

PRCCMP Policy Guidance for PRCC Chaplains

Taken from the PRCCMP Chaplains Manual As of August 10, 2015

V. WOMEN IN COMBAT

In recent years, the major churches making up the membership of the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCCMP) have in their senior deliberative bodies (General Assemblies and Synod) passed resolutions concerning the use of women as military combatants in the Armed Forces of the United States. Since this was the first formal response of our churches to the evolving policy and practice of female integration into all areas of the U. S. military, the result has been discussion and dialogue in many circles with a commensurate number of questions and concerns as to the practical meaning of these resolutions for members of these respective church bodies.

To assist in applying the resolutions, the PRCCMP provided this response to encourage study of commissioned study papers from the committees of each church. The approved statements, grounds and committee study reports are in published synod and assembly minutes. This response of the PRCCMP may be made available to church members and interested individuals and may be used as an aid by pastors, elders, chaplains, church leaders and military members in counseling others on this subject.

It is our prayer that each church member and fellow follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word will consider the resolutions of General Assemblies and Synod with due seriousness, applying these principles to living out their calling as disciples of the Lord.

DECLARATIONS OF THE SYNOD/ASSEMBLIES

A. RPCNA 168th Synod, 1998

“Therefore, be it now resolved:

That, while recognizing the right and duty that women have to self-defense, which may involve physical violence (Judges 9:53), it is our conviction that Biblical teaching does not give warrant to employ women for military combat.

That, we direct all presbyteries and sessions, to instruct their congregations in this regard,

That we urge any of our female members who are considering or presently engaged in military service to take counsel of their Sessions as to the teaching of God's Word in the matter, and

That the Clerk of the Synod send a copy of this resolution to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and to our military chaplains, and

That the Moderator of the Synod be directed to assign a representative to present a copy of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Senate, and the House of Representatives.”

B. OPC 68th General Assembly, 2001

“That the 68th GA declares that the use of women in military combat is both contrary to nature and inconsistent with the Word of God.

Grounds [also adopted by the GA]:

1. This is a ministerial declaration of what is revealed in Scripture, cf. 1 Corinthians 11:14; Report I, Sections III-IV. [See pp. 265-269 of the 68th GA minutes].

1. This provides the biblical counsel requested by the PRCCMP without making any further pronouncements that would, presumably, cause the church to ‘intermeddle with civil affairs which

concern the commonwealth' in a matter that some would say is not yet an extraordinary case, cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 31.4.”

C. PCA 29th General Assembly, 2001

“That the Philadelphia Presbytery Overture, the PRCCMP letter, and the Report of the Bills and Overtures Committee be answered by this report.

That the PCA continue to recognize that the individual conscience, guided by the Word of God and responsive to the counsel of the Church, must decide concerning the propriety of voluntary service in the military.

That the PCA believes that military service is a just and godly calling; however, that it presents special and difficult moral challenges in light of the integration of women into the armed services.

That the women of the PCA be warned of the many difficulties and moral and physical dangers involved in serving in the military in secular America, due to their inherent greater vulnerability.

That individual believers as citizens be urged to exercise their godly influence to bring about authentic spiritual and moral reformation in the military services.

That the PCA chaplains be encouraged in their continued ministry to all male and female personnel in their spheres of ministry.

That pastors and sessions be informed of this report and be encouraged to instruct their people in the matters it presents.

That the NAPARC and NAE churches be informed of the PCA’s position on this matter.”

D. PCA 30th General Assembly, 2002

“1. Acknowledging that the child in the womb is “a person covered by Divine protection”

(*Statement on Abortion*, Sixth General Assembly); and that women of childbearing age often carry unborn children while remaining unaware of their child’s existence; and that principles of just war require the minimization of the loss of life—particularly innocent civilians; the PCA declares that any policy which intentionally places in harms way as military combatants women who are, or might be, carrying a child in their womb, is a violation of God’s Moral Law.

