lord's direction. After a specific period in which Pastor and I were focusing through prayer and Bible study, God opened my eyes to military chaplaincy — something I had not ever considered. One day I travelled from Richardson to Gulfport, MS, to be in a wedding. I had plenty of time to speak with God on that trip, and as I passed an Army convoy, a switch flipped that light bulb inside my head to the "on" position.

In a short period of time, God confirmed this direction in my life, and I began the process of becoming an Army chaplain. Last year, my Army unit convoyed from New Mexico to Ft. Polk, LA. I found myself on the same road I traveled years before, except this time I was the one in the convoy.



senior commanders who are in command of subordinate units who have their own commanders and chaplains. This is always a fun time, as you get to train others how to do ministry.

After my supervisory experience, I was assigned at the United States Army Chaplain Center and School where I was privileged to train mid-level captains and majors in their six-month career course. After training many chaplains, I was assigned as the school's operations officer where I directed the daily operations of the schoolhouse and served as the Army liaison for the Navy and Air Forces' Chaplain Schools. During this assignment, I began an "old-paths" mentoring group where I would gather young fundamentalist chaplains for informal mentoring to help them negotiate the pluralistic environment of the military. This ministry proved very fruitful to several of our young chaplains and served to build relationships that

still exist to this day.

After three years at the chaplain school, the Army selected me to serve as the U.S. Army Command Chaplain in Qatar. This one-year tour, while full of pastoral care and supervisory responsibilities and the normal stress of family separation, was less jagged than previous deployments and provided many opportunities to work with local national Christian religious leaders in this Muslim country.

Chaplain (Major) Bill Wehlage recently retired from the U.S. Army after 22 years of service. He lives near Grove, OK, where he attends Grace Harbor Baptist Church and serves as evangelist for our Baptist Bible Fellowship churches. Chaplain Wehlage is available for meetings and can be contacted at (580) 695-9402 or wehlageb@aol.com.

Elliott Barrowclough Lieutenant (Army National Guard)

During my annual training of 2008 I served as a chaplain assistant. Because the battalion chaplain was unable to attend, I was asked to fulfill the role of chaplain for the battalion. A month later, my unit was called up for state emergency duty and deployed to Louisiana for Hurricane Gustav. It was during this time I felt God was giving me a choice. I could choose to serve as a chaplain assistant and my ministry would look like my deployment to Gustav, or I could choose to submit my packet to become a chaplain and my ministry would look like my annual training experience. My family and I spent some time in prayer and I sought counsel from advisors. In August of 2009 I was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant as a chaplain

candidate. The next six years were spent completing my Master's in Biblical Studies and gaining ministry experience. In May 2014 I was endorsed as a BBFI chaplain and in May 2015 I accessioned to

the position of chaplain and was promoted to captain.



David Sisco Captain (Army)

At age 17 I was permanently, medically disqualified from ever serving in any branch of the armed forces. Yet, in God's sovereign grace and timing, He opened the door.

In August 2009, I was reacquainted with an old high school friend who prodded me to consider the chaplaincy. I was serving

as the senior pastor of a small BBFI church in Findlay, OH, and I was content. But after totally surrendering my life to do whatever God wanted of me, I was open to whatever the Lord presented. Up to that point in my ministry, I had always questioned why God had not allowed me to pursue a life in the military. So after much prayer, my wife and I decided to start the process to see if God was in it. I would submit an application and see where it took me. Now, this is definitely the nutshell version, but God has given me the desires of my heart, serving my Lord and Savior and serving the greatest men and women on the planet, a life-long dream fulfilled.



Tell us about a memorable evangelism opportunity you have had as a chaplain.

Stephen Jimenez

One such event was my being called to a state emergency to respond to a wildfire. After a full day of visiting the troops and providing various counseling and encouragement, I sat down in a makeshift recreation area where soldiers were playing ping-pong. In between reading some passages from my New Testament, I conversed with the soldiers around me. When the main group of soldiers finished their games, one stayed behind and I had the opportunity to share the hope of Jesus Christ with him. That evening, in the midst of a state emergency, he accepted Christ as his Savior.

