

These Challenging Times

by **Stephen Boyd**
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Recently it was reported that Chaplain Modder, who once ministered to Navy SEALs, could be thrown out of the military after he was accused of failing “to show tolerance and respect” during private counseling sessions regarding issues pertaining to faith, marriage and sexuality, specifically homosexuality and pre-marital sex. As a few ecclesiastical endorsers work to secure the availability of chaplains who are able and willing to serve to all service members, this display of intolerance is unacceptable.

Legislation to repeal Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was enacted December of 2010 and, after much debate, went into effect September 20, 2011. This major legislative action directly affected many American service members who lived daily in fear of losing their jobs, their security and livelihoods if they were discovered to be gay or lesbian. Less than two years later, in a 5-4 decision, the United States Supreme Court declared the unconstitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act on June 26, 2013. The impact of these decisions on the military and the ministry to our men and women in uniform has been immeasurable.

While many of us believed that these decisions were a long time in coming, what has not been as visible to most of the American public are the consequences that these decisions have had on the Army, Navy and Air Force Chaplain Corps. Recently, I spoke with one of our United Church of Christ military chaplains as she prepared to deploy for an extended duty at sea. During our conversation, she expressed her mixed feelings about the deployment and shared her concern and anxiety about the months ahead.

Later, I shared our chaplain’s anxiety with another female chaplain who described the hostile environment that many of our military chaplains are forced to endure as they minister to men and women in uniform. Upon further discussion I soon realized that much of the hostility, within the

Chaplain Corps, can be attributed to the ever-changing and evolving landscape of the post-Don't Ask Don't Tell and the Supreme Court ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act military.

Rear Admiral Margaret Kibben, Chief of Navy Chaplains, quoted the legendary lyrics of Bob Dylan, "for the times they are a changin'", as she addressed a gathering of military chaplains this past January speaking to the post-DADT, post-DOMA military environment. However, it is apparent that they are not changing quickly enough.

Last fall I was contacted by Air Force Chaplain Recruiter Chaplain Ward and was told that the Air Force has come to realize that the Air Force Chaplain Corps cannot minister to all the men and women who wear the uniform. In the current military environment chaplains who are able and willing to openly serve the LGB community are scarce. This is in part what Rear Admiral Kibben was referring to in her remarks: the landscape of our service members, serving in all branches, has radically changed and we need chaplains who can minister in a pluralistic environment.

In an effort to actively address the need for more progressive military chaplains, we have extended an invitation to Air Force Chaplain Recruiter Chaplain Ward to be present in the General Synod 30 display area this June in Cleveland.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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