2. This Assembly declares it to be the biblical duty of man to defend woman and therefore condemns the use of women as military combatants, as well as any conscription of women into the Armed Services of the United States.

3. Therefore be it resolved that the Thirtieth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America adopts the above as pastoral counsel for the good of the members, the officers, and especially the military chaplains of the Presbyterian Church in America.

4. Be it further resolved that the Presbyterian Church in America supports the decision of any of its members to object to, as a matter of conscience, the conscription of women or the use of women as military combatants.”

E. PCA 31st General Assembly, 2003

“Nothing done by the previous Assembly compels any court of original jurisdiction to exercise discipline on issues pertaining to the report on the Ad-Interim Study Committee on Women in the Military.”

PRCCMP UNDERSTANDING OF THE FORCE OF SYNOD/ASSEMBLY DECLARATIONS

We believe that the actions of the General Assemblies/Synod, rightly understood, have significant weight for chaplains, ministers, ruling elders, military personnel and members of our churches. The weight of these ecclesiastical statements includes the duty to take them seriously, not to dismiss them casually as advice that can

be ignored. Our purpose here is not to foster judicial actions, but to help understand and apply what the assemblies have approved.

As we do this, it is important to realize that none of the declarations has been formally adopted as part of the law and order of the church. Therefore, they are, in a sense, works in progress and the full force of the statements is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, actions are to be taken and counsel is to be given in accordance with the stated position of the church, insofar as one's individual conscience enables.¹

Regarding the matter of individual conscience, these words from A. A. Hodge's commentary on *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Banner of Truth reprint, 1992) are instructive. The following paragraphs are from that commentary on Chapter 31, sections II-IV: "... synods and councils, consisting of uninspired men, have no power to bind the conscience, and their authority cannot exclude the right, nor excuse the obligation, of private judgment. If their judgments are unwise, but not directly opposed to the will of God, the private member should submit for peace' sake. If their decisions are opposed plainly to the Word of God, the private member should disregard them and take the penalty."

Nothing herein summarized by the PRCCMP compels any court of original jurisdiction to exercise discipline on issues pertaining to Synod and General Assembly declarations cited above.

PRCCMP RESPONSES TO ISSUES RAISED ABOUT WOMEN IN COMBAT

1. We acknowledge that many troops have as their primary mission the support of the warfighters. They may kill or capture the enemy in instances of self-defense within the support train. They are positioned in harm's way, as are any military or civilian personnel close to the battlefield. However, the synod/assemblies' declarations clearly assert that God never intended a woman to be a military combatant. Further, we regard these assembly/synod actions to frame the biblical sense of military combatant to be anyone who is involved, accountably and plainly, in seeking the death of enemy personnel.

There are concerns for women in support roles, as in "remote" naval and aviation roles in the military, that must be considered individually and judiciously. Those concerns affect the spiritual life of the female military member or potential member as well as the male member who as commander or subordinate might be expected and required to abstain from acting on his sense of moral obligation to protect women. While these denominational declarations do not forbid women from participating in those remote or support roles, each should evaluate his own circumstances. Military positional requirements should be examined and evaluated in light of the Scriptures elevated by denominational study committees, as well as by the chaplain's independent study. PRCCMP chaplains should assist men and women, as requested, in their making that evaluation.

2. These declarations provide authority for PRCCMP chaplains who counsel or advise other military members regarding the use of women in combat.

¹PCA members of the Commission, in consultation with recognized leaders of the PCA, understand the actions of the Assembly to be interpreted and applied while keeping in mind two common errors: The first error perceives an action of the General Assembly to be similar to a law of Congress or a decision of the Supreme Court. Both are improper analogies. Until the General Assembly acts so as to make a matter a part of our Standards, then that matter is not binding -- unless the matter is determined by a judicial decision or unless the determination is already within the powers of the GA as assigned in the constitution (such as determining the trustees of agencies). The second error perceives a non-constitutional statement of the GA as being superfluous and of no import. In actuality, the GA makes such statements to advise its members and churches of the mind of the larger church at that moment. While such action does not have the authority of law to bind conscience or future Assemblies, brothers in Christ are obligated to weigh with great deference this "pious advice" since they have vowed to seek the peace and purity of the church, and this cannot be done through simply ignoring the properly approved advice of brothers and fathers. Such advice (i.e., an "in this" statement) must be seriously considered as the consensus of the church (but not the mandate of the church) by conscientious brothers until the church changes its advice.