Jeremiah Catlin

I think I can recall nearly every soul saved since my entrance into the Army chaplaincy from the first one at my first duty station through the last one at Fort Bragg. However, my most memorable experience was while receiving a chemo treatment at Johns Hopkins University in 2008. I was convinced the cancer would take my life soon and had resolved my ministry was finished. It was during this time that God brought an older gentleman, Gary Greene, to come and sit with me every other day for the same treatment. He was a Vietnam veteran who had served three tours and earned the Silver Star. He was a hero who had never talked about his time in combat, yet he opened up with me. He was dying of cancer and didn't have long to live. He only agreed to take the chemo in order to sit next to a combat-experienced chaplain and talk about war memories. Our conversations led to a discussion about his need for Jesus Christ as His Savior. I'm happy to say he received Christ and that I'll be blessed to see Gary again without illness and pain in glory someday!

Herman Cheatham

During my first deployment to Iraq I had a Special Forces soldier pounding on my living quarters' door in the middle of the night. He had been attending the chapel service that I offered. He was about to go out on a mission that he felt he would not come back from. He asked me, "Chaplain, what can I do to know for certain that if I die tonight I will go to heaven?" I was able to take the Bible and walk him through the plan of salvation. I never saw that soldier again. I do not know if he made it through that mission or not. I do believe one day I will see him again because on that night before his mission he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Give us a testimony showing the evidence of discipleship at work in your ministry.

Stephen Jimenez

Just today, as a result of decisions being made by political entities in the U.S.A., I had a great opportunity to help a soldier determine to make a change in his level of commitment to his local church. He described himself as part time, but knew he needed to be involved more faithfully.

Jeremiah Catlin

I've been blessed to teach as well as preach at every duty station. However, at the first duty station I had one of my most memorable teaching and discipling opportunities. I met up with several soldiers who had been in church their entire lives (22-25 years old). They were all officers who wanted to take their understanding of the Scriptures to a new level. In their own words, they wanted the "meat of the word!" I was thrilled to see where it would take us in their discipleship. I finally entered into a study of one particular book to help them learn to love the Word at a deeper level ... we studied Greek from the book *The Basics of Biblical Greek* by Mounce! I never dreamed I'd be teaching Greek in the Army! I was not the best at my Biblical languages in graduate school, however, this opportunity simply enhanced and built upon my own love for the Word as well as the soldiers. We were learning together. It was contagious throughout the unit. Our core group of two grew into five and in two months we were up to 13 members. The enthusiasm was contagious in other ways as well. We saw several of our members sharing what they were learning with the unbelievers within the unit.

Herman Cheatham

I have done several men's group Bible studies and have been told how these studies have strengthened these men's personal lives as well as their marital lives. I have used *Every Man's Battle* and *Wild at Heart*. These books gave me the opportunity to openly share the Scriptures with my fellow soldiers. I had one soldier contact me after he got out of the Army to tell me he had surrendered his life to be a minister and it was in large part because of what he saw me attempting to do with the soldiers.

I have only had the privilege of leading a few soldiers to the Lord. I am hoping and praying that the many opportunities I shared the Scriptures with others was truly beneficial. I guess I will never truly know what the effects of the many Bible studies I offered had on people's lives until I go home to glory.

Under what circumstances are you free to share the Gospel of Christ?

Stephen Jimenez

In the U.S. Army, all chapel services in which I preach and pray have only one regulating authority — the rules established by my endorsing agent. As a BBFI chaplain, I enjoy the same freedom to preach and pray as any BBFI preacher would in their church services. Often, my ministry will allow me to work alongside soldiers. I inevitably speak to the soldiers and share with them the truth of the Scriptures.

