

Toolkit

Military Reach-Out Project

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**Board of Church and Society
Texas Annual Conference
December 2007**

Overview

Background:

On February 12-13, 2007, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) sponsored a task force of Military and Veterans Administration chaplains to dialogue on the needs of service members returning from Iraq and/or Afghanistan and how the United Methodist Church can support these service members and their families.

Various groups within the church have taken a strong stand against the war. Yet people serving in the military and their families, like anyone else in distressing circumstances, are in need of the ministries of the church. Additionally, with the Vietnam War in mind, and the brokenness it left in its wake, there is a need to find common ground and to increase our capacity for healing and reconciliation.

The Chaplains Task Force collected a body of reference materials and resources for local congregations to use in reaching out to service members of their own congregations and to individuals in their communities. This project is based on their work.

Purpose of the project:

This is a gospel project. It's about love, healing and reconciliation. Above all, the purpose is to reach out to those who are experiencing the extremely difficult conditions of war. Also, we want to provide opportunities for people to come together. The current political situation has the capacity to divide us, because of differing feelings and beliefs about war in general and/or current armed conflicts. This project is not about the politics of war. It is about overcoming the divisiveness that sometimes comes from those politics. The Reach Out to Military Project has the capacity to provide all of us with common ground by caring for those among us who are most seriously affected by war. It lays the foundation for whatever healing and reconciliation may be needed, now or later. What matters here is love for one another.

Specific congregational objectives:

- Encourage everyone, regardless of political views about this or any war, to come together to minister to those in harm's way. Provide the vision.
- Make regular calls, at least monthly, to local family members of military persons to ask for updates and to inquire about their own wellbeing.
- Maintain one list of military service members who are connected to the congregation. Update it monthly, and encourage the congregation to pray for the service members and their families, and also to pray for peace.
- Maintain a second, separate, list of *deployed* persons, with APO addresses. Update it monthly. Ask Sunday School classes and other groups to "adopt" a *deployed* service member and send monthly snail mail and CARE packages during deployment.
- Support returning military members: welcoming and listening. Make the information under "Military Chaplains Project" available to the congregation so that they will understand how to listen. This is very important.
- Advocate for adequate veterans' benefits through contacts with public officials.
- Encourage donations for UM phone cards to be distributed by UM Military Chaplains.
- Invite the larger community to help with the phone cards and advocacy.

Minimum Requirements: approval of pastor, clear understanding and consensus of team leaders on the purpose; volunteers to do the phoning, copying, encouraging, advocacy etc.

To-Do List for Organizers and Leaders

1. Read everything in this packet very carefully. Parts of the project require special kinds of understanding and/or sensitivity. Adequate preparation is important.
2. Take all the information to the pastor and get approval, especially for the sending off and welcoming home litanies.
3. Get whatever approvals are required by your congregation – Church Council, Admin Board, or other. Depending on the approval process in your church, you may need to recruit your volunteers first and/or get an okay from Finance (for the phone cards, which may be seen as a fundraiser needing approval).
4. Understand the system of having two lists of service members, so it can be clearly explained to the volunteers.
 - a. *General List of active service members* – all those who are actively serving in the military. These people and their families will be prayed for on a regular and ongoing basis.
 - b. *Deployed List* - only those who are deployed to “hot spots” where armed hostilities are ongoing. These are the people who will endure the greatest stress. They will receive CARE packages at least monthly. They are also on the general list (for prayer). When they leave the “hot spot” and are stationed in a calmer place, they are removed from the deployed list but stay on the general list. Even after discharge, keep them on the list until the family is confident they are “okay”. Reentry to civilian life is nearly always somewhat difficult, and post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) is very common. In some cases there may be physical wounds that need healing as well.
 - c. *Updates* – both lists are updated monthly, for locations, APO addresses, and changes in rank. The General List is passed on to the prayer team, with changes highlighted. The Deployed List goes to the CARE Package Handler, with changes highlighted.
5. Recruit volunteers:
 - a. List Updater(s). (1 or more persons) Updating a list of 20 service members takes 2 to 4 hours monthly, done in “chunks” of time over 2 – 3 days. Playing phone tag is to be expected. (*Estimated 2 hours monthly, depending on size of list and number of updaters*)
 - b. Adoption Agent. (1 person) Enlists small groups and individuals to “adopt” a person on the deployed list. Those who choose to adopt will send a monthly CARE package to their adopted service member. Personal calls to Sunday School and other small group leaders will be needed, and possibly Sunday Bulletin announcements or flyers, etc., to invite those who aren’t engaged in a small group. (*Estimated 2 hours to get started, 1 hour monthly after that.*)
 - c. CARE Package Handler. (1 person – could be the same as “Adoption Agent”) Matches groups with a service member to “adopt”. Distributes the CARE Package items list, issues reminders, and checks to make sure the packages get off every month. You may choose to have this person pick up the packages and mail them. (*Estimated 1 – 2 hours monthly*)
 - d. Benefits Advocate. (1 person) Encourages all members to contact appropriate elected and appointed public officials to express support for adequate veterans’ benefits. Makes a list of these officials, with email addresses, local office addresses, phone numbers. Distributes this list to the church members, making it easy for them to make the contacts. Stress to church members that all

