



United Methodist Endorsing Agency

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

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United Methodist Pastors and Armed Forces Reserve/Guard Programs Questions and Answers

1. Why should United Methodist pastors serve in National Guard or military reserve programs?

Participation in National Guard or military reserves allows clergy people a significant way to extend their ministry beyond the local church. Such service provides a remarkable opportunity for ministry to people who otherwise might go untouched by the faith community. It makes witness possible in critical times. Chaplaincy is an outreach ministry of the local church.

2. Can a pastor enter into a military obligation as a chaplain without the knowledge of the denomination?

Ministers enter either the Guard or Reserves only with the endorsement of the United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA), General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). Such endorsement requires the consent and recommendation of the individual's bishop, district superintendent, and annual conference Board of Ordained Ministry. Involvement in part time chaplain ministry is always with the consent of the denomination and is a known factor in the appointive process.

3. How do pastors and local churches deal with Guard/Reserve obligations?

Participation in Guard or Reserve chaplain programs does carry with it specific obligations which require the pastor to be away from the parish for periodic mandatory training. Individual clergypersons have a responsibility to ensure that the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee (SPPRC) of their charges be fully aware of the nature and extent of their military obligations. Prior to an appointment, a SPPRC should have an opportunity to consider and consent to the fulfillment of these obligations. This is an appropriate matter for negotiation.

Local churches are strongly encouraged to accept and support participation in such ministry since it does represent a valid outreach of our denomination. Participation as a Guard/Reserve chaplain must not be considered punitively within the appointive structure. Neither, however, should Guard/Reserve chaplains allow participation in their units to detract from their primary parish responsibilities. Pastors may not be required to use vacation time for meeting annual training obligations. They may, however, choose to exercise this option.

4. What if a pastor is mobilized for full-time duty?

Mobilization of Guard/Reserve units is always a possibility. There are occasional incidents of brief mobilization to meet a short-term emergency such as a natural disaster. During Desert Storm, the average period of mobilization was for six months or less. Recently mobilizations have been for as long as 12 to 15 months. Individual chaplains may be offered opportunities for an extended educational experience or for a special tour of duty, but these are not recurring events and are almost always matters of negotiation. There is a mandatory period of training that precedes assignment to a Guard or Reserve unit, but this is a matter of weeks, depending upon the service branch.

5. What about pulpit supply if the pastor must be away?

If a pastor/chaplain must be absent from the pulpit, he or she is responsible to work with the SPPRC, DS and bishop in relation to pulpit supply. This is a consultative process. The pastor/chaplain must share with the SPPRC the possibility of mobilization and have a plan prepared against such an eventuality. Should an extended mobilization occur, pastoral supply becomes the responsibility of the cabinet. 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 but should not be seen as a right by either the charge or the chaplain.

For specific information see “Guidance For Bishops, Cabinets, and Boards of Ordained Ministry The United Methodist Church” found on the UMEA Web site, www.gbhem.org/chaplains.

6. What about pay and housing should mobilization occur?

A parish is responsible for paying its pastor. It does not have responsibility to provide dual compensation for an assigned pastor who has been mobilized and is receiving pay and allowances from the armed forces. Housing is not as clear cut. A parish may choose to allow the pastor's family to remain in the parsonage if it appears the pastor will return to the parish or if moving constitutes an immediate hardship for the family.

However, if a new pastor is appointed, the family of the chaplain should make appropriate arrangements for other housing as quickly as possible. Since a housing allowance is a regular part of military compensation, normally this should not create a family hardship. This, again, is a matter of negotiation with the SPPRC. If the family is allowed to remain in the parsonage, and if another pastor is appointed, the mobilized chaplain would surrender his or military housing allowance to the SPRC to facilitate the housing of the assigned pastor.

7. What about pension and health benefits?

Refer all questions to the Wespath 1-800-851-2201 • www.gbophb.org

8. Does mobilization change a pastor's relationship with the annual conference?

Mobilization does not change the active relationship of the pastor/chaplain to the annual conference. In an extended mobilization, he or she moves to an extension ministry appointment under the endorsement of the Division of Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Endorsing Agency. Neither leave of absence nor sabbatical are legitimate options. Service as a military chaplain is a valid appointment.

9. How are questions about chaplain duty resolved?

Matters related to Guard/Reserve duty are a part of the consultative process and should be negotiable without the need for strict legalisms. The duties of the SPPRC are clearly defined in the Book of Discipline in reference to pulpit supply, housing, salary, benefits, etc. and places the SPPRC as the primary point for any negotiation. 2016 Book of Discipline (§258.2)

The needs of the congregation must be primary in reference to any extended mobilization. No congregation needs to feel obligated to provide ongoing compensation for a pastor who is mobilized and receiving pay and allowances from the state or federal government. No pastor or clergy family should experience undue hardship because of an involuntary mobilization.

Problems are best avoided by creating a contract in which specifics are clearly established to deal with both the opportunities and obligations of Guard/Reserve duty and the rights of a congregation to the services of its pastor.

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