

**BRIGADE LEVEL CHAPLAIN SUPERVISORY MINISTRY**  
**An Interview with CH (MAJ) Ron D. Fisher**

CH Fisher served as the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade “Bastogne” Combat Team Chaplain, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (AASLT), at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, from July 2018 to June 2020. His experience covered one rotation to JRTC, a nine month deployment to Iraq and Syria in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE 2019, and the transition into pandemic ministry during the first surge of COVID-19 in the Spring of 2020. The below interview captures much of his experience as a BCT Chaplain and is provided here for the benefit of the reader.

**QUESTION:** CH Fisher, thank you for meeting with me. Let’s talk about some of your lessons learned from your experience as a BCT Chaplain in one of the Army’s premier warfighting divisions. What was that like?

**CH FISHER:** Well, first, let’s level the bubble. It’s important to note from the outset of this interview that my experience is limited. I don’t have all the answers, and I certainly don’t want anyone thinking more of me than they should. Second, I’m reminded of a quote I read awhile back about the problem with lessons learned, and it’s that lessons learned are so intensely contextual. Another problem is that they’re so intensely personal which takes us back to my limited perspective.

**QUESTION:** Those are great points; I appreciate that. But, organizationally speaking, there have to be parallels in experiences, so what was week one like?

**CH FISHER:** Week one? (laughter) I don’t know, but I can tell you what day one was like. I woke up early and was feeling anxious. I remember doing a kettle bell workout interspersed with 200 meter sprints to dial down the anxiety. Then, I went to the S1 Shop to sign in. I was there at 0930 sharp. While standing at the S1’s desk, she said, “Here, take this” and handed me a piece of paper. It was a CONOP for a 20 mile foot march taking place that evening. I looked at her like, “Are you for real?” She answered the question my face was asking, “You just got here; no one expects you to be there, Chaplain.” But at that moment, I made a decision that set the trajectory for the remainder of my time there at 1BCT. I said, “No problem. I’ll be there.” Now, never mind that I’m already smoked from the morning’s workout and have never rucked 20 miles before, I knew that was my place of duty. I also believed that the Lord was in it for me. The timing wasn’t some sort of a cosmic accident; I was supposed to be there receiving that CONOP at exactly that moment. Now, that doesn’t mean I was grateful for it, and the march turned out to be a grueling experience. I wasn’t even sure if I was going to make it. But it also turned out to be a tremendous introduction to the Brigade and, more importantly, the Brigade Staff. The S1 was a no show, but the S2, S4, FAO and JAG were all there, as well as, a lot of the HHC players. And they didn’t want to be there either! These turned out to be key relationships for me later. It was seven and half hours of walking, so I had plenty of time to come alongside others, introduce myself, make small talk, offer a few words of encouragement, and reflect and pray. And when asked, “When did you get here?” I got to say, “I signed in this morning.” We marched through the night, recovered, then returned for an 1100 CUB. It turns out this march is an annual

requirement. I checked that box in my first 24 hours in the assignment. So, while not ideal, it was a great introduction to the Unit and an experience that really set the tone for the remainder of my time at Bastogne.

**QUESTION:** That's funny. (Pause) But, what would have happened if you had failed?

**CH FISHER:** Well, there would have been no humor in that, but I trust that God would have used even my failure for His purposes. And ministry of presence carries some inherent risks. But listen, no one wants to fail and no one wants to be embarrassed. We all want to be liked and accepted. This was my first day on the job, and I had never been a Brigade Chaplain before. So, I don't know. If I had fallen out, it would have been tough for me. But I knew enough to know that this was the kind of event that we Chaplains are supposed to be at.

**QUESTION:** Ministry of presence is something the Chaplain Corps talks a lot about. What does that mean for you?

**CH FISHER:** Well, it means a lot more than just showing up. I'll put it like this, it's only a ministry of presence if your presence has the power to minister. Showing up isn't enough.

**QUESTION:** Hmm...well how did it go that first week with your Brigade Commander?

**CH FISHER:** So, I made some mistakes out of the gate. Here's a lesson learned. Before signing in, get on the Commander's calendar versus making a drive-by to his office. I didn't do that. The challenge for me was that I was set to sit down with the seven Chaplains I was supervising on the following morning. These are the Brigade Commander's Chaplains, so it was important to me to speak with the Boss first before addressing *his* Chaplains. So, that afternoon, I just sat outside his office for hours until I could be squeezed in between meetings. At one point the FAO invited me into a meeting that I had no business being in as a means of meeting the Commander. The FAO, who was a Major peer, was pushy too, so I reluctantly agreed. And I was tired of waiting. But, then I found myself at the table with the FAO and his Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major. The Brigade Commander looked at me like, "Who are you?" I jumped out of my chair, smiled, introduced myself, shook hands, explained MAJ X invited me to the meeting, and I said, "Sure, why not? I'll learn from it." I also added, "But, Sir, I'm happy to wait for you outside if that's your preference." That was his preference, so I went back to the couch in the lobby. An hour later though, I was invited into his office and we had our first real meeting. One of my personal takeaways from watching all the traffic in the Command suite that afternoon was just how busy the Brigade Commander actually is; I realized then that the days of making drive-bys like I used to in the Battalion were over.

**QUESTION:** What was that first meeting like?

**CH FISHER:** It was awesome. The Commander is a former CAG Commando and a man of faith. I immediately understood I was dealing with a no-nonsense professional with a formidable intellect. I asked, "How often would you like to see me, Sir?" He answered, "Let's meet every Monday morning at 0600 for prayer, once a month to talk shop, and know that my door is always open to you, but don't abuse this access." As a Chaplain, what more can you ask for? He also

took a personal interest in developing me and remains a trusted mentor today. Let me add something here though, we did meet that next week and we prayed for the Brigade together. That afternoon we had an officer in the Brigade killed in a motorcycle accident. I mention this because we had a number of deaths in the Brigade. This has to be a part of the preparation and realization for new Brigade Chaplains. People are going to die around you. When the Commander informed me of this officer's death, my first impulse was to run out, engage leaders, and start setting things in motion, but I had to stop myself. That was no longer my job; that was the Battalion Chaplain's job.

