



# United Methodist Endorsing Agency

General Board of Higher Education & Ministry | Division of Ordained Ministry

[www.gbhem.org/chaplains](http://www.gbhem.org/chaplains) • [umea@gbhem.org](mailto:umea@gbhem.org) • (615) 340-7411

## MOBILIZATION GUIDANCE FOR BISHOPS, CABINETS, CONGREGATIONS AND CHAPLAINS

Mobilization of military chaplains in the National Guard or Reserve can create several challenges, including matters related to appointments, family concerns, emotional issues, legal issues, pension issues and reintegration issues for families and churches. Clergy, congregations, districts and annual conferences all have a role in addressing these issues before, during and after mobilization.

### **Does mobilization change a pastor's relationship with the annual conference?**

Mobilization does not change the itinerant relationship between the pastor and the annual conference. In an extended mobilization, the chaplain moves to an extension ministry appointment under the endorsement of the United Methodist Endorsing Agency (§ 344.1b, 2016 *Book of Discipline*). Neither leave of absence nor sabbatical are legitimate options. UMEA requests that Boards of Ordained Ministry grant provisional time credit to chaplains who are in the probationary phase while mobilized and deployed. Note that chaplains on provisional status cannot volunteer for deployment, mobilization or active duty; however, chaplains who have completed the basic chaplain course can be involuntarily mobilized and deployed.

### **How long may a chaplain be mobilized?**

The length of deployment depends on the situation, the branch of service and the mission assigned. Some chaplains may be mobilized for as few as 90 days. Others may deploy for a year or more, depending on section of law used to activate the reserves. If the requirement changes, a chaplain may be released from active duty prior to the date stated mobilization order.

### **What happens to the chaplain's church, appointment, family, housing, pension, and insurance, when mobilized?**

Here are the significant issues you will need to examine carefully. Stay up to date with the latest legal information from Certified Public Accountants, Wespeth and the Internal Revenue Service.

The Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA), a federal law, provides employees called to military duty in the uniformed services with a variety of rights, including job restoration rights and continuation of certain benefits during military duty. Clergy are generally excluded; however, provisions of the USERRA should be taken into consideration by the church.

### **Does the church continue to pay the chaplain's salary during a deployment?**

A parish is not responsible for paying its pastor's salary during a mobilization. The armed forces pay reserve component chaplains the same as their active duty peers while they are on active duty, based on rank and time in service.

### **Does pastoral supply become the responsibility of the Cabinet should an extended mobilization occur?**

Pastors must collaborate with the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee (S/PPRC) to ensure that the needs of the church are met while the pastor fulfills her or his military responsibilities. This is an appropriate matter for negotiation, in consultation with the District Superintendent, and should be pre-planned. Clarifying expectations in advance among all the stakeholders will make deployments much better for the pastor, the pastor's family and the congregation.

If it appears that the mobilization may be long term, it may be appropriate to assign a new permanent pastor. The chaplain, of course, remains within the itinerant system and has the assurance of appropriate appointment upon return to the annual conference. A parish may be willing to keep its pulpit available for the mobilized pastor. This should be negotiable, however, and should not be seen as a right by either the parish or the chaplain.

Recommended guidelines in the event of mobilization:

- For 1-89 days: A change in appointment is not recommended unless it is already a part of the appointment process. Housing arrangements and rental agreements are made.
- For 90-179 days: An appointment change may be in order. Housing arrangements and rental agreements are made.
- More than 180 days: An appointment change is likely to occur, but it is determined by the projected length of the deployment and the appointment process. Housing arrangements and rental agreements are made.

### **Should the family be allowed to live in the parsonage?**

In mobilizations of 179 days or less the option to remain in the parsonage should be given to the family. While on active duty, the chaplain will be paid a government housing allowance. The chaplain and the church should negotiate how to use these funds in paying rent, housing allowances, or use of the parsonage.

For longer mobilizations, the family of the chaplain should ordinarily arrange for other accommodations as quickly as possible. Since a housing allowance is a regular part of military compensation, there will be funds available to rent temporary housing if necessary. Recognize that the government will not fund the move and the housing allowance may not cover the higher costs of short-term housing. Naturally, the move itself will have a significant impact on the family. If the chaplain's family remains in the parsonage during an extended mobilization, the chaplain may be asked to surrender his or her housing allowance to the church to offset the cost the housing of the newly assigned pastor. All of this is subject to negotiation in advance.

