



Reserve spiritual care providers ready 'anytime requested-anywhere'

by Maj. Tom Deall
Chief of public affairs

As the Air Force raises its eyes to the heavens toward a global reach, global power mission, the chaplain service responds with an aggressive strategic plan focusing on people, ministry, resources and communication.

With the Expeditionary Aerospace Force now a common part of Air Force life, each segment of the service has stepped up to be a full partner in the operations both home and abroad. The chaplain service's global ministry vision, from which its strategic plan emerges, ensures that as the Air Force's mission evolves, these spiritual care providers are ready "anytime requested-anywhere required."

Though seemingly unchanged in many years, a closer look finds a service that is in every duty station around the world and in every situation.

"Our reason for being has not changed," said Chaplain (Col.) Bill Thomason, director, HQ Air Reserve Personnel Center Directorate of Chaplain Individual Reserve Programs. "We continuously examine and change how we provide for the religious requirements and spiritual needs of Air Force people."

With the dynamics of these changes taking place, more than 300 chaplain service individual mobilization augmentees were recently brought to Colorado Springs to be trained at a weeklong conference in the specifics of the Air Force's methods of "Doing Global Ministry."

This approach to Global Ministry follows the military strategy of centralized control, decentralized execution. Simply put, it places the various headquarters' staff in a position of providing the tools and support needed while the local chaplain service teams use them to access local religious requirements and spiritual needs and then tailor programs and activities to fit.

According to Chaplain Richard Oberheide, this assessment is a ministry of presence. It essentially allows local chaplains to gear their ministry toward the needs of the people assigned and their families.

"Rather than a cookie cutter-type checklist that attempts to provide one-size-fits-all programs," said Thomason, "now, people will see more customized programs at each duty station. It gives local chapel teams the opportunity and tools to assess the needs and then implement an appropriate spiritual care activities and religious programs. It demands flexibility by the chapel service staffs."

Responsible for bringing this mission of "freedom, faith and ministry" to Air Force members and their families is a chapel service of only 2,000 people.

These dedicated members represent more than 80 different religious denominations serving Air Force people and family members, who are affiliated with hundreds of different religious organizations and backgrounds. And that number continues to grow today in a more diverse military population.

With a greater move toward global ministry, chaplains are filling a dual role of ministry and leadership that is valued by all members of the Air Force. But the officer corps does not accomplish this mission alone. Enlisted chaplain's assistants also perform a valuable role in the spiritual health of the Air Force family.

"Chaplain's assistants, the enlisted part of the chapel service, bring a fresh perspective," said one senior chaplain. "They are the young generation. And if we are going to reach out to that young generation, they can give us the perspective that makes our programs work or not."

According to one commander, chaplains help people overcome obstacles in their lives that might otherwise prevent them from focusing 100 percent on the mission.

The chapel staff is essential, said another commander. "If we don't have the spiritual readiness, we risk not having an effective force," he said.

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