3. These declarations do not require a PRCCMP chaplain, who is biblically counseling a military member who has a problem of conscience with women in combat, to advise resignation. Neither do they require a chaplain who has a problem of conscience with women as military combatants to resign.
4. PRCCMP chaplains should counsel women who are or might be carrying a child in their womb and who intentionally place that child in harm's way to repent and consider the implications of genuine repentance and forgiveness. Counseling should include the father of the baby and the person who knowingly orders that woman into harm's way.
5. The military chaplain is not expected or obliged to preach or impose these biblically derived declarations presumptively upon individual service members. He should be prepared to teach principles from which this finding is derived and to explain and elaborate when particular pastoral guidance is sought by a uniformed service member. As well, the chaplain shall explain the particulars of such pastoral guidance to a uniformed service member's senior in command when asked to do so by a member who is appealing for relief from duties that could compromise behavior by a man toward a woman.
6. With respect to questions of conscience and morals, as in any other difficult and complex ethical problem, it is the duty of any PRCCMP endorsed chaplain, humbly relying on God's enabling grace, to seek to deal with all the aspects of such a situation in a manner consistent with his ordination vows, regardless of the inherent difficulty.
7. How are chaplains supposed to deal with (including providing counsel) commanders' policies and institutional/state policies as compared to dealing with individual women vis-à-vis the Synod/Assembly actions?

Chaplains have a moral responsibility to be well and carefully informed of the policies and actions of their endorsing church as well as the policies of their parent command and service, and also the appropriate civilian authorities. From the perspective of the PRCCMP, we believe this includes diligent, thoughtful reading of the actions of the three church bodies on this issue, including the exegetical work. Furthermore, we believe that the obligation of each chaplain is to deal biblically with each counselee, as God will grant him the grace to do so.

For instance, we do not believe any PRCCMP endorsed chaplain is obligated to inform every female service member he meets of the position of his church on the subject of women as military combatants, any more than he is obligated to inform every service member he meets of his church's stand on baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc. On the other hand, if anyone asks for a biblical perspective on any of these subjects, we believe it is the duty of the chaplain to represent his endorsing denomination without fear or dissimulation.

To put it another way, it is the duty of a chaplain to do his own "heavy lifting" beforehand on issues such as women as military combatants, issues which may come up in many different settings. He must think it through with humility, honesty and care, just as he would in explaining why our PRCCMP denominations do not ordain women. Thus, when asked about the issue of women as military combatants, he can kindly and with sensitivity give the questioner the basic biblical facts and citations to encourage his or her own "heavy lifting."

8. The Commission was also asked: How should chaplains advise their command concerning these Synod/Assembly actions?

When asked, answer honestly. When reporting to the command, during the indoctrination period, inform the senior chaplain and/or C.O. if it appears that there may be an issue. If the issue is discussed in an up-front manner at the beginning of the relationship with the command, the probability of friction diminishes.

Informing a command of our commitment to use the name of Jesus Christ in prayer is an analogous issue best addressed before having to force the issue in an actual occasion of public prayer.

9. In light of the Synod/Assembly adopted recommendations, some chaplains have asked what advice they are being “commanded” to give? The answer is “none.”
10. A group of chaplains addressed the following related questions to the PRCCMP: “We felt that the churches will be looking to the PRCCMP for guidance on this issue. How should they be counseling their members on this issue? Some form of statement would be very beneficial so that ministers can provide the Godly advice as stated in the resolutions. And, if it is the obligation of men to protect women, can the denominational statements be construed to imply that all our young men should enter the military to fulfill their obligation and our young women be counseled on the biblical roles that they can play in the military?”