**QUESTION:** What was that first meeting with those seven Battalion Chaplains like?

**CH FISHER:** Well, I'm going to tell it like I remember it. If you ask them, you might get another seven answers. My intention was to simply make a brief introduction, have a few laughs, and communicate expectations – what I expected of them and what they could expect from me. Then, I presented the opportunity for them to ask any questions, and we called it a meeting. What was important to me was for them to understand that I had zero intentions of being the Brigade's eighth battalion chaplain. So, I presented copies of an excerpt from FM 1-05, chapter 3, 16-19 which lays out the Brigade UMT's role. This way, there were no questions about what I was there to do. Second, I said, "So, you know how most ministers are non-confrontational? That's not me. I am confrontational. In fact, I believe confrontation, in the right spirit, can be an act of worship. I'm telling you this, so if *you* ever put me in a position where I have to confront you, I need you to understand that I will. Now you know. So, if we ever find ourselves in that place, you can't say you didn't know because I'm telling you now." I also reiterated that there was only one standard in my mind, and that standard was excellence. Once you establish excellence as your base line, when things are substandard, you just have to ask the question, "Is this excellent?" or "Is this what excellence looks like to you?" Those around you will catch on when the event or program is falling short. I believe most of us want to be a part of something that's excellent, and this is winning. Once your Team gets good at what they're doing, you can then introduce the reality that there are *degrees* of excellence. This keeps you pushing the envelope forward and reinforces the expectation that we need to keep learning and getting better at our craft. Lastly, and I think this is important, I said, "Success for me is seeing you succeed. So, if you succeed, I succeed. You are not here to support me; I am here to support you." I asked the question, "In this relationship between you and me, who is the customer?" They said, "You are, Sir." I answered, "Wrong. You are the customer. So, whatever it is I ask of you, I will send you what right looks like first." My doing this was also the means by which I QC'd their products and ensured that what the Chaplains submitted was properly nested with the Brigade's religious support plan.

**QUESTION:** Were your Chaplains successful?

**CH FISHER:** That's the question, right? Did the plan work? They were successful. Six of the seven Chaplains I had the privilege of leading received AAMs for their performance at JRTC (as did all 56 Mikes). I wrote all of these awards and worked them through their individual battalions. The one who didn't receive an AAM later received an ARCOM for his role as the

Brigade Strong Bonds Program Manager. I wrote this one as well and worked it through the Brigade. We had the number one Chaplain on Fort Campbell and the number one and two Religious Affairs Specialists in the Division. These were selections made by the Garrison and Division Chaplain Sections. All Chaplains received at least one most qualified rating, and most received two during my time at Bastogne. But more importantly, they were all faithful to the call of God in their lives. I watched them all consistently strive to be better husbands, fathers, and ministers. So, they won professionally, but I think the professional wins they experienced started at home and remained rooted in their call to this ministry. We serve the Army best when we serve God first.

**QUESTION:** Did you ever have to confront the Team or individual chaplains?

**CH FISHER:** Sure. If all you ever do is cheerlead and tell them how great they are, you stunt their development. Initially, I refused to correct them unless I had to, but that's only because I knew the confrontations were coming. I wanted to earn the right to be heard first. Confrontation is leadership. Leadership is also holding people accountable and making them take responsibility for what they do or fail to do. But in retrospect, I wasn't always right. Again, limited perspectives. I also gave my Chaplains permission to be candid with me, and over time, once trust had been established, they were. So, there were strained relationships at times, but I think we all did a pretty good job about not making things personal and keeping the mission front and center. We all learn at the expense of one another.

**QUESTION:** What about your relationship with your Religious Affairs NCO and the other Religious Affairs Specialists in the Brigade?

**CH FISHER:** Again, we're called Unit Ministry Teams. There is no Team apart from our 56 Mike counterparts. With my Battle Buddy, I provided him with his initial counseling where I told him, "Your NCOER will never be better than it is at this very moment. Right now, it's maxed out, so it's yours to give away. You don't have to earn my trust. I already trust you. You wouldn't be here if you didn't have the goods. But, the first time trust is given, the second time it's earned. Please don't violate my trust." Then, we went line by line over the Staff Sergeant and Sergeant First Class portions of DA PAM 600-25, Smart Book. I'm convinced most Chaplains have no idea all that their NCOs are supposed to be doing for them and the Unit, particularly as it relates to operations. So, I put it on paper in a counseling letting him know that I knew exactly what it is the Army says he is supposed to be doing for the Brigade and the Brigade's religious support mission. I explained that to the Army this is what meeting the standard looks like. Then, I laid out my expectations on top of that because meeting my expectations on top of the Army's expectations is what exceeding the standard looks like. Lastly, I explained that I would not, as a matter of principle, fluff his NCOER or PCS award. Those documents have my name on them; I care about that. I treat these like sworn statements. After that, I trusted my NCOIC to do his job. He provided the majority of the training to the 56 Mikes in the Brigade. Sometimes we trained as a whole UMT, but often we broke up into two separate groups. I took the Alphas, and he took the Mikes. Let me add something else here. To ensure every Chaplain was in fact counseling his 56 Mike, they were all responsible for submitting those counselings to

the NCOIC for his review. This was a good forcing function to ensure everyone was doing the right thing. It also protected the Chaplains and the integrity of our collective Team.

**QUESTION:** That's great. You're hitting on an interesting dynamic about the difference between the Brigade Chaplain role as a Staff Officer and the role as a Supervisor. What else does a new Brigade Chaplain need to know?

**CH FISHER:** You really have to have some understanding of the bigger picture and what it means to be an organizational leader. This can be a real challenge coming directly from a Battalion where you've served as a direct leader for eight or more years. This is also one of the reasons I recommend Captain Chaplains slow the train down and volunteer to serve as a CRM before jumping into a Brigade. Second, you've got to understand operations and your place on the Staff, particularly if you're serving in a warfighting Brigade or at Group. Third, you've got to have a team of mentors made up of both peers and older Chaplains who are going through what you're currently experiencing or who have gone through what you're experiencing or will experience. I think of it like training for an MMA fight. You want the right people in your corner and on your team. Otherwise, you'll step into the octagon unprepared, and the Brigade is a brutal place to be.