Advice from a certified public accountant or the IRS should be obtained concerning the tax status of these arrangements.

### **What about health insurance benefits for mobilization of more than 30 days?**

There will be a delay of approximately 30 days for the chaplain's family members to be incorporated into the military medical system (TRICARE). For this reason, it is important that family members have copies of the military member's orders activating him or her to active duty and a family member identification card. Family resource groups and rear detachments can assist families with the process. When mobilized chaplains return from their deployment, they can re-enter their conference insurance program under the HIPPA rules that guarantee insurance coverage. The chaplain must provide the certificate from TRICARE to show that they were covered during the period described. Care should be taken in this matter. Sometimes the transition into TRICARE is not immediate. Some clergy families may have members who are not insurable under TRICARE.

### What about pension benefits?

Wespath includes in each of its pension plans a provision titled The *Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA)*, providing clergy/employees who satisfy certain requirements with some benefits during qualified military absences. To qualify for the protection provided under USERRA, the person must satisfy requirements that may include providing notice to the employer of the absence for qualified military service and returning to work after completion of military service. Generally, the covered individual is treated as though the chaplain did not incur a break in service. Plan sponsors who receive notice of the required military service should determine whether the clergy/employee meets the requirements for protection under USERRA and should notify Wespath so that it can administer the plan accordingly. For more information on the USERRA requirements, contact your legal counsel.

### How are questions about chaplain duty resolved?

Matters related to service in the Guard and Reserve are a part of the consultative process and should be negotiable without the need for strict legalism. The duties of the S/PPRC are clearly defined in the *Book of Discipline* in reference to pulpit supply, housing, salary, benefits, etc. The S/PPRC is the primary point for any negotiation. (¶1258.2.G.8, 2016 *Book of Discipline*)

The needs of the congregation must be primary in an extended mobilization. At the same time, pastors and their families should not experience undue hardship because of involuntary mobilizations. Clarifying expectations in advance in a mobilization agreement among all the stakeholders will make deployments much better for the pastor, the pastor's family and the congregation.

## CHAPLAINS/CLERGY

### United Methodist Chaplain's Checklist

- Give your DS and S/PPRC a copy of this guide.
- Describe to the district superintendent and the S/PPRC what you do as a chaplain and how this might affect your appointment.
- Discuss with the district superintendent and the S/PPRC possible housing arrangements for your family should you be mobilized.
- Discuss with the district superintendent and the S/PPRC the matters relating to health and pension benefits.
- As soon as you are notified of your mobilization contact your DS, S/PPRC, and UMEA (Consistent with operational security.)

## CARING SUGGESTIONS

### What kind of support does the chaplain and family need during pre and post deployments and reintegration?

It is essential that the church, the annual conference, and the United Methodist Endorsing Agency work together ensure that clergy and their families make the transition to temporary active duty in a caring climate. The greatest gift the church can offer mobilized chaplains is the assurance that their families are well cared for at home. Ongoing support, communications and responsiveness to the family's needs are critical. When chaplains return from deployment, it is important that their new appointments are comparable to what they left and, if possible, that their families' moves are supported.

### **Before Mobilization/Deployment**

The time prior to a chaplain's deployment is filled with anxiety. Chaplains need to secure their business affairs, prepare for family separation, and care for the needs of their churches. Deploying chaplains do their best to provide effective ministry to their current congregations while preparing for their departure and an unknown future. Chaplains need encouragement, practical assistance and prayer.

Tensions and conflicting requirements are inevitable but try to maintain a hopeful spirit of cooperation.

### **During Mobilization/Deployment**

Deployments are difficult. Chaplains deploy with unresolved issues from home, an ever-present concern for their families and the tough demands of ministry in a military environment. Living conditions are often harsh, and the separation from home gives rise to loneliness. War, for those who see it, is scary, brutal, tragic, painful and unforgettable. Chaplains carry not only their own burdens, but the often-overwhelming burdens of those they serve. Letters, emails and packages arriving from church officials, colleagues and church members truly brighten the day. Knowing that the church is caring for the family at home eases the burden immensely. Prayer and encouragement are always welcome.