We do not believe it is the place of the PRCCMP to instruct churches as to what respective synod/assemblies have said. However, we can provide to those who are interested the narrower application for which the PRCCMP is responsible. It is not the place of the PRCCMP to construe denominational statements with respect to these questions outside the responsibilities of the PRCCMP as set forth in the first sentence of Article II of its Constitution: “The Commission is an agent of its member denominations (not an ecclesiastical commission in the technical sense), created by them to assist in carrying out their ministries to members of the Armed Forces and other institutions.”

Note on exegesis: The exegetical grounds of the PCA and OPC statements address diverse issues of military combat, such as those raised in Judges 4:4-5:31. Deborah was not a woman in combat. Chaplains and other interested Christians are urged to make use of the careful exegetical work already done by the General Assembly committees that studied the issue. The RPCNA included Scripture references in its declaration. The PCA and OPC published in General Assembly minutes the full majority and minority reports of their study committees, including detailed exegesis.

Adopted 02 March 2004

VI. PRAYING IN JESUS' NAME

- A. Today, as never before in our nation's history, there are contentious issues related to the free exercise of religion and the protection of individual civil liberties that challenge United States military chaplains in the conduct of their ministry to members of the Armed Forces.

One high profile issue is the liberty to pray in Jesus' name, in public, non-sectarian settings, and without illegitimate pressures to refrain from doing so, both from within and without the uniformed services. The most common source of those unconstitutional pressures has been some senior chaplains and senior commanders who are fearful of offending others.

The secular settings in which these pressures are growing are settings of religious and cultural diversity commonly referred to as pluralism.

It should be noted that in the context of worship services, conducted in any military setting, the use of Jesus' name in prayers is seldom an issue.

B. Historical Background

Congress established the military chaplaincy to provide for ministry for uniformed Americans in the free exercise of their religion in environments where that exercise would otherwise be impossible or extremely difficult. It is no accident that the first amendment to our Constitution addresses the principle that the government may not establish any religion.

From the beginning of the military chaplaincy, it was understood that the chaplaincy services necessarily included chaplains endorsed by different ecclesiastical bodies. Further, the providential circumstances of remote and/or combat environments required chaplains to provide ministry to those from religious traditions and communities other than their own. It was understood that such ministry was to be offered graciously, respecting the right of recipients to believe differently than the chaplain himself.

Well before the War of Independence, the practice of offering public prayer in non-sectarian environments was a well-established practice. Prayer was commonly offered in local governmental meetings, school classrooms, civic memorial services, and even in Congress itself. For nearly two centuries, few saw this strong tradition of public prayer as a problem, so it was seldom addressed or challenged. In recent decades, that relatively benign situation has changed. Multiple lawsuits and court challenges became a major strategy for those who objected to public prayer at non-sectarian events.

C. Discussion

This development generated a growing debate and conflict when a chaplain was invited to offer public prayer, and did so "in the name of Jesus Christ." The reason this is so contentious is that many non-Christians, and even some churchgoers, rightly regard this phrase as implying that all religions which do not specifically highlight the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, are therefore, "wrong." In this, they are eminently correct, from the perspective of those who hold to the Bible as God's inspired Word, and as revealing salvation in Jesus Christ alone. Admittedly, that truth, however circumspectly avoided in direct statement by a discerning chaplain in the wording of his public prayer, in today's politically correct climate, is to invite attack, and, for chaplains, possibly cause damage to their careers.

Where the debate becomes murkier is in the widespread notion that chaplains, offering prayer at public events, should suppress the specific mention of Jesus' name and use generic nomenclature to refer to God. That the specific understanding and intent of a rabbi or imam who would so use their respective traditional names for their god is of no offense to those of anti-Christian bias is scarcely surprising, even though adherents of those faiths also believe theirs is the only true way to Heaven. In the name of "pluralism", chaplains are often pressured by supervisors to restrict the expression of their Christocentric focus and commitment.

Yet, from a constitutional perspective, no governmental entity has the legal authority to tell a chaplain offering prayer, in a public ceremony, what the content of his prayers will be. To do so violates the stringent restrictions on our government to establish a religion of any sort. Governmental attempts at any level to restrict the content of any chaplains' prayer constitute an effort to establish a generic religion, supposedly devoid of theological offense.

In sum, many Christians believe their entire faith and system of belief center in the person, and finished work, of Jesus Christ, of which one of many expressions is offering prayer in His name. Further, for some Christians, refraining from that obedience in such a circumstance constitutes betrayal of their Savior. Nevertheless, recognizing the diversity of an audience in a public setting, we counsel thoughtful language in the use of Jesus' name (e.g., "I pray in Jesus' name" versus "we pray ...") and prefacing public prayer with a statement such as: "I am a Christian Chaplain, and am praying in accordance with my Christian faith"). Thus, chaplains and their endorsing bodies, have a spiritual and constitutional duty, to insist that they not be censored for the use of the name of Jesus Christ in public prayer.

Adopted Mar 06

VII. RELIGIOUS MINISTRY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

BACKGROUND

Until the last few decades, there has been little dispute about how to deal with a member of one of the military services who is discovered to have homosexual leanings, or to have actually engaged in such conduct. These members were removed from the particular service with some degree of punitive consequence, such as an Administrative Discharge or an Other Than Honorable Discharge. During the process of enlistment or applying for a commission, it was not the practice of our armed services to probe for a list of possible moral, social or ethical deficiencies that were not connected to a criminal record of some sort.

This policy was characterized by the Clinton administration as “Don’t Ask – Don’t Tell,” implying some sort of moral hypocrisy on the part of the military for punitively dealing with discovered homosexuals, but who presumably had turned a blind eye to their admission in the first place. This incorrect characterization, along with several other contributing factors, including the emergence of formidable political power on the part of the homosexual segment of American society has resulted in Congress repealing the “Don’t Ask – Don’t Tell” policy and making moot the long-standing, adequate practice of our military services in dealing with this problem. This change in public law and policy, however, does not relieve PRCC-endorsed chaplains from their responsibility to stand firmly for what is right.

PASTORAL GUIDANCE

A. Remain faithful to one’s vows: Historically, it has been the practice of each Chaplain Corps of the Army, Navy and Air Force, respectively, to insist that it expects every chaplain to remain faithful to the doctrinal practices and ordination vows of his endorsing denomination.

For chaplains endorsed by the PRCCMP member denominations this includes the vow, in some form, to be faithful to the doctrines and truths of Scripture. That necessarily involves both the duty and privilege of calling sin “sin,” whether in the formal proclamation of the Word of God, or in applying it in solving a problem in conduct or thinking requiring a biblical solution. As in our guidance on praying in Jesus’ name, and women in combat, we remind our chaplains of constitutional principles prohibiting the government from imposing upon them substantive moral/religious judgments and beliefs, such as directing them on how to pray. These prohibitions are even more stringent if attempting substantively to limit chaplains in performance of their spiritual/moral/religious duties in consensual settings where views on homosexuality would be typically discussed in preaching, teaching, or counseling contexts.

B. Perform Religious Ministry: For PRCCMP endorsed chaplains “religious ministry” includes all those activities and behaviors which are in accord with the inerrant Word of God, and the doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Examples of “religious ministry” set forth in these standards include, but are not limited to, preaching, teaching of all religious subjects, sacramental rites, informal and formal counseling, ministry of presence, and staff interaction on religious issues. “Religious Ministry” for PRCCMP endorsed chaplains cannot include anything that would cause a chaplain to support biblically defined sinful behavior. If a question arises as to what constitutes “religious ministry” then that particular issue should be clarified in consultation with the Executive Director of the PRCCMP.

PRCCMP endorsed chaplains are called by God to minister to our beloved soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and guardsmen and their respective families and there are few parts of their military or ecclesiastical life that would not be considered “religious ministry.” The ‘DOD Support Plan for Implementation of the repeal of DADT’ clearly stipulates that chaplains, in the context of their “religious ministry,” are not required to take actions that are inconsistent with their religious beliefs. In light of this ‘DOD Plan for the Repeal of DADT’ any detailed service documents requiring ‘sensitivity’

and/or 'support' by military chaplains for ministry to homosexual service members (also referred to as gay, lesbian and bi-sexual in DoD documents) may not in any way be construed as over-riding, or requiring the compromise of, any biblical, doctrinal or confessional standard on the part of those chaplains endorsed by the PRCCMP.

C. Affirm Biblical truth and application: God's Word specifically addresses the sin of sodomy, and related homosexual behavior in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; and Romans 1:26-27, in addition to the Genesis chapter 19 account of the supernatural destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for precisely that iniquity.

In light of the objective passages on the sin of homosexuality, and the Scriptural guidelines on the exercise of pastoral grace (1 Timothy 6:11-16; 2 Timothy 2:14-26), the PRCCMP advises our endorsed chaplains to deal humbly and yet truthfully when asked about any aspect of this matter, and to do so in as courteous and kind a manner as possible. A chaplain is entirely at liberty to disagree with current secular assumptions, such as the idea that homosexuality is genetically caused, and yet may provide gracious counsel to an individual who confesses to this behavior. A service member who professes to be homosexual is still entitled to receive spiritual counsel if he or she so desires. It is not unconstitutional for a chaplain to encourage such a service member to seek the grace of Christ to repent of this, or any other sin, whether he or she is an unbeliever, or one professing faith in Christ as his or her Savior. However, this guidance must not be construed as in any way requiring any PRCCMP endorsed chaplain to perform a marriage or union ceremony for homosexual or transgendered service members, to provide any counseling in support thereof, or to counsel or perform programmatic encouragement for homosexual or transgendered relationships before or after such a union. Chaplains endorsed by the PRCCMP will not be permitted to perform marriage or union ceremonies for homosexual or transgendered service members, nor will they be permitted to plan, organize, lead, assist, direct, supervise or otherwise support same-sex couples retreats, family life seminars, other similar activities, or participate in any joint worship service with any chaplain who is a non-Trinitarian or does not accept the authority of God's Word in what they teach and believe. Moreover, according to the implementation guidelines, our chaplains will not be required to violate their faith in conducting or sharing worship services with homosexual chaplains or in condoning that which the Word of God condemns.

If a chaplain is challenged to cease and desist from addressing what is wrong with homosexual thinking or behavior, or to cover up his belief that it is wrong, especially if by one who is senior to the chaplain, we expect our endorsed chaplains to seek God's strength not to waver, even if unjustly accused of failing to support the command, or some aspect of the command's policies, such as equal opportunity programs. Further, if placed in such a situation, we encourage the chaplain promptly to contact the PRCCMP for such assistance and protection as we are able to provide.

D. In conclusion, PRCCMP endorsed chaplains will continue to be under the dual authority of the military and their respective denominations. The PRCCMP will continue to provide counsel and guidance to ensure that their "religious ministry" is consistent with their ordination vows and denominational beliefs. "Cooperation without compromise" will remain a way of life for our chaplains. In this increasingly pluralistic environment they will have to exercise wisdom in conducting ministry in the pulpit and in the counseling room, but are not restricted, according to the implementation guidelines, from counseling against a lifestyle that is contrary with the Word of God and calling for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and for a life of virtue flowing from the love of Christ.

We should all pray fervently that God will allow that which was intended for evil to be used for good as our chaplains have the opportunity to minister the Gospel of Christ to a military that increasingly reflects the social perspective of our civilian world. May He have mercy. May He give greater grace. May He keep this door of chaplain ministry open so that men and women may hear the Gospel and be saved and Christ's Great Commission go forward in the United States military community and in our nation and in the world.