contacts with public officials should be courteous, friendly, and brief. We only need to express our concern for the veterans and the care they may need. Nothing high pressure. Invite the larger community to help with this part of the project. A Benefits Advocate might even want to arrange a small group visit with the U.S. Representative from their district and/or the U.S. Senators from Texas. Appointments can be made through the local office, for visits when Congress is in recess. *(Will require an estimated 2 – 3 hours to get started, then a maximum of 1-2 hours a month for reminders, etc.)*

- e. Phone Card Coordinator. (1 person) Encourages all members to contribute to the phone card fund. Distribute information about what they are and how they work. Gives instructions on how to contribute. \$10 will buy a card with 120 minutes on it, but some may want to contribute less. What's important is that everyone have an opportunity to give. Reach out to the local community beyond the congregation and invite them to help with this part. (See model letters.) You may want to contact your local paper about publicity for this. Or use door-hangers, or ask congregation to spread the word informally. Invitation and thank-you letters are included. *(Estimated 1-3 hours to get started, then it depends on what is decided about inviting the community to help.)*
 - f. Prayer Team Leader. (1 person) Your congregation may already have a prayer team, in which case you just plug into what they are already doing. If not, either publish the list to be prayed for once a month to the entire congregation AND/OR gather a group of friends who will agree to pray for the persons on the list on a regular basis. Daily or weekly, for example. Also, pray for peace. *(Estimated 30 min. to 1 hour weekly.)*
6. Contact church administrator, or whoever mails out checks in your church, with the information about how to send the funds collected for phone cards to the UM Endorsing Agency (military chaplains).
Deposit all the checks and cash coming from the members to the church's account, keeping a record of the amount. Then write one check from the church's account, made out to UMEA with "phone cards" written on the memo line. Send to:
United Methodist Endorsing Agency
P.O. Box 340007
Nashville, TN 37203-0007
7. Call all the volunteer leaders together for a planning meeting
- a. Use the meditation as small group worship at the beginning of the meeting, or at some other point in the meeting. Stress the spiritual preparation needed for the project. Having shared the experience of the meditation, invite the group to decide how to use this and/or some other method to help the whole congregation prepare. *(It's good to have the pastor's assistance here.)*
 - b. Make sure everyone understands the project as a whole. Look at the big picture first (background, purpose, objectives). Then the to-do list and its details.
 - c. Invite the group to identify any problems for your congregation. Problem-solve together to make any changes needed so that this model will work well for your particular congregation.
 - d. Create a plan for introducing the Military Reach-Out Project to the congregation.
8. Please complete the evaluation sheet for this Toolkit and return it to us, so that we can know if you found it useful, and how we might improve it.

For further assistance, contact: Rev. Glynden Bode, Conference Board of Church and Society (281) 537-5628 glyndenbode@gmail.com

Scripture and Prayer

Begin with a time of silence, considering all the people who are affected by armed conflict at this moment. . . Consider all the people around the world – Afghanistan, Columbia, Darfur, Iraq, the Philippines, and all the other places. . . Consider those who fight with gunsThose who fight with words in political arguments Those with internal battles, trying to separate right and wrong. . . . Those caught in the crossfire. . . . Those who try to ignore all the battles. . . . Those who have been wounded, physically or spiritually. . . . afraid or angry or hopeless. . . . And also consider those who love all those people. . . . Consider yourself. . . . Silently acknowledge a broken and hurting world.