**QUESTION:** Why do you say that? Why is the Brigade a brutal place to be?

**CH FISHER:** For one, there's no place to hide. Either you've got the goods, or you don't. The expectation is that at this point in your career, you're a subject matter expert. So, if you don't understand operations, funding, and just the way staffs work, you're sunk. I'll share this with you. I received two pieces of counsel from two senior Chaplains and mentors that really bookended my experience as a BCT Chaplain. The first said, "Don't always assume you've got the right answer or know the best way forward. Some of these young Captain Chaplains will surprise you if you let them." That was sage counsel, and I found it to be true. We were a highly effective Brigade Unit Ministry Team because we were one Unit Ministry Team as opposed to seven different UMTs with a Brigade UMT at top, and I consistently learned from my Chaplains. Often times, their ideas and products were better than mine, so I learned from them while still providing direction which usually took the form of me asking clarifying questions. The second piece of counsel I received was, "Beware of the other Majors on the Brigade Staff; they're a bunch of sharks." And that was true too!

**QUESTION:** Can we talk about that, about the sharks on the Brigade Staff? And, what does that mean for the Brigade Chaplain?

**CH FISHER:** Well, if you're going to swim with sharks, then you better be a shark too, or you're going to be eaten. That's what my mentor was getting at. We don't talk a lot about key development (KD) assignments in the Corps, but for the other Majors on the Staff (the S Shops, the PAO, JAG, Brigade Surgeon, SPO, FAO, Brigade XO) this time is critical to their career advancement. It really is sink or swim. You also see the same dynamic playing out across the Brigade with the Battalion and Squadron XOs and S3s. Everyone is competing for a "Most Qualified" rating, but not everyone is going to receive one, much less two. With that competition

comes a lot of stress. And the Chaplain needs an MQ too. So, you're looking for opportunities to minister to those you're competing against, and they know you're in the mix with them. You're also their competition. This part of the position isn't fun; it's real work with real career consequences. Some do better than others. The take-away though is that there's a lot of stress, and not everyone is able to succeed at this level or in these positions which makes for a lot of ministry. There's also a lot of marital and family strife at the Field Grade level due to the pressure, hours, and demands of the job. Everyone is trying to convince everyone else around them that they have it all together when they're really just figuring it out day by day. It's a tough season of life for everyone involved, including the Chaplain. It can be a very unforgiving environment too. Some mistakes you only get to make once. For the Chaplain, taking care of the staff is full time job all by itself, but we're also expected to supervise the Battalion UMTs, report to and execute taskings from Division, serve at Chapel, and take care of our own families, et cetera.

**QUESTION:** The Brigade XO is also a Major and your peer. What was managing that relationship like for you?

**CH FISHER:** Well, you forgot to mention that he's also your Rater. It's a strange dynamic, but I kept it simple. It went something like this, "XO, I get that we're peers and all that, but you're the Chief of Staff, so whatever it is you need from me, the answer is yes. Too easy. Also, while I have an open door with the Boss, it's important to me that you understand if there's ever anything I think merits your attention, I'll bring it to you. You'll never get back doored on my account." Then, I'd swing by his office once a week to say hey, check on him, and to see if he needed anything from me. I also supported his every initiative like it was my own. And when tasked to do things outside the scope of religious support, like serving as the Brigade Working Group Leader for CR2C, I made it happen. This particular tasking taught me an important lesson. I believe leaders will often assign Chaplains taskings outside the scope of what we normally do to make themselves feel better about giving us that Most Qualified rating. It's like they're looking for ways to justify our rating to themselves, so they task us with doing things that aren't our job because they don't really understand what it is we do anyway. But, he knows he needs someone to lead this CR2C thing that no one else wants to do. So, that was my approach to managing this relationship. I sought to be one of his best Staff Officers while also attempting to be his friend. He was my peer, Chief of Staff, rater, and we had a great relationship.

**QUESTION:** So, how did you go about building relationships with the other Majors across the Brigade?

**CH FISHER:** One of my first initiatives was a Brigade level "Iron Major Strong Bonds Training Event." I attempted to scoop up every Major in the Brigade to have this weekend experience with them. And, it was awesome. We had a great time. This was also the means by which I sought to protect myself from getting triangulated by my Battalion Chaplains which is something I saw as a Battalion Chaplain myself. My peers would sometimes pit their Command Teams against the Brigade Chaplain. It was just ugly. So, the retreat was really the first significant step in developing relationships with these Majors and their better halves. Then, I attended all the

Officer PT sessions which were smokers. I was never first at any of these events which were usually long runs, but I was also never last. Lastly, I'd swing by the Battalions and Squadrons once a month to see the XO's, sometimes the S3s, and occasionally the Commanders. I saw my Major peers at the various Staff exercises we conducted. Granted, there was little for me to do there, but they were there, and I was playing the long game. I knew there was going to come a day when I would be advocating for my Chaplains. Chaplains need "top blocks" too. And those conversations weren't awkward for me because by then I was talking to men I knew and got along well with. And some of them became personal friends. We'd spend time together outside of the Brigade. Now, let me close with this: As a matter of courtesy, I usually let my Chaplains know ahead of time when I'd be in their AO. I also let them know what I was up to. I told them, "I am building relationships with your Field Grade Officers because it benefits you, the organization, and is in keeping my Boss' intent." I never had any issues.

**QUESTION:** How'd you go about working with the other Battalion and Squadron Commanders in the Brigade? What were those relationships like?

**CH FISHER:** That's a great question, and it's an interesting dynamic. Initially, I established office calls with each of them to introduce myself and said something like, "Sir, you've got a great Chaplain, but I'd be honored if you'd consider me Chaplain number two. If you ever need anything from me, if I can do it, the answer is yes." Now, there may be things that I can't do for him, so this statement says, "I'm here for you" but it also gives me a way out. "If" is a little word with a lot of meaning. Second, before the meeting concluded I'd add, "Sir, it's also important to me that you know, if there's ever anything I think you need to be aware of that I'm hearing at Brigade that affects you or your Command, I'll bring it to you. You'll never get blindsided on my account." And Commanders genuinely appreciate this. So, this first meeting really sets the stage for all that takes place later. Of course, you're going to see these men later in various meetings, and I'd sometimes ask, "How's *your* Chaplain working out for you?" This is important. Sometimes, and I know it's not conscious, but supervisory chaplains can come off like they have command authority when they don't. Chaplains work for Commanders. Words matter, so during meetings when briefing the Chaplain's portion, I'd intentionally find a way to say, "*Your* Chaplains" or the "No Slack Chaplain" and never "my Chaplains" or "my Team." What surprised me most about these relationships though is that I actually had real, meaningful relationships with these men and came to view them as mentors. I regularly had breakfast with one of the Battalion Commanders. His Chaplain was present too for most of these meetings, and it became a regular event that all three of us found value in. We'd discuss military history, leadership, operations, and anything else the Commander wanted to talk about. We were a sounding board for him too, and he addressed our questions.