For instance, recently I helped perform maintenance on the rear wheel of one of our MedEvac Blackhawk helicopters. If I stopped the entire group from doing their jobs and then proceeded to preach a sermon, there would be trouble. Instead, I worked alongside the soldiers for a little more than an hour, answering their questions and sharing truth. Ministry sometimes requires the Army chaplain to turn some wrenches, to get greasy knuckles, and to get a little sweaty in the heat.

Herman Cheatham

Short and simple answer: I can share the Gospel in my office when counseling, from the pulpit when I am preaching, and when a soldier asks me about my faith and why I do what I do.



Jeremiah Catlin

It would be easier to answer where I'm not free to share the Gospel of Christ. Our recent Army Regulation that dictates the roles and responsibilities of chaplains in the Army (AR 165-1) summarizes that we shall not be required to perform any religious acts that are against the tenets of our endorsing faith group. It also states we cannot be prevented from practicing our own faith as well. Simply put, we are free to share our faith and free from being required to practice aspects with which we disagree. However, the catch is we are to minister to "all faiths" present. Therefore, when we stand in a formation of hundreds or even thousands of soldiers, we must be aware there are those present in that crowd who may want to challenge the way in which we pray or speak. I've found these gathered formations are not often opportunities to do anything more than a prayer or a quick announcement. Neither of which has often been used in civilian churches to win souls to Christ (announcements and prayer times?).

Therefore, the times in which we most often win people in civilian church ministry and missionary work mirror those times in which we can do the same in the Army. For example, when I am counseling a soldier ... I share the Gospel of Christ; when I am preaching in a military chapel ... I share the Gospel of Christ; when I am visiting the motor pools/airfields (resembles visitation) ... I share the Gospel of Christ. There is little difference except that our soldiers are incredibly interested in hearing about the Gospel, especially in deployed scenarios.

Chip Fields

I can share the Gospel of Christ whenever I want to.

David Sisco

One really cool aspect of my ministry is I am free to share the Gospel of Christ as freely as the typical Baptist missionary. "But what about what we hear in the news?" The short answer is the chaplain exists, not for his own benefit, but in order to facilitate and protect the free exercise of religion within the military. I also have the freedom to share my faith and beliefs in any environment where a soldier's participation is voluntary. Examples of this would be within my counseling, when I officiate weddings and funerals, and when service members ask questions that are religious in nature. This has resulted in over 700 hours of biblical counseling, seven souls saved, six marriages saved from divorce, three suicides thwarted, and countless conversations on how to implement the truth of God's Word practically into the lives of my troopers. Oh yeah, and I pray in Jesus' name quite frequently ... and legally! But that is for another article...



What restrictions are there on your ministry?

Jeremiah Catlin

I've heard so many ask this question about our restrictions. I've heard we cannot hand out Bibles in hospitals, pray in Jesus' name, share the Gospel openly, preach in Jesus' name, and so many more. There are a lot of rumors that float around about our restrictions. However, I would caution individuals to feel free to email someone actually in this ministry to request first-hand experience from our "boots on the ground." So, for me personally, I'd say the restrictions are present, but they can be navigated with tactful wisdom and approach to each area of ministry. For example, a soldier coming in for counseling under the cloak of a relationship issue can reveal halfway through the conversation that he/she is in a homosexual relationship. If that soldier is looking to find a way to use the chaplain's response to this scenario, then the situation requires deliberate and tactful approach in wording. During both occasions where this scenario happened to me personally, the soldiers were looking to blame the chaplain for their need to reveal their secret lifestyle (before recent rulings by our Supreme Court, etc.). In their minds it would've given them an opportunity to request to leave the Army ... which was their end goal. It was the exact way in which I worded all our discussions that was my saving grace. Restrictions are present, but I simply believe the wise chaplain will discern those restrictions and be tactful in his approach without sacrificing his stance for Jesus Christ!