Pray aloud:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all God's benefits –

 who forgives all your iniquity,

 who heals all your diseases,

 who redeems your life from the Pit,

 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

 who satisfies you with good as long as you live

 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do God's will.

Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of God's dominion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

(from Ps. 103)

Read and contemplate Scripture:

Jesus said that peacemakers would be called God's children. He also ministered directly to at least one soldier. (Read Mt 5.3-11 and Mt 8.5-13)

When the church at Corinth was experiencing internal conflict, Paul pleaded with them to remember what they had in common, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Cor 10.16-17)

Jesus, in the last hours with his disciples before his arrest, gave them a final instruction, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 14.34-35)

Consider our tradition

Our own UM "Social Principles" sum up the Christian experience: "From the beginning the Christian conscience has struggled with the harsh realities of violence and war, for these evils clearly frustrate God's loving purposes for humankind." They go on to acknowledge that we are not of one mind when peaceful alternatives have failed and we are confronted with unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide. United Methodists are urged to extend the ministry of the Church to both soldiers and conscientious objectors.

Wise, Loving and Merciful God, we confess we don't always understand what is best, and we don't always agree among ourselves, but we trust that with time and help from your Holy Spirit, we will eventually get it all sorted out. In the meantime, we know that we should love one another. Remind us daily that loving one another is what Jesus' disciples do for their identity and for your glory. Amen

Essential Information for the Members of the Congregation

Make the church a safe place for service members and families. Making yourself “military friendly” doesn’t necessarily mean that you support war or this particular war. It does mean that you are willing to see members of the military as you see any other distressed population in your parish. Jesus ministered to soldiers and His Church has the opportunity to do the same.

Take the time to prepare yourself spiritually for this mission. Use the meditation provided as a starting point. Remember that this project includes an element of “coming together” among people with different points of view concerning war. Be sensitive to that, and don’t assume others agree with you. This is not about politics; it’s about being members of the body of Jesus Christ, called to be peacemakers and reconcilers. Pray daily about this to help you remember.

Reach out to the deployed soldier. Gather a group of friends and sign up to take turns sending snail mail and care packages to our service members.

Support the families of deployed soldiers. Let them know you are praying for them. Be a good listener. No advice. No talk about politics of war. Just listen.

Support our UM chaplains in their mission. Contribute to the phone card project. The cards feature the UM Cross and Flame and the message “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors. The People of the United Methodist Church.” When soldiers use the cards they will hear a recorded prayer: “The people of the United Methodist Church are praying for your safety and sense of peace. Our hearts, our minds and our doors are always open to you.” Cards are distributed by chaplains to “any soldier”. Each card provides 120 minutes call time. Make checks payable to your church, with “military phone cards” in the memo line.

Listen to returning soldiers with sensitivity. This is especially important for family members and close friends of the soldiers. “Listen, support, absolve and don’t condemn. One of the tragic legacies of the American experience in Viet Nam is that our society either ignored or condemned the military service members who fought in that war. Societal shame ... broke the spirits of countless Viet Nam veterans. Soldiers need a place where they can share the experiences of war that may trouble them. They need a safe place where they can do theological inquiry which is so necessary for anyone who has suffered trauma. They need a place where they can question, grow, and gain the strength needed to grow through their combat experience and on into the person God is calling them to be. A church that will provide a listening ear, a place for confession and a heart of compassion will become a healing haven for soldiers and their families.” – John Morris, chaplain

See them off and welcome them home with love. Let the pastor know if one of ours is leaving from here or is coming home to here. We have special liturgies for both deploying and returning, designed to be used in worship services.

Advocate for combat veterans. Insist that returning soldiers get the care and support that they need. Health care, mental health services, living wages, financial support until/unless they can meet their own needs. Etc. Contact your public officials, just to let them know you think this is very important. Re-contact them when appropriate.