**QUESTION:** Let me stop you right there. Was there any weirdness about this with you and that Commander's Battalion Chaplain?

**CH FISHER:** No, at least not from my perspective, but there could have been. It goes back to trust. I viewed this Chaplain, not as my subordinate, but as my colleague in ministry. Second,

there was nothing I had to say to his Commander that I was uncomfortable saying in front of him.

**QUESTION:** I find that fascinating. What else?

**CH FISHER:** I once asked a Commander if he'd share his counseling philosophy with me. He was a stellar Commander, and I wanted to know how he went about managing his relationship with his Command Sergeant Major. What did that look like for him? He introduced me to a contract he used as his initial counseling. He'd write his expectations for his Command Sergeant Major and what the CSM could expect from him, then gave it to him on a Friday and said, "Take this home with you, review it, edit it, then bring it back to me on Monday, so we can discuss it." Once Monday came around and they were both in agreement as to what their relationship needed to look like, they both signed the contract and that became the foundation for their working relationship. Here's why it worked. He said he now had something that his Command Sergeant Major co-authored, agreed to, and signed that he could always point back to, if necessary. It was a contract, and because it was a contract, it was never personal. Any corrections or counsel from either side was always related to the contract and was always about making the Unit better. It was just business. This Commander also encouraged me, and I'm sure the other officers on his Staff, to have more hard talks and to know the difference between what he called "Me Problems" and "You Problems." He said, "Chaplain, if you ever pass a deficiency and let it go, you just created a new standard." He added, "Don't be afraid to revisit the NCO Creed with your NCO. "No one is more professional than I." "Competence is my watchword." "Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine." Those are all lines from the NCO Creed. He also said, "When correcting someone, always go back to what's best for the organization. Always explain 'why'".

**QUESTION:** That sounds like an education in leadership.

**CH FISHER:** It was, but it never would have happened if I hadn't initiated that meeting. I also asked him, "Sir, from your perspective, is there anything that you see I need to improve on?" He wasn't the only who invested me in either, and that's the thing, leaders invest in what and who they care about. If the leaders in the organization care about what the Chaplain is doing in their Unit, that's a win for every Chaplain in the Brigade. I'd also ask my Commanders what they were reading, learning, listen to, how they saw certain issues, stuff like that.

**QUESTION:** What about the Command Sergeants Major?

**CH FISHER:** Same approach. The Command Sergeant Major is an advisor, just like me. It's actually pretty simple, just show honor. I come from a family of NCOs, so respect was always a big thing in my home growing up. Honor the CSMs as the Senior Enlisted NCOs in the Units. That's too easy. The same goes for the First Sergeants across the formation. My HHC First Sergeant is a great friend today. He taught me more about NCO counseling than anyone in my career and really helped to shape my NCOIC for the betterment of the Brigade. We'd meet weekly, usually drive-bys, and I'd always ask, "You got anything for me, First Sergeant?" I also attended all of his formations and ensured my NCO was at his section synchs. He knew he could



count on us to do the right thing without playing the “We’re the UMT and can’t do x, y, z game.” When he needed a detail to lay razor wire at JRTC, we volunteered, and not just once either.

**QUESTION:** Let’s switch gears. How did you approach training with the Battalion Chaplains?

**CH FISHER:** So, in my mind, there are some things your predecessor owes you. I had been in contact with the Brigade Chaplain I was backfilling who is also a friend. And, he’s a great Chaplain, so it’s plus and minus when you follow a guy like that. But, what I requested, what I believe our predecessors owe us, is the previous year’s CMRP, the signed CMRP for the next fiscal year (FY), the previous FY’s UMT Training Plan, a copy of his OER Support Form, and a copy of his PCS award. My predecessor did that for me. As for the training plan, I looked at my team and built the training plan around what I believed they needed developmentally for where they were as a collective whole. All of my Chaplains were active duty first termers and none had deployed. The first major obstacle in front of us was JRTC, and that was taking place six weeks after I signed into the Unit. So, JRTC preparation took center stage. The second mission critical issue that affected real time ministry was memorial ceremony training. I needed to ensure every Chaplain on our team was hot on memorial ceremonies and could both lead their staffs through the planning process and execute a ceremony that honored not only the dead, but also the living. This is a no fail mission. Another training that I front loaded was entitled “Demonstrating Honor through Phone and Email Etiquette.” We all needed to be on the same page as to what it means to be a professional. Philosophically, I approach training like this, “You’re all future Supervisory Chaplains, so everything we do together is built around preparing you for this reality. I don’t care that you graduated CHBOLC two months ago. I need you to get to where I am – time now. If I die while driving into work tomorrow morning, any one of you should be able to step into my role and provide the leadership necessary to lead this team.” I also added, “I need you to understand that I have a very high threshold for your individual pain levels.” Then, I’d smile. This approach meant I had seven Battalion Chaplains who were weekly engaged in the training necessary to become Brigade Chaplains. I also met with each of the Chaplains one on one every week to provide individual encouragement and coaching. This was also the means by which I sought to be their pastor, so this time often included prayer. And, we’d have fun as a Team too. The expectation is that we would win every Division UMT PT event and we concluded most weekly training sessions with lunch somewhere away from the office. I took every opportunity, and was often obnoxious about it, to champion all things “Bastogne.” If another Chaplain in the Division did something noteworthy, I would publicly proclaim, “Great job; you have Bastogne potential.” Another time I sent a sister Brigade UMT a certificate recognizing them for their hard work and making them honorary Bastogne UMT members. As an organizational leader, the most important thing we do any given day revolves around the environment we create. I wanted my Team to believe they were pipe hitters, and I wanted us to have fun together. Fun is important. Social time is important, so we spent time together outside of work. If you’re going to make relational and emotional withdraws which I knew I would be making at some point, you’ve got to invest in those relationships on the front end. The last thing is predictability. I created the Training Plan and ran it by them for their input and buy-in. The second year, they created the

Training Plan and ran it by me for my input and buy-in. Then, we together executed their plan. It worked.

