



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
2000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-2000

1400
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17 Mar 15

Colleagues in Ministry,

As your community leader, I support and champion your work as you carry out vital religious ministry to our people; ministry centered often on pastoral care and confidential counseling. I assure you that the Navy values, and protects in policy, the rights of service members, including chaplains, to practice according to the tenets of their faith, and respects the rights of individuals to determine their own religious convictions. The Navy is governed by and adheres to the FY13 and FY14 National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) which protect the rights of conscience of chaplains and service members to express their sincerely held beliefs.

As naval officers and chaplains, we obey the law and DOD and DON policy. Professionalism, discipline, dignity, and respect are at the heart of Professional Naval Chaplaincy. At commissioning, we each agreed to serve in this pluralistic environment and to treat each person with dignity, respect, and compassion, irrespective of differences in religious beliefs. You may recall that we underscored this message in our Tier 2 training in 2011 and our most recent training in 2014 on the post-DOMA repeal.

As religious ministry professionals, we are given the opportunity to bring a message of hope and spiritual counsel that is informed by and representative of our religious organizations. It is equally important that we acknowledge our obligation to care for all in a way that respects the rights of individuals to determine their own religious and personal convictions. In our pastoral role, we assist each person to connect with what they have determined keeps them grounded spiritually and help them to develop their own spiritual voice, while also serving as a religious leader to those of our own faith.

As staff officers and trusted agents to our commanders, we have the responsibility to positively contribute to the morale, welfare, and unit cohesion of our commands. With this charge comes a sacred trust that we must honor with utmost care. While commanders are expected to hold all chaplains accountable to professional standards for conduct and performance laid out in SECNAVINST 5351.1, we are all obligated to uphold these standards. This is a profound commitment. I will continue to engage our commanders in my travels to ensure they understand both the expectations of and the protections afforded to our chaplains by Navy policy and the FY13 and FY14 NDAA.

As a Chaplain Corps, we desire to communicate and collaborate freely and openly to ensure our health as a community. I encourage you to continue to share your concerns on the delivery of religious ministry with your chaplain "chain," which includes your supervisory chaplain, my office, or your endorser, so we can adequately address them as a Corps. Open communication will enable us to evaluate areas where there is a need for clearer guidance. There are certain instances where we cannot divulge specifics to respect the privacy of the individuals involved and because it would be premature to do so while the matter is under review. With that in mind, I acknowledge your recent concerns and request for clearer guidance to ensure our ability to provide authentic religious ministry to our people. This guidance is forthcoming. If you ever feel you are being compelled to act in any way that is contrary to the tenets of your faith or fear reprisal for sharing your sincerely held beliefs, and all other avenues to address your concerns have failed you, you should call my office directly, without delay.

It is my privilege to serve and lead you as you minister to our people and bring hope in times of deepest human need. As you can see, whether in our collaborative ministry with chaplains of different faiths, or in our service to our people with or without faith, *Cooperation Without Compromise* is as relevant today as it has been for decades. Thank you for all that you are doing to protect the free exercise of religion and to strengthen the spiritual well-being and resilience of those we serve.



M. G. KIBBEN
Rear Admiral, CHC, U. S. Navy
Chief of Chaplains