AN ORDER FOR BLESSING SERVICE MEMBERS DEPLOYING FOR WAR

The pastor calls the service member forward together with his/her family.

Pastor to congregation:

Scripture calls all Christians to pray for those in authority, to honor them and to be subject to them as they support those who do what is good, reprimand those who do wrong and provide for a just ordering of society. Those who are called to military service act as instruments of these authorities. Today we recognize _____ (Job title/rank/name) as he/she departs to serve in _____. (Theater of Operation)

The pastor may briefly describe the assignment that the military service member is departing to fulfill.

The service member may kneel or stand as the pastor and the family members/loved ones lay hands on him/her.

Pastor to service member:

_____, (First name) on behalf of this congregation, I pray God's blessing be upon you as you journey into harm's way. While you are serving in _____ (Theater of Operation) we promise to remember you in prayer, uphold you with encouraging communications and surround your loved ones, who remain at home, with a community of care and support. As you deploy in service to our country, may the Lord be the stronghold of your life. May you rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation and be constant in prayer. May the Holy Spirit guide and sustain you through every experience and may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

Let us pray:

The pastor and the congregation pray together:

**Almighty God, we commend to your love and care, _____ . (Full Name)
Be with *him/her* now as *he/she* prepares to face the challenges of deployment and the uncertainties of war. Grant *him/her* wisdom and courage so that *he/she* may discharge *his/her* duties with integrity and faithfulness. Help *him/her* to endure hardship with grace and humor. Fill *him/her* with compassion for those who go the journey with *him/her*. Protect *him/her* from all danger, O God, and comfort *him/her* in moments of distress. During this time of separation, be for *his/her* loved ones a source of hope and strength and hasten the day when peace may finally come. Amen.**

*Liturgy prepared by Laura Bender, U.S. Navy, endorsed member of the New York Annual Conference.
May 2007.*

AN ORDER FOR WELCOMING SERVICE MEMBERS RETURNING FROM WAR

The pastor calls the service member forward together with his/her family.

Pastor to congregation:

In 1749, Charles Wesley wrote these words:

“And are we yet alive, and see each other’s face?
Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace!”

It is with joy and thanksgiving that we this day welcome _____ (Job title/rank/name) as he/she returns from service in _____. (Theater of Operation)

The pastor may briefly describe the assignment that the military service member has just completed.

_____ (first name), on behalf of our congregation, I want to thank you for your service to our country and thank your family for their many sacrifices during your deployment.

The pastor may briefly describe any family events of significance that occurred during the family member’s absence (births, deaths, graduations, etc.)

Pastor to service member:

_____ (first name), you have been to war and you have survived. We recognize that there is a deeply personal cost for being a warrior that few of us will ever fully understand.

The gospels tell us about a man who had been living among the tombs, and who called himself Legion because he was haunted by so many disturbing spirits. When Jesus saw him, he had compassion on him and gave him release from his demons. As you return to us today, we want you to have the opportunity to leave behind what is past and accept for yourself the healing and comfort that God alone can provide.

The service member responds:

I have returned from war – help me continue my journey home.

The service member may kneel or stand.

Pastor to congregation:

Let us be in prayer:

The pastor and the congregation pray together:

Almighty and merciful God, we lift up to you this day our brother/sister _____ who through your great love has been returned to us. For your protection, guidance and sustaining presence while he/she was in harm’s way, we give you profound thanks.

With _____ (first name), we mourn the loss of all those who did not return home and pray for all those who have been wounded in body and spirit. We pray also for their loved ones, that in you they might find a source of hope and strength.

Silence may be kept for the remembrance of names or specific individuals may be named aloud.

Remembering that even your son Jesus still had scars after he was resurrected, we pray that you will continue to uphold _____ (first name) as he/she seeks healing for the wounds that inflict the spirit of all who endure a struggle. Help him/her to let go of painful memories. Help him/her to reconnect with those who love him/her. Help him/her to know that he/she no longer needs to be quite so vigilant, for you have the watch over his/her life. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen

Pastor to service member and congregation:

In the Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"

And then he answered the question with these words:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Pastor to service member:

_____ (first name), in service to your country, you may have been required to act in ways that are outside the parameters of civilized behavior. Reflecting on these memories may be painful and disconcerting. I ask you now, in the presence of this community of faith, to offer up a silent prayer for all that you have experienced that grieves your spirit and weighs heavily on your heart.