**QUESTION:** Did you ever get any push back from the Units about weekly UMT training?

**CH FISHER:** I did, but my Chaplain told me about it before his XO and S3 pulled the plug on his attending our weekly training. This gave me the time I needed to staff my training through the Brigade S3 who said, “Chaplains at weekly UMT Training...yeap, sounds like the right thing to me for you guys to be doing.” I wrote an inject which he then placed in the weekly FRAGO. The Unit S3 in question emailed me afterwards to talk about this Brigade tasking for weekly UMT training. My response was, “It’s not my name on the bottom of the FRAGO.” There were no issues after that, and the Chaplain was always present for training.

**QUESTION:** As the Brigade Chaplain, you’re an Intermediate Rater. What was your rating philosophy?

**CH FISHER:** I told the Chaplains I expected them all to be number one of one in their Units, but if they wanted to be ranked number one or two across the Brigade, then I expected them to work to ensure the success of those on their right and left. It’s not enough for me that Chaplain X is crushing it in his Battalion. That’s my expectation. I want to see Chaplain X sharing products, coordinating joint programs and ministry events with others. I wanted to see my Chaplains leaning on each other’s strengths for the betterment of the entire Brigade. If I saw them doing this, then I would rate them all number one or two. So, how does one do that? So and so is the number one Chaplain of the seven Chaplains I rate while so and so is the number one pastor or counselor or religious leader or staff officer, et cetera. If it sounds underhanded, it’s not. Commanders play word games too. Once you run out of synonyms, you can then write, “So and so is in the top 10 percent of all Chaplains I have served with in 14 years of active duty service.” The following year he may be in the top five percent.

**QUESTION:** Wouldn’t it have just been easier to rank the top three and then let the others fall wherever they fell?

**CH FISHER:** Of course, but that pits the Chaplains against each other. I was trying to create synergy, so I needed an approach that said, “If you do it my way, you all win. If you don’t do it my way, then I’ll rank you on the bottom of seven because my metric requires you to extend influence beyond your immediate chains of command. So, it really benefits you to do it my way.” One of the Unit XOs challenged me on this, to which I said, “You’re rating one Chaplain. I’m rating seven. It’s not enough for him to excel at ministry in your Battalion. I expect that from him. He’s one of one for you.” And I told the Chaplains up front exactly how I was going to rate them. I don’t like surprises, and I don’t think those under our leadership want to be surprised with our ratings of their performance and potential either.

**QUESTION:** So, what do those metrics look like then?

**CH FISHER:** Professionalism. So, military bearing, understanding military courtesies, timely reporting, proper correspondences, and physical fitness. These all communicate credibility and

legitimize one's role in the Unit. I also expect my Chaplains to write like guys who have 90 hour master's degrees. Shoddy work and poorly written emails are unacceptable. Another metric for me was the Chaplain's leadership of his Religious Affairs NCO or Specialist. I was looking for the delegation of responsibility. Were the Chaplains trusting their 56 Mikes with things that mattered or relegating them to the completion of menial tasks that really make little difference to the overall mission? That's not particularly fulfilling, and our Mikes know the difference. I wanted to see these Soldiers developed. I also wanted to see our 56 Mikes taking ownership of the mission and ministry, not just pulling administrative duties. Collegiality is another metric for me. I looked at how my Chaplains were actively helping other Chaplains in the Brigade and Division succeed. We're one Team, so I expected them to package their ministries in such a way that someone else in a sister Battalion or sister Brigade could take what they've done, tweak it out, and execute a similar event or program in their own organizations. There are more than enough MQs to go around, so we need to help each other win. When one of my Chaplains executed a Father-Daughter Dance, I expected that program to be rolled up and shared; this package included copies of the FRAGO injects, the CONOP, all funding memos and expenditures, a checklist detailing the requirements for IPRs, an invitation sample, storyboard, and AAR. We did this for every event in the Brigade and then shared these packages with others across the Division. This is good business. So, I looked for a positive impact on the religious support mission, not across the Battalion or Squadron, but across the Brigade and Division. I also presented the Chaplains under my leadership with opportunities to serve as the Brigade OIC for various initiatives. For example, I'd ask one of them, "Would you like to serve as the OIC for the Brigade Prayer Breakfast? You can say no. But, if you say yes, you own this mission from beginning to end, and you know what the expectation is." If someone said no; that was okay. I had six other Chaplains who would likely say yes if given the opportunity to serve at this level. I looked at their support of the Garrison religious support mission. I'm talking about Chapel. Attending an early service to check the box, so you and your family can attend church off-post demonstrates both immaturity and a lack of commitment to the broader religious support mission. So, my Chaplains understood that if they attended an earlier service, I expected 100 percent commitment to that congregation because that's what those Soldiers and families deserved, and that's what those Chaplains were being paid to do. Lastly, they needed to be pastors, so seeing them move and mature in their vocational identity was important to me. So, professionalism, chaplain leadership of their 56 Mikes, collegiality, a positive impact on the religious support mission outside of their organic units, a willingness to serve as a Brigade OIC, support of Garrison Chapel ministries, and maturing in their vocational identities were my metrics.

**QUESTION:** Did you make any mistakes as an Intermediate Rater?

**CH FISHER:** Absolutely. Here's one of the big mistakes I made: I should have ranked them all number two that first year, so I could then rank each of them as number one the following year. I caught it too late. So, I wrote, "Chaplain X *remains* the number one counselor, et cetera." The key term here is "remains." Lesson learned. But, this approach pulled the Team together and allowed me to tell their Commanders and XOs, "Just so you know how I see it from my

perspective in looking at the Chaplains across the Brigade, your Chaplain is the number one pastor or number one staff officer or number one whatever of the seven Chaplains I rate.” The question drawn from this statement is this: If he’s the number one Chaplain from the Brigade Chaplain’s perspective, how can I not give him a Most Qualified rating? Now, don’t misunderstand what I’m saying. The Chaplain has to perform. He has to come through. But, my Chaplains kept their end of this agreement, and I kept mine. I think the entire organization benefitted from this approach.

**QUESTION:** How did you manage that? It sounds like what you’re describing could easily have careened out of control and crash with everyone on the bus, so to speak.

**ANSWER:** I think of myself as a leader of leaders, not a leader of followers. That’s the simplest way I can put it. If I have to treat a Chaplain like a Private and tell him step by step what needs to be done, then he’s in the wrong business, and I need to help him find his way back into a civilian ministry. Not only is that approach not “Mission Command”; it’s not functional. Second, when you have seven Battalion Chaplains, you have to recognize your limitations. So, I encouraged peer to peer mentoring. Now, here’s why seeing yourself as a leader of leaders is so important. When I saw my Chaplains reaching into my “developmental lane” in support of their fellow Chaplain, I couldn’t be threatened by that, even if they were more effective at it than I was with that Chaplain or on that particular topic. I had one Chaplain, who though new to active duty Chaplaincy, was a former Armor Officer. Even though I was a resident CGSC graduate, this Chaplain was a better staff officer than I was. I suspect he knew it too. Instead of competing with him, I employed his expertise, set him to training the other UMTs in the Brigade, helped to put him up front and center in training the Division UMTs, and often sent him my staff products asking for his take on my work before submitting it to Brigade. Also, when I saw my Chaplains functioning as leaders of leaders, I publicly recognized what they were doing and encouraged them to keep doing it.

**QUESTION:** But, how did you control all of this?

**CH FISHER:** I didn’t. I liken this approach to fishing. I’d cast them out, then reel them back in. Depending on what was taking place in these individual Chaplains’ lives and Units, some were being reeled in, some were floating in the depths, and others were being cast out. No one wants to be micro-managed. But, here’s the other thing, I’ve yet to meet a Chaplain who wants to fail. So, there’s an ebb and a flow to what I’m suggesting, and it worked for me. People will often surprise us in really positive ways when we equip them then encourage them to just go for it. I told the Team, “I will personally underwrite all of your mistakes and none of your crimes. So, push the envelope. Take risks. Don’t worry about failing. Failing is learning. I’ve got your back.”

**QUESTIONS:** So, here’s a question. What are your thoughts on Chaplain and Religious Affairs Specialist entitlement?

**CH FISHER:** (Laughter) COVID-19 is not the virus that’s going to wreck the UMT’s ministry. That’s another virus running rampant through our ranks, regardless of branch. But, interestingly, it only affects those who believe they’re immune to it, and this virus is entitlement. Being the

best shouldn't make you entitled; it should make you humble. And, it should make you grateful. I saw some entitlement across the formation regarding deployment awards. Are you familiar with the Dunning-Kruger Effect? This refers to the tendency of poor performers who consistently over-evaluate their performance and contribution to the organization. So, deployment awards... You don't receive awards for who you are but for what you do. You don't receive awards based on potential either. You receive awards based on performance. The underperforming Soldiers I'm thinking of wanted to be awarded for what they failed to do and then were upset when their leaders didn't acquiesce to their demands. This is entitlement. Maximum award and recognition for minimum work. The argument goes, "So and so got an MSM, but I'm only getting an ARCOM. I did as little as he did, so why am I not receiving an MSM too?" The Soldiers I'm speaking of don't frame it in those terms but that's what they're really saying. Yet, in their minds, that other Soldier's performance, the one receiving the MSM, is now supposed to somehow count for their performance too. I particularly find this attitude in young achievers. Their worth is rolled up in their image, the image they hold up to themselves and the image they project to others. So, this award thing really matters to them.

**QUESTION:** And, you see this in the Chaplain Corps?

**CH FISHER:** I do. I see it in some of our 56 Mikes who want to promote as fast as possible without first mastering the fundamentals of their trade. This entitlement rolls over into exceptionalism too. I see it in young Chaplains who believe they're off duty at 1700 and tell Staff Duty to phone the on-call duty chaplain after hours and on weekends because they're off. Seriously? There are other variations too. I once had an overweight Brigade Chaplain try to convince me that it was okay to fall out of Battalion runs because you're the Chaplain, and Soldiers and leaders understand that. I just disagree.

**QUESTION:** Did you talk about entitlement with your Chaplains?

**CH FISHER:** We did discuss it. It's a poison. It has to be addressed. I'll leave you with this principle which was shared with me by a senior Chaplain. He told me, "The Army doesn't owe me anything. Me and the Army are straight twice a month, the first and the fifteenth." I like that. I believe that's true. Here's the other thing I think we sometimes lose sight of. Any success I've experienced as a Chaplain has always been connected to others. I've yet to experience any wins on my own. So, where is the entitlement or pride in that? I owe my wins in the Chaplain Corps to God, my wife, and other Chaplains. None of us succeed by ourselves.

**QUESTION:** Tell me about Air Assault School. How was that?

**CH FISHER:** (Laugh) It was painful. I was 44 at the time. It was a lot harder than jumping out of an airplane. That really required no thinking for me, but I had to actually study while in Air Assault School. And it was also a great break from the Brigade. We were in the throes of preparation for deployment, and I knew this was my window for, what one mentor called, 'getting my union card stamped.' This was also the agreement I made with the Command Chaplain prior to coming to the 101<sup>st</sup>. I called him earlier in the fall and said, "Sir, if there's ever an opportunity for me to return to Fort Campbell, it would be a privilege to serve under your

leadership in the Division.” I once served there on the Garrison Staff as the CRM. The Command Chaplain asked me one question, “Can you climb a rope?” I answered, “Yes, Sir” and that was the last I heard of it until I received an RFO to 1BCT. So, this Air Assault School thing was hanging over my head; I still had to pay the butcher’s bill. We had JRTC in August and September and deployment in January. Back that up into October and November and you have the upcoming holidays with all the many pre-deployment requirements taking place on a condensed timeframe leading into block leave. It was hectic, but I saw an opportunity on the calendar and attended the course prior to Christmas. I then sent an email to that same Chaplain, who at the time was in Afghanistan with the Division Headquarters, that read, “Sir, I am mission complete re: Air Assault School. Thank you again for this opportunity.” This is also where I saw a lot of Officers and Chaplains self-select. Not attending Air Assault School is an easy way for a Commander to HQ a staff member. The idea is to make it hard for the Commander to *not* MQ you. The other important note here is that the 101<sup>st</sup> is an Air Assault Division, so I expected 100 percent of the Brigade’s UMTs to be air assault qualified. But, that qualification started with me.

