

# Airman turns to God's work as chaplain

By Maj. Tom Deall  
Chief of public affairs

Starting his career affecting the flight of aircraft as an enlisted maintenance controller, Capt. David Pendleton of the 9018 Air Reserve Squadron, HQ Air Reserve Personnel Center, Denver, Colo., now affects the flight of souls as a Reserve chaplain.

Pendleton began his Air Force career in 1981. After completing basic training and technical school, he reported for duty as a maintenance controller with the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Offutt AFB, Neb.

Four years later, he answered a higher calling and left active duty to pursue the ministry. However, because of his love and dedication for service to country, within one week of leaving active duty, he accepted a position with the 302nd Airlift Wing, Petersen AFB, Colo., as a maintenance controller. And within another six months, he was hired as an air reserve technician.

In 1988, answering an even stronger call to ministry, Pendleton left for Kansas City and the seminary. He was reassigned to the 442<sup>d</sup> Tactical Air Wing at Richards-Gibaur Air Reserve Base.

After completing his master's degree, he received his commission as a second lieutenant chaplain candidate. During his first three years, he served tours at Kirtland AFB, N.M., Petersen AFB, Colo., and Eglin AFB, Fla. By 1992, he was reappointed a first lieutenant chaplain in the Air Force Reserve.

Since then he's served with the US Air Force Academy and HQ ARPC as director, Chaplain Candidate Familiarization Course.

Endorsed by the Church of the Nazarene, Pendleton said the chaplaincy gives breadth of exposure to people of other faith groups and denominations.

"I am appreciative of serving in a pluralistic setting," said Pendleton. "I don't see it as a threat to my faith. Rather, I see it as an opportunity to affirm my faith."

Pendleton said he likes working with

others who help to place his denominational identity in the whole history of the Christian church. He said he is grateful for his Air Force experience because it has helped him grow as a person.

"Serving is what I'm all about," said Pendleton. "It's not a choice I made, it's a choice that was made for me."

He sees service in the Air Force as a higher calling because its core values, in his opinion, are steeped in Biblical principles. And that's important because he wants to be a Biblical Christian.

When asked why he chose to stay with the Air Force these many years, his answer was simple.

"I stay because I like it," he said. "I like the Reserve because it's where I can do something different. There are opportunities to expand my ministry in a way not available in civilian service."

In highlighting those opportunities,

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Chaplain (Capt.) David Pendleton

Pendleton noted that he could be on a flight line one day and in a tent in the desert the next. And since chaplains are non-combatants, he enjoys not having to carry a weapon.

Another opportunity is ministering to people of other faiths. Since he contends



that a chaplain's first commitment is to God and then the faith group, this does not create conflict. A point emphasized by the fact that very few professions have that kind of freedom.

"An opportunity not available to civilian ministers is service to our country's future leadership," said Pendleton. "It's a ministry that sometimes crosses denominations."

One example of this crossing occurred when a Catholic priest was unavailable for a funeral. Pendleton received and accepted this call to ministry.

"Though a protestant minister, I was honored to lead the congregation during the funeral of a Catholic member," said Pendleton. "I performed this ceremony as I thought Jesus would have done. For that moment, it was more about service to the Lord than it was to myself."

In summarizing why he has served for almost 20 years, Pendleton simply said, "Service to God and service to country are steeped in history and Holy Scripture. For me, there is no greater answer to such a high calling."

Dr. Pendleton currently serves as founding/senior pastor of Christ Community Church of the Nazarene in Olathe, Kan.

For more information on service as an Air Force chaplain, contact Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Donald Smith at (800) 525-0102, Ext. 71241 or e-mail [Donald.Smith@arpc.denver.af.mil](mailto:Donald.Smith@arpc.denver.af.mil).