A moment for silent prayer will be observed.

Hear now these comforting words from the Scripture:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11: 28)

A moment for silent prayer will be observed.

The service member turns and faces the congregation.

The pastor and congregation proclaim:

_____ (First name), may the peace of God be with you.

The service member responds:

And also with you.

Pastor to congregation:

Members of the household of faith, I commend to your love and care our *brother/sister* _____ (*first name*). Do all in your power to continue to uphold *him/her* so that one day, by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, true peace may again dawn in *his/her* life.

Pastor to service member and congregation:

Now may the blessing of God be with all of us as we look toward that glorious day described by the prophet Isaiah who said: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore."

*Liturgy prepared by Laura Bender, U.S. Navy, endorsed member of the New York Annual Conference.
May 2007.*

Top 10 Items for Military Care Packages

(in no particular order of importance)

1. Beef Jerky
2. Individual packages of snacks, such as trail mix, peanuts, almonds, nuts, etc.
3. Cookies & candy that will not melt or perish from the heat or transport (ex. Oreos, Animal crackers, Rice crispy treats, Starbursts, Orange slices, etc.)
4. Sunflower seeds / Pumpkin seeds / Corn Nuts
5. Individual packages of drink flavorings that dissolve in water, such as Gatorade, Crystal Light Peach Tea, Raspberry Tea, Lemonade, etc. (NO KOOL-AID, AS IT IS INCLUDED IN ALL MRE'S)
6. Eye Drops / Re-Wetting Drops for dry eyes
7. Carmex / Chapstick
8. Sunscreen 20 SPF (+) and Gold Bond Powder for chaffing
9. Hand sanitizer, baby wipes, individual packages of q-tips
10. Decent and current reading materials, such as The Upper Room, Sports, Fishing, Motorcycle, Auto magazines, Newspaper Comics, etc. Local papers might be particularly appreciated.

The most important item to always include in all care packages

is simply a personal letter or note, letting them know that we're thinking of them, praying for them, and we are here for them. We do care - they are not forgotten. And we love them.

Sample Request for Donation

(Church Letterhead)

Dear Community Member,

The Military Reach-Out Project at ____ United Methodist Church invites you to help us support United States military service members.

So far as we are concerned, political points of view do not matter here. This project is about caring for people in dangerous places. We believe God cares about them, and so should we all.

We want to provide phone cards that allow service members to stay connected with family and friends, **and we invite you to help us with this.** Each \$10.00 contribution will provide a message of support and a phone card with 120 minutes. All phone cards will be distributed through our United Methodist military chaplains to “any soldier” in all branches of the military who are serving in combat zones. **We give to soldiers needing these cards, regardless of their religious affiliation.**

Each donation is tax deductible and each individual or business will be given a receipt. **All donations and proceeds will go strictly towards the “Phone Cards for Military” project.** Please make your contributions payable to __U.M.C., and in the memo section designate “Phone Cards for Military.”

We would be deeply grateful for your help with this project.

Please feel free to contact us at any time with any questions, concerns, or comments.

(Contact information)

Sample Receipt / Thank-You

(Church Letterhead)

Dear ____ (name of business or individual),

You have made a donation of \$_____ to buy phone cards for United States military personnel. These cards will be distributed through our military chaplains to “any soldier” who needs one.

As a tax-deductible contribution, “no goods or services were provided to the donor”.

We are deeply grateful to you for helping us lend support and encouragement to U.S. military service members and their families. We hope that you will join us in praying for their well-being and also for justice and peace in this world.

Blessings,

(appropriate signature)

Evaluation

Name of Church:

Address of Church:

Name of Project Organizer:

Organizer's phone:

Organizer's email:

What you like about this project:

What you found most helpful in this toolkit:

What you had trouble with (please be specific so that we can create better toolkits):

Anything else you would like to tell us (continue on back):

Please mail or email to: Rev. Glynden Bode, 1122 Marne Ln., Houston TX 77090 or glyndenbode@gmail.com