



United Methodist Endorsing Agency

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

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United Methodist Pastors as Chaplains in the National Guard or Reserve

Why should United Methodist pastors serve as military chaplains in the National Guard or Reserve?

Participation in National Guard or Reserve extends the pastor's ministry beyond the local church to people who might otherwise go untouched by the faith community. Military chaplaincy enables elders to exercise their call to word, sacrament and service in a pluralistic setting. Chaplains perform ministry for their own religious constituencies away from home and provide loving care for all the members of the military family. As one could guess from the history of the last two decades, the need is great.

Local churches are strongly encouraged to accept and support participation in the Guard and Reserve chaplaincy; military chaplaincy is an important outreach of our denomination.

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

United Methodist clergy enter the Guard or Reserve only with the endorsement of the United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA). 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 always takes place with the consent of the denomination and is a known factor in the appointive process.

Who may be endorsed for service as a chaplain in the National Guard or Reserve?

United Methodist elders – provisional or in full connection – may be endorsed to serve as military chaplains in the Guard and Reserve. Provisional elders may be involuntarily mobilized for extended emergencies, but they may not volunteer to serve in an active status. You can begin the application for endorsement online at: <https://methodist.smapply.io>.

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

Participation in Guard or Reserve chaplain requires the pastor to be away from the parish for periodic mandatory training. 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. Even during pre-appointment consultations, the S/PPRC should have an opportunity to consider and consent to the fulfillment of these obligations. This is an appropriate matter for negotiation.

Participation as a Guard or Reserve chaplain should not be considered punitively within the appointive process. Neither, however, should Guard or 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.

What is the difference between the National Guard and the Reserves?

The National Guard (Army and Air) is organized by state and operates under state control unless activated for federal service under one of the authorities in federal law. The governor can use the National Guard for emergencies within the state. The Reserves (Army, Navy, Air Force) are federal forces, organized across state lines and always under the control of the Department of Defense.

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

Mobilization of Guard or Reserve units is always a possibility. There are occasionally brief mobilizations to meet short-term emergencies such as natural disasters. Longer mobilizations are also possible. During Desert Storm, the average period of mobilization was six months or less. Since 2001, some mobilizations have lasted 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.

Military life, especially in a deployed environment, can be difficult and demanding. Military orders carry legal force and deployments are not generally voluntary. UMEA does not withdraw endorsements to prevent chaplains from being mobilized or deploying. Pastors interested in military chaplaincy – even in the Guard and Reserve – should understand the hardships and obligations entailed in military service.

What about pulpit supply if the pastor must be away?

If a pastor must be absent from the pulpit, he or she is responsible to work with the S/PPRC, DS and bishop in relation to pulpit supply. This is a collaborative process. All stakeholders should work together to develop a contingency plan before the need arises, and the pastor should give the S/PPRC as much notice as possible – consistent with operational security – before the mobilization occurs.

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; it is not a right for either the pastor or the congregation. For specific information see “Guard and Reserve Mobilization Guide for Church Leaders” found on the UMEA Web site, <https://www.gbhem.org/chaplains>.

What about pay and housing should mobilization occur?

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.

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 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.

What about pension and health benefits?

Refer all questions to the Wespath 1-800-851-2201, <https://www.wespath.org>.

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

Mobilization does not change the itinerant relationship of the pastor to the annual conference. In an extended mobilization, he or she moves to an extension ministry appointment under the endorsement of the United Methodist Endorsing Agency. Neither leave of absence nor sabbatical are legitimate options. Upon return from mobilization, reserve component chaplains will receive an appointment from their bishops in accordance with the provisions in the *Book of Discipline*.

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 legalism. The duties of the S/PPRC are clearly defined in the *Book of Discipline* with regard to pulpit supply, housing, salary, benefits, etc. and places the S/PPRC as the primary point for negotiation. *2016 Book of Discipline* (§258.2)

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.

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