

# STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION | 2009

## A Chaplain's Story

Anbar Province, Iraq

**A** soldier's burden doesn't disappear when the rucksack is empty.

I'm a full-time pastor and a chaplain in the National Guard. In 2006 I was called up for duty. For 20 months I left behind my family and congregation, and **ministered among the soldiers and Marines in Anbar Province, Iraq.**



Coming home from that experience was a day to rejoice. The danger and separation were finally over and I could lay that burden down. Yet some burdens were only beginning.

**Soldiers often don't realize how much the war changed them** until they have been home for a month or even a year. There's the trauma of the violence and the guilt for friends who didn't make it back. There might be anger or depression that takes months to surface. The worst is a sense of isolation because people around you haven't been there and you're convinced they couldn't possibly understand.

**The ELCA has always supported the ministry of its chaplains and care for returning veterans and their families.** This ministry needs to continue long after the mobilizations are over. I know I've looked to this church for help with my own burdens. **I'm thankful for those in the ELCA** who stand behind veterans, take the time to learn our needs, and carry the burdens of combat alongside us.

— The Reverend Steve Timm

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