### **After Mobilization/Deployment**

When the pastor returns from deployment the process of reentry begins. The form it takes and the time for completion will vary with each pastor and congregation. Whatever their experience, returning chaplains will be changed by their deployments. Changes can be both positive and negative. Don't assume that chaplains are either untouched or permanently damaged by their service.

Chaplains will need time to reintegrate fully into the home environment. The world to which they return will be different than the world they left. Some of the changes will be good; others will not be. Commonly, the family system has evolved during the deployment. Children grow. Spouses become more independent.

The congregation may be different as well, with new members, new leaders, new experiences and new problems. Old faces may be absent from the table due to death or illness.

Pastors, their families and members of the congregation will all feel the urge to act as if nothing has happened and move on quickly. The truth is that everyone in the relationships has changed. And a period of separation tends to amplify the existing relationship. The good aspects of a relationship get better. Problems that existed before the deployment don't go away. Troubled relationships feel even more difficult.

Returning chaplains and their families should take time together – measured in weeks, not days – before the pastor returns to work in the parish. This will allow pastors the opportunity reconnect with their families and refocus on the life to which they are returning. It is possible for a person to be physically at home but emotionally still half a world away.

The same attention will be required when pastors returns to work. Members of the congregation will need to reconnect with their pastor. Significant changes may have taken place in their lives. An overnight retreat or a day apart with the church leadership is a good way to begin the process. Pastors can briefly talk about their deployments and choose how deeply to share the emotional experience. Similarly, pastors should learn how other church leaders experienced the separation. If changes have taken place, they can be discussed. As in the family, some renegotiation of roles and practices may be necessary. This, however, is not the time for a major reorientation of the church's mission and goals. Neither is it the time to make decisions about future changes in appointment. Let the process of reintegration work its course, first.

The congregation should also be aware that the chaplain's work with the unit is not done when the chaplain returns home. The chaplain's presence in the unit is as important as ever – maybe more so. Some members of the unit will come home with tragic stories or to tragic stories. Much of the chaplain's attention will still be focused on his or her military family.

It takes time to regain one's sense of balance and order upon return from combat. Life may feel off kilter for a while. Congregations operate at a different pace and intensity than military operations, and the pastor will need to adjust to this. Chaplains may miss the adrenaline rush of a life-and-death environment. Like other service members, returning chaplains may experience hyperarousal, hypervigilance, startle reactions, sensory triggers, intrusive thoughts and dreams, sleep disruptions and other artifacts of the deployment. These symptoms are a natural reaction to the chaplain's experience and typically resolve over time.

Watch out for signs of persistent or worsening depression, including a loss of interest in activities that once mattered, feelings of detachment, and disconnecting from friends and family. Unmanaged rage and the loss of impulse control need to be addressed, as does repeated and worsening avoidance of situations, activities and people. Unhealthy coping mechanisms include substance abuse, sexual acting out and actions that endanger people or relationships. If deployment-related disturbances don't resolve or get worse, the chaplain should seek professional therapeutic assistance. In cases where the District Superintendent recognizes the need for therapeutic intervention, but the chaplain does not, the superintendent may need to shepherd the chaplain in that direction.

Short of behavioral therapy, returning chaplains may find their lives enriched by adopting a new spiritual practice, meeting regularly with a friend or peer or participating in programs designed for veterans. Maintaining a healthy diet and exercise are also important.

Regular use of the means of grace is also essential during reintegration. Just as returning chaplains must renew their relationships with their families and congregations, so they must renew their relationship with God as men and women changed by military service.



**The United Methodist Endorsing Agency**

Division of Ordained Ministry

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

P.O. Box 340007, Nashville, TN 37203-0007

Phone: 615-340-7411

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/umc.umea/>

E-mail: [umea@gbhem.org](mailto:umea@gbhem.org)

Website: <https://www.gbhem.org/chaplains>

Apply Online: <https://methodist.smapply.io>