Chip Fields

I get asked this many times. I suppose I could get tired of answering it, but then some would never know the truth regarding our "restrictions." So let me put it this way: I can do anything a civilian minister can do off post. But they cannot do the things I can do on post or in a combat zone. Now who is more restricted? We actually have more religious freedom in America (and in most parts of the world) than our civilian clergy counterparts. We can preach and minister everywhere civilian clergy does (churches, street corners, hospitals, prisons, rescue missions, schools, fellowship meetings, nursing homes, etc). PLUS, we have access to military installations, chapels, ships, and combat zones worldwide where we can preach the Gospel. Not to mention we are in demand in the surrounding communities during Veterans Day and Memorial Day events. Civilian clergy have to have special permission to enter an installation (usually escorted), and it is rare they ever get to preach in a chapel. I can count on one hand the number of civilian clergy I have known to fly into a combat zone and preach to troops — I lost count how many times I've done it. And you talk about a bunch of young people ready to receive good news when facing death ... there you go. Oh yeah, it's also cool flying around in all those military aircraft ... they'll even let you jump out of them while airborne.

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Stephen Jimenez

When I counsel soldiers, I remind them that I am a chaplain — which means my religious beliefs will be a part of what I say and think. The military has a vast array of secular counselors available to the soldiers, but only chaplains can speak to the “religious” solution. I hone my counsel that way, and then refer those soldiers who do not wish to hear about the “religious” to secular counseling options. Either I perform the counseling, or I provide for their counseling. I always follow up with my referrals to ensure they have met with one of the counselors available.

One area of confusion to the general public is the difference in the Army between a service and a ceremony. Ceremonies are regulated events which, at the commander’s discretion, may involve a prayer. I liken these ceremonies to a civilian’s workplace training meeting/awards event to which employees must attend or face disciplinary action. I like to point out that at no time in my civilian work history has any work place meeting opened with a five-minute prayer or sermon from someone. How would your congregants feel if they had to hear from the local Mosque’s Imam every time they attended their mandatory meetings at their place of employment? I do not preach at ceremonies. I do not “pray” for five minutes at these events. If

invited to pray at a ceremony, I limit my time to less than a minute and keep its content poignant and within the bounds of the expectations of my endorser.

Herman Cheatham

It’s definitely not like any civilian ministry I have been associated with. When I am not in my pulpit or faith-based training I must be careful what words I use. It seems to me there are individuals out there that are looking for a reason to get rid of chaplains throughout the military. I am truly learning how to “be as wise as a serpent but as harmless as a dove” (Matthew 10:16). When I am out and about I have learned to share the grace and peace of Jesus in other ways than just word of mouth. There are times when actions speak louder than words. So the only real restriction I see is that I may not be as free to speak my mind all the time like I may do if I was in the civilian ministry.

Is there a special blessing you would like to share with our readers?

Stephen Jimenez

It is a blessing to have the opportunity to serve your loved ones who are currently in the military. I count it a great honor to encourage them and share in our faith together with them.

Herman Cheatham

Being an Army chaplain is a unique blessing. Seeing what our government dollars go to support is sometimes frustrating. It’s nice to know your government dollars are going to support something good too. It’s a blessing to have an endorsing agency such as the BBFI to stand behind me as a chaplain. I can boldly stand in my pulpit and preach the Gospel because of the proud supporters of the Gospel.

Jeremiah Catlin

I used to describe my ministry while serving in a Basic Training Battalion and supporting their chapel service like this: How would you like to be involved in a preaching ministry where your congregation of nearly 300 individuals was 80 percent un-churched/unsaved ... and yet they wanted to be in church? And what if this ministry regularly rotated its population out bringing in a fresh new 300 each month with another 80 percent un-churched/unsaved? And what if this congregation had a choice each Sunday to either work on the grounds and facilities in which they reside or attend your church? It wouldn’t take long before your building exceeds its capacity ... but no worries, the building and all utilities are paid for by the government! The offerings of this congregation are slight because of their poor income level ... but no worries, everyone receives pay for food, lodging, and their respective salaries. This is the blessing I get to call my ministry ... the Army chaplaincy! And yes ... I have led many, many soldiers to the Lord through our chapel ministries.



What advice would you offer to young men interested in becoming chaplains in the United States Armed Forces?

Stephen Jimenez

It is a calling, not a career. If you join up, be prepared to die in the most gruesome way. Be prepared to be disabled. Be prepared to accept your children's desire to join the service. Be prepared to bury your child who dies as a result of his or her service. If you cannot accept these things, set your sights on a different ministry. Also, get in shape.

Jeremiah Catlin

I would offer one simple piece of advice to those considering becoming a BBFI chaplain ... take as many biblical counseling courses as you possibly can afford in your schedule. Your preaching and teaching ministry should come with time, but the training for your counseling ministry is best conducted prior to entry into the military. Once you are in the military, you will not have the time to invest in counseling courses.

Chip Fields

The call to this ministry, like any other ministry, must come from God and not yourself. It is a pluralistic environment, and if you think you will have problems providing for the free exercise of religion for Wiccans, or Muslims, or gays, then you probably are not cut out for this ministry. (Always remember, when you provide for the free exercise of religion for those groups, you are also protecting your own right to worship the way you want.) But if you believe you can provide for the free exercise of religion for all service members, and still maintain your walk with God, then this may be for you.

Herman Cheatham

Get a biblical counseling degree and learn to think outside your comfort zone. You must do these things while maintaining true to God and His Word. Start learning to be faithful and humble but not a floor mat to be stepped on. Know what you believe and why you believe it. You must have a healthy balance in all things.

David Sisco

Do it! There is no mission field that can compare. It is cross-cultural ministry, with its own fascinating history, language, customs, sub-culture ... and deep and overwhelming need for the message of Jesus Christ. Are there challenges? Absolutely. And as our American culture continues to turn its back on God, and open, blatant sin is not only accepted but is celebrated, the challenges will grow. But then again, we are called to be the salt and light of the world, and a good soldier doesn't flee the enemy! (2 Timothy 2:3)

Elliott Barrowclough

I would strongly encourage anyone interested in becoming a chaplain to, if possible, spend time as an enlisted soldier first. You gain a deeper and better understanding of the military and its culture by enlisting. This will make you a better chaplain, and gain the respect of many in the uniform.

To future National Guard and Reserve chaplains: It needs to be your calling for several reasons. First, it is a very unique ministry in many ways and will require a level of commitment beyond regular church work. Second, the reality of a calling like chaplaincy is that it will conflict with any civilian ministry in which you are involved. For that reason, in the state of Missouri, out of roughly 35 chaplains, only two work in full-time civilian ministry. I have had pastors say they would love to have me on staff but the requirement of one weekend a month would put me away from the services a quarter of the time. As a chaplain you are a missionary and the church has to understand this and support your mission in order for you to be on staff and remain without conflict between the two ministries. Unlike other missionaries or church planters, chaplains do not receive ministry support. So, unless you want to be an active duty chaplain, plan on the reality that you will be a tentmaker.

Are there any specific frustrations in military chaplaincy that may not occur in civilian ministry?

Herman Cheatham

I would have to say short-notice movement orders would have to be one of my frustrations in the Army chaplaincy. Several times we have had to pack up and move quickly. Three months' notice is the longest notice of a move I have ever had. It's very stressful on a family. Being told what duty position I will be in instead of me selecting my duty position can be sometimes frustrating as well. I have learned though that wherever there are soldiers, there are ministry opportunities.

Jeremiah Catlin

Our Chaplain Corps is popularly known for its Strong Bonds retreats over the past ten years. It is a program in which the chaplain can conduct retreats for couples, families, and single soldiers ... but, it involves only certain curriculum and places certain restrictions upon the chaplain in executing these events. In other words, we are known for something that is quite frustrating to execute.

