



Chief of Navy Chaplains Official Statement on Public Prayer in the Navy

Title 10 of the United States Code, Section 6031, requires commanders to cause Divine Services to be performed and protects chaplains' rights to conduct those Services "according to the manner and forms" of their religious organization. Navy policy on prayer recognizes the distinction between Divine Services and other command functions that customarily or traditionally may contain elements commonly held to be religious, such as invocations or benedictions.

Navy chaplains who serve in Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard commands are trained to distinguish between Divine Services and other command functions at which they may be invited to offer prayer. Our nation encompasses a diversity of faiths and beliefs as do our Navy communities. DoD policy requires commanders to accommodate individual religious practices consonant with the best interests of the unit (DoDD 1300.17). Tolerance and mutual respect guide Navy policy, doctrine and practice in order to recognize and balance both the rights of chaplains and the rights of those who attend command functions, such as changes of command, retirement ceremonies and other functions that commonly incorporate religious elements.

Recognition that religious ministry in the military takes place in a pluralistic setting is a prerequisite for service as a Navy chaplain. To be considered for appointment to military chaplaincy, religious ministry professionals must be "willing to function in a pluralistic environment..." and follow the orders given by those appointed over them (DODI 1304.28: 6.1.3 and 6.4.2). In settings other than Divine Services, chaplains are encouraged to respect the diversity of the community as they facilitate the free exercise of religion guaranteed by the Constitution and military policy (DoDD 1304.19).

Commanders retain the responsibility to provide guidance for all command functions. In planning command functions other than Divine Services that incorporate religious elements, commanders, with the advice of their chaplains, should assess the setting and context of the function. The diversity of faith that may be represented among the participants and whether the function is mandatory for all hands should be taken into consideration in the planning process. The chaplain, once informed of the commander's guidance, may choose to participate based on his or her faith constraints. If the chaplain chooses not to participate, he or she may do so with no adverse consequences.

By emphasizing mutual respect, cooperation, and inclusiveness in delivering prayers at command functions, chaplains encourage recognition of values and virtues which are crucial to military life. When chaplains are invited to pray in command functions other than Divine Services, and do so in a context-sensitive manner, they provide participants of different faiths the opportunity to give assent to what is said. They also model positive behavior and provide a concrete example that mirrors the rich heritage of strength through diversity that is a hallmark of our nation.