

## **JOINT STATEMENT OF SUPPORT BY THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD ON CARE TO CHAPLAINS AND CONGREGATIONS DURING DEPLOYMENT**

**BACKGROUND and PURPOSE:** The extraordinarily large number of Reserve and National Guard chaplains called to serve extended periods of active duty since 9/11 is without equal since the close of World War II. Unprecedented numbers of reserve chaplains have been and are being called away from traditional congregational service. Those congregations and pastors have had their ministries dramatically changed by this war, and often they are not sure of the way ahead. Regional and national church leaders have responded to these challenges in a variety of ways, sometimes stepping in to help and shepherd, while at other times leaving the pastors and congregations to make the hard decisions alone. The churches' responses have been uneven.

Both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have long and commendable histories of support for ministries to the armed forces. Just as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provide cooperative support for the ministry of their active duty chaplains, so also the two church bodies can demonstrate that same unity by adopting a joint policy on the care of pastors who are being deployed and those congregations from which they are being deployed.

In this regard it would be appropriate for the two church bodies to address the following concerns.

- Neither the congregations affected nor their pastors/chaplains who are deploying or returning from deployment should be expected to negotiate the complexities of the transitions without support from the church bodies.
- Just as it is the norm for non-chaplain Reserve and National Guard personnel to return to their civilian jobs after their war-time service, it should also be the norm for pastors to return to their congregations after their war-time service.

While there will always be unique issues which require exceptions to policy, the purpose of this proposal is to provide standard guidance for support to congregations whose pastors are being mobilized and to those mobilized chaplains and their families.

**Vision Statement:** Failure to provide adequate guidance and support for pastors and congregations during the turbulence of war-time service may result in congregations no longer being willing to accept Reserve and National Guard chaplains as their pastors. The likely result would be a reduction in pastors recruited to the reserve chaplaincy, which could potentially end or reduce the Lutheran pastoral presence to military members. It is always a priority of the church to care for its people in times of need and stress. By choosing proactive, intentional involvement, the two church bodies will continue their critical ministries to the armed forces.

*Set forth here are goals towards which the national and regional church leaders/structures agree to work. This proposal assumes that each church body will implement them with appropriate procedures.*

**Goal 1:** The pastor/chaplain should remain the called pastor of the congregation while deployed

and return to that role when re-deployed home. While some pastors and congregations will judge the deployment as the right time for a peaceful release from call, the normal practice of both church bodies should be that the pastor/chaplain will return to the same congregation after re-deployment, and resume the pastor's interrupted ministry.

**Goal 2:** The district/synod leadership may assign an interim pastor in much the same way other interim pastors are assigned. (The roster of retired chaplains is a rich resource for these temporary vacancies.) The synod/district leadership will provide pastoral care to the congregation and to the deploying pastor while the procedures leading up to mobilization are under way. They can assist the congregation in planning the pastor's homecoming and reintegration to congregational ministries. This would provide continuity of care, and help the congregation claim their pastor's chaplaincy role as an extension of their ministry.

**Goal 3:** The congregation will seek to minimize the trauma and turbulence suffered by the family by surrounding them with love and support. In appropriate cases the families of deploying pastors/chaplains residing in congregational housing will be allowed to stay.

**Goal 4:** In most cases the financial burden to the congregation during the pastor/chaplain's deployment will be insignificant since the pastor/chaplain will draw military salary, health care, and housing allowance for the chaplain and the chaplain's family. Therefore the salary of the interim pastor could easily be paid through the normal congregational budget.

**Goal 5:** The synod/district leadership will work with national church offices or board of pensions to determine how the church pension is protected and how the return to normal status can be made seamless following re-deployment. This is also true of health care benefits.

**Goal 6:** After deployment, the pastor/chaplain and the family, as well as the congregation, will need nurture and care for a period of time. All parties will experience significant changes that must be addressed. In addition the chaplain/pastor may come home with stress related problems and require additional care. Intentional pastoral care will be necessary to help everyone adjust to these changes. The districts/synods in partnership with the Ministry to the Armed Forces of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Bureau for Federal Chaplaincy Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will recognize these needs and seek to provide appropriate care.