



September 27, 2013

To all Military Chaplains of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):

**Re: Ministry to military members, family members, and civilians**

A number of you have asked me to clarify your role as clergy in uniform with respect to ministering to persons with regard to their sexual orientation. My response is simply this: you minister with the love of Jesus Christ and the guidance of your own personal conscience and heart. Our church historically has never dictated doctrine, policy, or beliefs to its clergy or laypeople. We believe that all individuals have the God-given ability to interpret Scripture and theology by their own lights, using their intellect and heart to discern God's will for their ministry.

Some of you will decide that you cannot in good conscience offer personal ministry to everyone. Others believe equally strongly that their call is to perform ministry and counsel to all. The decision is yours. I say this knowing that there is pressure from all directions for you to make your choice based on conditions other than your own faith and conscience. And some are concerned about their future status as chaplains if they do not conform to the beliefs of commanders or supervisory chaplains.

The bottom line is this: you must perform or provide ministry to all God's people. If you do not or cannot, then you are not in compliance with military regulations and are of little value to those who serve our nation. If you are unable because of conscience to perform a service, then you must obtain that ministry from others who are willing to do so.

I realize that some believe that our church has taken an official position on allowing all persons at the communion table, to include clergy who may be in a same-sex relationship. As our General Minister and President, the Reverend Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, made clear in a recent letter to the church, that resolution in the 2013 General Assembly was a non-binding sense of the assembly. As such, it changes nothing in our churches or seminaries or even in our individual struggles. Nothing changed.

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Our church makes no official pronouncements. Even this letter reflects my own personal interpretation of our beliefs.

You are finally blessed with a terrible freedom to react to the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act in the way that reflects your own deepest beliefs and your call to ministry. We must never stop putting others first--it is the way of Christ. You cannot be judged by anyone on how you understand your call. If you somehow suffer because of your actions or beliefs, let me know immediately. The post-DOMA environment must not raise litmus tests as to the fitness of chaplains. If the chaplain corps can dictate to the military how it must respond to this Supreme Court decision, we come perilously close to marginalizing military ministry. And if chaplains face discrimination and ostracism because of their own practices or beliefs, that too is unacceptable.

No matter what you do in your ministry, I will defend and support you. You represent a church with a long tradition of liberty, unity, and love. You are called to represent the Risen Lord, to minister to all persons--especially the least of these--and to remain faithful to your calling. It is still a noble profession and still a passion for all who have taken up their cross. There is no room for fear or boasting. Because finally your touchstone must simply be love. Love without limits and without hesitation. When in doubt, love. And be the person God intends you to be. I am grateful for your ministry, no matter how you decide in this difficult post-DOMA world. You are, I believe some of the very finest ministers ever to wear our country's uniform--may God bless each of you!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven B. Doan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Steven B. Doan  
Chaplaincy Endorsing Officer