

The National Association of Evangelicals Declaration on Religious Freedom for Soldiers and Military Chaplains

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American soldiers¹ are American citizens. They have inalienable rights to the free exercise of religion. The restrictions of military life, including the call to serve far from one's home and religious congregation, present challenges to the regular practice of faith. Congress, Presidents, and military leaders have recognized throughout American history that it is the military's responsibility to respect and provide for the religious needs of its soldiers. The First Amendment, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and other laws guarantee the religious rights of soldiers and military chaplains as set forth in this Declaration and as further described in the Statement on the Religious Freedom of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Military Chaplains.

Soldiers. Religious freedom is the right of every soldier. Every soldier has the right to worship, pray, speak, and engage in religious exercise unless it conflicts with a true and compelling military need.

Military Chaplains. Military chaplains are called by God, endorsed by their religious bodies, and commissioned by their country to serve the religious needs of soldiers and their families. When performing core ecclesiastical functions, military chaplains may exercise their pastoral judgment, without governmental oversight, in accordance with their faith tradition. Chaplains ministering to followers of other faith traditions should be respectful of those traditions. Chaplains may minister to those rooted in no faith tradition or seeking a new faith in accordance with their pastoral judgment.

Commanders. Religious freedom is also the right of commanders, and they, too, have the right to worship, pray, speak, and engage in religious exercise unless it conflicts with a true and compelling military need. Commanders may not discriminate on the basis of religion among those under their authority. They may not coerce subordinates to adopt the commander's religious beliefs or practices.

Ceremonial Prayer. The offering of prayer by military chaplains and others in memorial and ceremonial contexts has been part of military life since the founding of the United States. Such prayer should be welcomed for it dignifies and marks public occasions.

Academic Freedom. Academic course work, for military cadets and other soldiers, should include the study of religion, religious history, and religious ideas. Such study should encourage free and vigorous discussion. Vigorous debate is part of sound academic formation. It is good preparation for the varieties of religious beliefs and practices soldiers can expect to encounter.

¹Soldiers" is used herein to include all those who serve in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard.