

So You're Going to be a Garrison Chaplain....

Introduction

It's late November and you have just received your request for orders from the Office of the Chief of Chaplains. You excitedly click on the attached PDF file and... Congratulations – you have been selected for the high calling of Garrison Chaplain. Finally, after years of working hard in the unit while also meeting the challenges of chapel ministry, you will have the opportunity to build, repair, and maintain the systems that support chaplain ministry across an entire installation.

And yes, it's an opportunity – one that must not be wasted. Too often chaplains have remarked that they “survived” their tenure as garrison chaplain, or have viewed it as a chance to “take a knee.” On the contrary, service as a garrison chaplain allows one to impact every unit ministry team on post, to cultivate a climate and environment where ministry can flourish, and ultimately, to impact the number of souls that make it to Heaven.

This does not mean garrison ministry isn't a challenge. In fact, it can be rather daunting, especially if one has no prior IMCOM experience. Rating DA civilians, moving the desk of an employee who is part of a collective bargaining agreement, contracting for watch care, installing senior pastors, and the myriad of other issues that must be addressed can seem overwhelming. So here are five areas to grasp in your first month. These are not exhaustive – there will be plenty of other issues to solve. But if you understand and take control of the following five areas as soon as possible, you will be firmly established and set up for future success. They are: 1) Money; 2) Suitability Checks; 3) Chapel Leadership; 4) Master plans; and 5) Your Team

Money

As garrison chaplain you will be responsible for managing and spending an AF budget of up to \$500K and an annual NAF CTOF budget of up to \$1M annually. Often, an alert and prepared Religious Support Office can spend far more AF money than has been budgeted. But for that to happen, one needs credit card holders. If you are at a medium or larger post, ensure your Chaplain Resource Manager (CRM) has 5 AF and 5 NAF card holders at all times, and two more potential card holders who have completed training and can take another card-holder's place. You may think this is excessive, but it is not. The time will come when you urgently need to spend money and the “perfect storm” arises when cardholders all seem to simultaneously go on leave, PCS, head to JRTC, deploy, or ETS. Five of each will keep you safe and will spread the workload. Remember this mantra from Chaplain (MAJ) Ronny Fisher, CRM *par excellence*: “getting money is easy – *spending* money is the challenge.” On day 1, have your CRM provide you a list of all AF and NAF cardholders.

Another day 1 task for your CRM is to provide you the AF budget and a spreadsheet with accurate NAF subaccount balances. Your NAF funds are all part of the Chapel Tithes and Offerings Fund (CTOF). Each activity on your post – chapel services, auxiliaries such as PWOC, etc., should have a subaccount balance listed in the CTOF spreadsheet. This may seem like a no-brainer, but I have taken over a garrison where the CRM did not know the subaccount balances in the CTOF and the garrison NCOIC (who was filling in for the funds NCO who had recently been chaptered) was approving CTOF purchase requests without knowing whether the requesting chapel service had the funds to spend!

Read and update the existing CTOF SOP and “temple tax” plan. Your “temple tax” is how much of every dollar that goes into an offering plate gets taxed to support ministries that generate less income than chapels or none at all. For example, out of every dollar given to a Protestant service, 10% may support Protestant Women of the Chapel (PWOC), 5% youth ministry, 5% Thanksgiving and Christmas charity meals, 5% religious education and 5% community fund (which supports Easter sunrise service, Christmas Eve service, National Prayer Breakfast, and other large events). Read your SOP and temple tax plan closely and ensure you are spending offering money with integrity. Remember that money was given as an act of worship. Therefore, don’t spend the offerings of one religious group on groups or events that conflict with their faith. Distinctive faith groups such as a Wiccan, Muslim, or Jewish congregation normally generate very little income and do not support any auxiliaries, so they should not be taxed. Once you have an approved temple tax plan, brief and advertise it in your chapels. People will give more freely when they know their tithes are spent with transparency and that they support ministries and events that are in line with their theology. Remember the sons of Eli in 1 Samuel 2:17 – they treated the LORD’s offering with contempt and had to face God’s justice.

Suitability Checks

Next to money, the issue most likely to generate immediate negative consequences is that of suitability checks. Volunteers who work with children with parents not present (Sunday school teachers, kids’ church leaders, youth group leaders, watch care volunteers) must have a current, completed Installation Records Check (IRC). Contractors such as watch care workers or contracted youth leaders must have a Childcare National Agency Check and Inquiries (CNACI) plus an IRC. New hires can work as long as they have an IRC and has a co-worker with a CNACI providing line-of-sight- supervision (LOSS). Your Director of Religious Education (DRE) should have a system to submit suitability checks and should be able to brief you on day 1 who your cleared volunteers are and what programs they are part of.

Chapel Leadership

Read the current chapel leadership SOP, and, if needed, update it immediately and ensure it includes the following:

- 1) You as the senior chaplain are the authority to install, change, and/or remove chapel pastors independent of PCS cycles. While outgoing pastors may recommend, you approve pastors and preside over the change of stole ceremony.
- 2) Chapel pastors have full authority to approve purchases, manage their staffs, add or delete chaplains from their preaching rotations, appoint and terminate volunteers, and delegate or terminate duties of the chaplains on their staffs. This empowers chapel pastors to build cohesive staffs and protects the theological integrity of chapel teams. If there are chaplains on post that want to preach but aren’t a good theological fit for existing services, offer them space and a time slot to conduct their own service. No one has a right to come into a service that he didn’t build and demand pulpit time.
- 3) Nevertheless, every chaplain supports the CMRP. AR 165-1, section 1-7.b. states: *Public law requires Chaplains to conduct religious services for personnel assigned to their command.*

Every Chaplain's orders contain the following instruction: *Chaplain will perform and/or provide unit, area, and denominational religious support in accordance with the installation Chaplain's religious support plan and command master religious program.* Chaplains can do plenty of things that contribute to the cause apart from preaching – sponsoring DRGLs, sponsoring auxiliaries such as Mothers of Preschoolers, overseeing Sunday school programs, etc.

4) Only chaplains preach and conduct sacraments/ordinances at chapels unless the senior chaplain grants an exception. This forces chaplains (and the community at large) to take the chaplain's pastoral role seriously. This is not a biblical mandate, but it will ensure accountability and solid preaching. Once the door is open to non-chaplains it is hard to draw the line on who can and cannot preach, baptize, or service communion.

5) Ensure you have a written SOP for Distinctive Religious Group Leaders (DRGLs). Make sure it includes the language of AR 165-1 section 5-5 verbatim. DRGLs must be approved annually by you – when doing so, ensure each has a sponsor and that the sponsor counsels them in writing using the language of AR 165-1 section 5-5.

Department of Public Works (DPW)

Visit Department of Public Works (DPW) Master plans and see if there are any DD form 1390s on file for new chapels. If not, start the process. If there are, look at the locations programmed for future chapels and ensure they make sense. Remember UMTs have offices in their brigade and battalion headquarters buildings and will likely not be willing to abandon that real estate to occupy a chapel in the brigade area. Remember also that most soldiers have cars, and a chapel within walking distance of the barracks is less important today than previously. Therefore you may want to consider a chapel campus that can be managed throughout the week by the existing garrison religious support office. If you cannot man chapels with Garrison UMT personnel during the week, forget about using the space except on Sundays.

Also, get a copy of the DPW Garrison Annual Work Plan. This is an excel spreadsheet that the DPW director tracks IAW commander priorities throughout the year. What are the projects you need? Get a DPW rep to help you fill out a DA 4283 for each large project you want to do – landscaping around an older chapel, cleaning and repainting of a chapel that is covered with mold, putting a playground in back of a chapel, etc. Check the annual work plan quarterly to ensure your projects don't fall off.

Take a look at your programs and your space – are you using your space effectively? Have you given prime time and location to your largest and most impactful chapel services and programs? If entrenched but ineffective services and programs are occupying prime time and space to the detriment of the overall program, make a 3-6 month plan to move them and begin prepping the battlefield with the Garrison Commander and CG.

Your Team

Get your team pulling together to support your priorities right away. First, get the CG's and the Garrison Commander's lines of effort and build your plan to support, at least partially, what they prioritize. Ideally you hand your lines of effort out when you do initial counseling of your subordinates. Include the counselee's duty description in the initial

counseling and your immediate priorities and a time to check back with you to ensure he/she completes those tasks. Staple your lines of effort and your OER support for to the initial counseling. This will help get subordinates on track with their respective support forms. The Army developmental counseling system works well when we actually use it.

Make sure you match faces to spaces on your TDA. Get a current copy of the garrison TDA from the Directorate of Human Resources. Is that supply tech actually filling a slot intended for a DRE? Is that secretary working at the family life center actually assigned to the garrison? Find your people and make sure they are lined up and working where they are supposed to be.

Dig up all versions of your team's SOPs for funds, chapel use, weddings, key control, etc., and update them within the first two months. If they are weak or nonexistent, contact Fort Bragg, Fort Benning, or Fort Campbell and get a copy of theirs. Delegate the writing to your team and give them a hard deadline. You can change them later if needed, but you must have something in writing and published to your installations UMTs so you have answered questions ahead of time.

Conclusion

Again, welcome to the high calling of Garrison Chaplain. No pre-mission prayers, no jumpmastering a chalk into Holland DZ late at night, no twelve-mile foot marches, but in many ways the most challenging assignment you will experience and one that will show you how the Army actually runs. Plus, you now have a large team to lead, and together you will face some very interesting challenges. Execute your calling well and remember, it is far easier to start out as the "hard guy" and loosen up than it is to go in the opposite direction. You will invariably hurt feelings and step on toes, but in the end you will enable ministry that will bear fruit for eternity.