It will only become more difficult with the inclusion of same-sex couples into all Army benefits, to include such couples retreats. This will simply complicate it further and I'm still praying for wisdom on how to best address this scenario as I'm sure I'll face it soon. I want to minister the Gospel to everyone regardless of their sinful lifestyles, but my fear is that some of these individuals may again use this platform as a chance to gain unnecessary attention or damage an otherwise successful calling for one of our chaplains.



How can the churches of the BBFI pray more effectively for our chaplains?

Stephen Jimenez

Pray for us to be knowledgeable and wise. We have a vast array of regulations and standards that must somehow become second nature. In our staff officer responsibilities we need the ability to quickly learn and adapt to new information and standards. We must be flexible. We need wisdom to translate ministry as a result of the boundaries in the ever-changing landscape of the bureaucracy of the U.S. government. The military seems to be the government's social experiment, and the chaplains are faced with a lot of difficult scenarios and questions.

Additionally, in my experience, chaplains deal with behavioral health problems and suicidal problems at a much higher rate than most local church pastors. Pray for them to effectively help those in need.

Chip Fields

Pray like Paul prayed in Ephesians 1: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."

Any final thoughts?

Herman Cheatham

As I mentioned earlier, I am thankful for our endorsing agency. If it wasn't for the forward thinking of our endorsing department and Fellowship I would not have a leg to stand on when it comes to same-sex relationships and many other controversial issues I have to deal with in the military. Continue to stand strong in the truth of God's Word!

Jeremiah Catlin

Pray for God to grant us a special dose of wisdom and tactful approach in these difficult days. The impact of our nation's choices is directly challenging so many of our Christian worldviews. This impact will require some of us, perhaps all of us, to make a stand in our ministries resulting in potential persecution. Could we see a day in which promotions, awards, and progression of our chaplains are hindered by our stance on these issues? I pray it doesn't come to this extreme circumstance, but I would further hope and pray we are courageous and strong enough to stand for Jesus Christ in that day.

Please remember to not only pray for our ministries as chaplains, but more importantly for our families and our connections with our families. We are separated from them not only by deployments, but also by training exercises lasting weeks at a time, and simply long hours of work (the day starts early with physical training, for example!)

Herman Cheatham

I would say pray for them and their families as they have to deal with the politics of their branch of service. Pray for wisdom on how to reach the lost souls of our nation as well as our many prodigals that run from God and into the military.

David Sisco

Pray more theologically conservative men will consider this awesome mission field that is beyond ripe unto harvest. Pray chaplains will stay true to God's Word, even in the face of a rapidly changing cultural landscape, remembering we are soldiers of God first, then of man. Pray young men and women in uniform will see the need for Christ in their lives and look to their chaplains for answers through Scripture. Pray for both spiritual and physical safety. Pray without ceasing.





Bringing God to soldiers...

Please pray for all of our BBFI-endorsed military chaplains

Ken Amador
Lieutenant Commander (Navy Reserve)

Jeremiah Catlin
Major (Army)

Thomas Hoyle
Colonel (Air Force Reserve)

Courtney Merchant
Lieutenant (Army)

Elliott Barrowclough
Lieutenant (Army National Guard)

Herman Cheatham, Jr.
Major (Army)

Joseph Isip
Lieutenant (Army Reserve)

David Sisco
Captain (Army)

Steven Benefield
Lieutenant Commander (Navy)

Chip Fields
Lieutenant Colonel (Army)

Stephen Jimenez
Captain (Army National Guard)

R. T. Stringer
Captain (Army National Guard)

Gregory Cates
Lieutenant Commander (Navy)

Clarence Helms
Lieutenant Colonel (Civil Air Patrol)

Nathanael Logan
Lieutenant (Army Reserve)

James Updegraff
Lieutenant (Army Reserve)



...and soldiers to God.