Revised May 14, 2011

VIII. PRCCMP POLICY CONCERNING CHAPLAINS SERVING ON COURTS MARTIAL

BACKGROUND:

The debate as to whether or not ordained ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ should serve as members of a court martial has been with us for generations, but some recent developments in the Armed Forces of the United States have brought this matter to the attention of the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel.

The United States Army itself has experienced confusion on this issue. Army Regulation 165-1, Religious Support, Army Chaplain Corps Activities, 4-3, e (2), states that a commanding officer cannot assign a Chaplain as “. . . a member of a court martial . . .” However, the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces in *US v BARTLETT* -66 M.J.426 determined that the Secretary of the Army “impermissibly contravened the provisions of Article 25(d)(2), Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), 10 USC, section 825(d)(2) . . . by issuing a regulation that exempted from court-martial service officers of the . . . Chaplain Corps . . .”

A Staff Judge Advocate (USMC) plainly stated, “Chaplains must be considered for service on courts-martial panels. Statute says ‘any commissioned officer’ can serve. Courts of Appeals for the Armed Forces said that a policy cannot be implemented that exempts certain categories of officers from consideration.”

The USAF policy on chaplains states, as of 21 December, 2007, “Chaplain Corps personnel may serve as jury members, as no Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) is exempted from service.” At the same time, “Chaplains may be excused for a number of reasons . . . ‘including . . . inner conflict during selection/ exclusion of court-martial members.’”

In summation, an absolute exclusion for military chaplains from court-martial duty cannot be obtained by appealing to military regulations, particularly in light of the UCMJ which clearly opens the door for that assigned duty. Exemption must arise from another source altogether, namely an individual chaplain's conscience (scruple[s]) against such service, based on the ecclesiastical/doctrinal standards of his endorsing denomination/agency. Furthermore, we would do well to remember that a chaplain, accused of a violation of the UCMJ, could strongly desire the presence of one or more fellow chaplains on a court-martial jury.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

If a PRCCMP endorsed chaplain has a scruple against serving as a court-martial member, such an objection should be based - carefully - on Scripture, and the subordinate standards of PRCCMP member denominations, specifically the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms or the Three Forms of Unity (Canons of Dort, Heidelberg Catechism, and Belgic Confession).

The commission recommends that the following Scriptural points be borne in mind if a chaplain wishes to be exempted from service on a court-martial.

1. Moses, a great prophet of the Lord, and a type of Christ, also served in a judicial capacity, adjudicating disputes as the final judge in an appeals court system as recommended by his father-in-law, Jethro.
2. Christ Himself, our great High Priest and Redeemer, also serves in the capacity of the ultimate judge of men in the court of Heaven itself (John 5:22; Acts 10:42). Clearly, judicial service is not intrinsically evil.
3. Scripture reminds us that the redeemed shall judge the world, and angels (I Corinthians 6:1-3) which implies that it is neither sinful, nor unbiblical, for a godly believer to serve in a judicial capacity as such (cf. Romans 13:5-7).

Consequently, the PRCCMP recommends that if a chaplain appeals to a higher (military) authority for exemption from serving on a court-martial, he should do so on the basis of a conviction of conscience, which both Scripture and military regulations support (e.g., a chaplain cannot be forced to violate his conscience in performing his military duties). For instance, a chaplain could legitimately claim that serving on a particular court-martial board would place him in an irresolvable conflict of interest. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 20.2 and Chapter 23 are helpful in seeking an exemption, if he believes that serving on a court-martial jury potentially could compromise his liberty to perform ministry consistent with his ordination vows.

These recommendations of the PRCCMP are NOT to be understood as prohibiting any chaplain from serving as a member of a court-martial when asked, if he cannot see any biblical principle being violated by his doing so.

Added February, 2013