**QUESTION:** What are some of your personal sustains from your experience as a Brigade Chaplain?

**CH FISHER:** I sent very few emails. When I did email, I strove to keep all email responses to five lines or less. This was really about managing my own pain. I daily opened my in-box to double digit emails. It was ridiculous. I also had an experience in Iraq that taught me the importance of minimizing email traffic. My XO told me to present the Commander with a number of COAs regarding a request from the rear about our Chaplain coverage plan. These COAs were to be drafted in an email as we were geographically separated. So, I did that, then waited 24 hours before phoning the Commander to ask him if he’d had the opportunity to view my email with the directed COAs. The Commander said, “Chaplain, I have 425 emails in my in-box. What did your email say?” I then briefed him in under three minutes what took me hours to write with multiple back and forths with the XO. I learned a valuable lesson and determined to never again waste my time crafting the perfect email when I could just phone my Commander instead. After that, I began calling him every other week to touch base and sought to stay away from email as much as possible. Another sustain is that I leaned heavily on the other BCT Chaplains. I regularly sought their counsel. Both helped me tremendously. One day I was particularly stressed out and my peer and friend from a sister BCT said, “Stop it. No one knows more about religious support in this Brigade than you do. Now, stop doubting yourself and just do your job.” It was like a cold shot of water in the face, but it snapped me out of the panic I was experiencing at the moment. I said, “You’re right. I’ve never thought of it like that before.” Then, whatever I didn’t know, I asked, sought counsel from others, or just made up. I had a senior Chaplain once tell me, “If you can’t swim, beat the water into submission.” And that’s pretty much what I sought to do. But those peer relationships were huge for me. Other sustains included an open house for the UMTs at our home that first month in the assignment. I also completed all initial counselings within my first two weeks on the job. I re-evaluated and tweaked as necessary all systems and processes making them my own. I also tracked my sleep. I focused on getting seven to eight hours of sleep a night regardless of what was taking place

around me. Lastly, I gave myself six weeks to get in step and focused on getting at least one percent better every day. That one percent is hard to quantify, but the thought helped me to regulate my anxiety. A mentor encouraged me to engage, withdraw, assess, re-engage, et cetera. And that's what I did. It worked for me too.

**QUESTION:** What about your personal improves?

**CH FISHER:** That's a much longer list. Let's wait until the end of this interview, and I'll share with you what I shared with my Team at my farewell.

**QUESTION:** What was your number one challenge?

**CH FISHER:** Rear D coverage for both JRTC and the deployment. The easy answer is to leave a Battalion Chaplain in the rear to provide this coverage for the Brigade while executing area religious support coverage in the field to make up for the short fall. But here's the deal. Chaplains work for Commanders, not Brigade Chaplains. Plus, we no longer deploy Brigades like we once did meaning the Unit Commanders all go forward while elements of their organizations stay behind. And what do deploying Commanders want when they like their Chaplains? They want their Chaplains with them. And I don't blame them. I wanted all of our Chaplains to receive combat patches and to have the experience of a deployment. Regarding JRTC, this is a 32 million dollar exercise. Why would I want any of my Chaplains to miss this training opportunity to sit back in the rear when the rear has the assets to provide its own area religious support coverage? So, for me, this was my number one challenge, and there are no easy answers. I was fortunate in that the Division Chaplain's Office worked with the Garrison Religious Support Office seeking creative means to provide my Brigade with the support required to make both missions happen. But it wasn't automatic which is why I list it as my number one challenge.

**QUESTION:** Before we talk about the deployment, how did you go about managing relationships with the Division Chaplain and Garrison Chaplain Staffs?

**CH FISHER:** Overcommunication. I sought to overcommunicate what it was we were doing at the Brigade and why it made sense for us to be doing what we were doing. I also routinely asked for support. That support usually came in the form of mentoring from the LTC Chaplains on the Staff. The Deputy Division Chaplain, who is also a Major, was a tremendous friend to me as well. I was very fortunate to have been able to serve with the Team I found myself a part of. And, I think we worked really well together. The other thing is that I went up to the Integrated Religious Support Office once a week to walk around, talk to the Team, poke my head in the Division Chaplain's Office, and ask, "Is there anything you need from me, Sir?" Usually the answer was "No," but he never had to come looking for me. Information sharing equals psychological safety. I needed my leaders to support me, but I think that started with them knowing that I supported them.

**QUESTION:** Let's talk about the deployment. Your Brigade had all of Iraq and Syria and has been credited with destroying the physical caliphate and final strongholds of ISIS. How did you

approach ministry in a deployed environment, and how did you maintain contact and provide ongoing mentorship to your Chaplains while separated from them for most of nine months?

**CH FISHER:** Short answer: Remote Team Mentoring. I framed the questions you're asking like this: How do I continue to provide supervisory support to my customers (those Battalion Chaplains under my leadership) while remaining geographically separated from them and only seeing them face to face once every other month? The next question I considered was: How do I continue to facilitate healthy relationship building within the Team itself when my Chaplains may not see one another during this deployment?

Everyone utilized WhatsApp to remain in contact with their loved ones and one another, so this became a key platform to address the above. I established the following two WhatsApp chat groups: a 1BCT Chaplain Chat Group enabling Battalion Chaplains to remain in contact with one another and me while providing a platform to share thoughts, anecdotes, experiences, pictures, prayer requests, and the like. This chat group was utilized throughout the week by all parties involved. This also served as an outlet for healthy banter within the group. This provided Team connection. The second chat group was for what I called "ICE Messages." ICE stands for Inspire, Challenge, and Equip. Every Sunday morning, I sent a "developmental message" to my Battalion Chaplains, and everyone understood that the only permissible discussion on this thread was what directly applied to the ICE messages shared. This enabled me to provide ongoing developmental mentorship and coaching to my customers. And I too benefited from reading their responses.

**QUESTION:** Are those readings available to others?

**CH FISHER:** Absolutely, I have nine months' worth of developmental material that I shared with my Chaplains over this medium. It's a pdf for my future use but also for other Supervisory Chaplains who find themselves deploying and are looking for a means of addressing the same dynamics.

