

The Ministry of Chaplains & Pastoral Counselors

One of the ways ordained clergy serve God through the church is through ministries of “witness and service which extend Christ’s love and justice.” (§1343.1) Clergy in ministries of pastoral care in specialized settings as chaplains and pastoral counselors may be endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency. (see ¶1421.5)

–Book of Discipline

Persons serving in these unique settings are expected to have specialized training to qualify for endorsement. A primary difference between these appointments and the local church is the nature of the institutions in which ministry takes place and the role of the minister in relationship to those settings.

Ordained ministers appointed to these extension ministries serve in institutions whose primary purposes are education, international security, peacekeeping, incarceration, hospitalization, or profit.

Though the purposes and environments differ from the local church, this does not mean that those endorsed have ministries which are in any way less valid than the ministries of the local church. They too are servants of God ministering to the deepest needs of humanity. Their ministries are as profoundly representative of the ministry of God through Christ as the ministries expressed through the local church.

Military Chaplains

War is inimical to the teachings of Jesus, but the role of a military chaplain is not to justify war. A chaplain’s task is to minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of service members in war and in peace.

The chaplain serves units that not only prepare for war but a number of other deployments as well. The military services are involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations both domestic and international.

Counseling takes place on flight lines, in motor pools, aboard ships, and in field positions. In addition, worship services are conducted in beautifully appointed chapels on military posts and bases in the United States and overseas. Programs of religious education and youth ministry are provided for the service member and his/her family.

Hospital Chaplains

Every day hospital chaplains help patients and their relatives cope with sickness, disability, and even death. In mental hospitals, the problems are perhaps even more excruciating in some ways. Chaplains in these settings are part of a team. They work shoulder to shoulder with doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, and social workers.

The role of the chaplain is to provide pastoral care for patients’ families and for staff. They reach out to persons on the wards and in the surgery and critical-care waiting rooms. Generally, they will be on ethics committees as they deal with complex issues of modern medicine. They frequently lead Bible studies and conduct worship services in hospital chapels.

Industrial Chaplains/Workplace Ministry

The success of industry is measured by the rate of production and flow of profit. The industrial chaplain stands in the middle of the needs of management and the men and women who power the industrial machine. When these people arrive on the job, they bring with them everything that is going on in their lives—from the joy of a firstborn baby to a nagging problem with alcohol—and inevitably it affects their job performance.



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Chaplains provide a ministry to people in business and industry, responding to individual and family needs as well as work-life concerns such as job stress and career. They provide a preventive as well as a problem-solving ministry that reaches out with a concern for all people.

Chaplains work with industrial management at a number of levels. They frequently train supervisors on the line to relate more effectively to their people who appear to be suffering from a personal problem. The chaplain is also influential at the policy level, conferring with management when new policies are proposed. Individual counseling often leads to referrals to in-house programs or community social services.

Prison Chaplains

"I was in prison and you visited me. . . ." (Matthew 25:36)
In the correctional setting (prisons, jails, detention facilities), chaplains have the opportunity to be pastors to unique and diverse communities, in both traditional and nontraditional ways. They preach, teach, baptize, serve Holy Communion, counsel, visit, and serve the prisoner congregation. They are pastors not only to inmates but also to the staff and the families of both communities. They serve and are available to all the people incarcerated in their institution, providing for the spiritual needs of persons regardless of their religious affiliation. This involves recruiting, training, supervising a broad variety of religious volunteers from surrounding communities. They serve as a link between the religious communities on the outside and the religious communities on the inside, helping to build bridges of care and service both ways.

Pastoral Counselors

All pastors counsel persons, but pastoral counselors endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency have undergone additional specialized training so they can bring together resources of scripture and faith and the insights of the behavioral sciences. Pastoral counselors serve on the staff of a local church, in a pastoral counseling center, or in a health-care institution. They work with individuals, families, and groups where their counseling is carried out within the tradition, beliefs, and resources of the faith community.

Civilian Endorsement Settings

- Children's Home
- Clinical Pastoral Education
- General Hospital
- Hospice
- Life Coach
- Marriage and Family Therapy
- Mental Health
- Pastoral Counseling
- Police
- Prison/Correctional Institution
- Retirement Home
- Substance Abuse
- Veterans Affairs
- Workplace

Military Chaplaincy

Army

- Active
- Reserve
- National Guard

Navy

- Active
- Reserve

Air Force

- Active
- Reserve
- Air National Guard

For further information contact:

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