**QUESTION:** While in Iraq, you also served as the CJTF Command Chaplain on two separate occasions. What was that like?

**CH FISHER:** It was stressful. I went from supervising my seven RSTs to supervising 22 RSTs spread across three countries. I'll be honest too; it wasn't something I wanted to do. But, in retrospect, it turned out to be a great experience, and I'm grateful to have been able to serve in this capacity. It was also the first time I've ever really been around General Officers, and that was its own learning experience. I was fortunate though. Our CAV Chaplain was situated at the same location as the CJTF Headquarters, and he proved invaluable to me during this time. So, between he and his Religious Affairs NCO and my NCOIC, the four of us got to work and were able to continue to provide the leadership necessary to ensure the larger Religious Support Team was able to continue making the mission happen until the CJTF Chaplain Section arrived into Theater.

**QUESTION:** So, you redeployed in September and COVID-19 came on five to six months later. What kind of pandemic preparation and pandemic ministry did you and your Team engage in?



**CH FISHER:** We had some great discussions around this and took the time necessary to formulate a sustainable response. I sent some initial guidance stating, “Now is the time when you'll start seeing a lot of well-intentioned innovation from your Chaplain peers across the Corps. While I certainly value initiative, here are some thoughts I want you to consider before you initiate any new programs and ministries.” Then, I went down a list that for me made sense.

**QUESTION:** Can we talk about that initial guidance and that list?

**CH FISHER:** I offered the following:

How you get 'em is how you keep 'em. So, take time to really think through your initiatives and what that innovation might mean for your future. If you get 'em by providing X, you'll always have to provide "at least X" to keep 'em. Despite COVID-19, effective, long term ministry remains founded on relationships. I also told them not to answer questions no one was asking. The church is notorious for doing this. Just ask yourself, "If I do this, am I answering a question no one is asking?" I reminded them that whatever you initiate, you have to maintain. Your initiatives will own you. So, be careful. Executing an online "word of the day" for a few weeks is doable, but how about a few months? A year? At the time, none of us knew how long we'd be dealing with COVID-19 or what the real mortality rate was and how that might affect our lives and ministries. The other challenge I issued was, “Let the demand signal outpace your efforts at supply. Think "supply and demand". Where's the demand for ministry amidst the *oversupply* of podcasts, virtual ministry, and so forth?” It would have been too easy to take to Facebook like others did, and that's fine, but I wasn't seeing the demand for it. And, I didn't want my Chaplains spinning their wheels on something that from my perspective was yielding little fruit when we might be engaging in conducting expectant ministry and mass burials in the not too distant future. We just didn't know what was going to happen, so I put a premium on rest and prayer. I also asked the Chaplains to nail down their metrics for success. If we're going to engage in virtual ministry, then how do we measure our impact? I wanted them to know their end state and to work backwards from there. I asked the questions, “What if it was 1970 and there was no internet? What would we do then? How would we seek to minister amidst this pandemic? Or, what if this wasn't a pandemic but a catastrophic electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack? Our enemies are right now pursuing this technology. How would you seek to minister under those conditions?” This helped us to reframe the discussion allowing us to draw some emotional distance from the pandemic, to get back to objectively and creatively creating COAs that made sense. I asked them not to compete with their peers. Just because other Chaplains were making weekly videos didn't mean they had to. I also gave them two words of caution. First, I said, “There is ministry, then there is that which masquerades as ministry. Know the difference.” Second, I said, “There is that which we do for Jesus, then there is that which we do for ourselves in Jesus' name. Know the difference.” Lastly, I told them to not overwhelm the Command with data, ideas, and potential ministry initiatives. Remain a non-anxious presence and choose your words (and timing) carefully.” This is the part that required prayer because it required wisdom.

**QUESTION:** As far as assignments go, how hard was this assignment for you?

**CH FISHER:** This was by far my most difficult and physical assignment to date. Every day was a challenge. I was up at 0500, reported to my first staff synch at 0600, was in formation at 0630,

PT'd for 90 minutes, in the office at 0900 to start sorting emails, and hopefully home for dinner by 1800. Then there were the meetings! I was back on Sunday for Chapel. Eventually, the days all seem to bleed into one. But, it's also my favorite assignment. I learned a ton, and I had a lot of fun. It was an awesome privilege.

**QUESTION:** Any book recommendations that you think might benefit future Brigade Chaplains?

**CH FISHER:** Sure. It's a little dense, but I recommend a yearly reading of Edwin Friedman's *A FAILURE OF NERVE*. The text is more of a collection than a chronological rendering of Friedman's leadership insights, so I recommend readers start in chapter four first. After reading chapter four, I recommend going back to the front of the book and working your way forward. This is my number one leadership text which approaches leadership, not as a series of principles to apply but as an emotional process to engage. It's brilliant. I also recommend Daniel Goleman's *PRIMAL LEADERSHIP* which deals with emotional intelligence and what he calls resonant leadership, as opposed to dissonant leadership. Goleman outlines six different styles of leadership which he compares to clubs in a golf bag. Four build resonance; two build dissonance. The two dissonant leadership styles are pacesetter and commanding. This is ironic because these are the two styles of leadership we see displayed most by military leaders. I also like F.W. Farrar's *SEEKERS AFTER GOD*, the *MEDITATIONS* by Marcus Aurelius (the Gregory Hays translation) and Ryan Holiday's *THE DAILY STOIC*. The stoic readings helped me to regulate my own reactivity as I sought to remain a non-anxious presence for my own benefit and the benefit of those around me.

**QUESTION:** All right. Last question. When I asked earlier about your personal improves, you said that's a much longer list and asked to wait until the end of this interview to share with us what you shared with your Team at your farewell. So, what did you share with them?

**CH FISHER:** I sent them an email with my lessons learned. Again, they are all future supervisory chaplains, and I want them to know that I recognize at least some of my mistakes, and I want them to learn from my mistakes as well. I also cc'd the Command Chaplain and the Division Chaplain on this email too. This is what I shared:

Bastogne Chaplains, as I reflect on my time as your BDE Chaplain, the below are some of my initial lessons learned. I submit these "7 Lessons Learned" to you for your consideration as you have been integral in my personal, spiritual, and professional growth over these last 23 months.

1. LESSON #1: I'm not as good as I thought I was.

I told them that time and again I marveled at their performance and execution of all things religious support *and some*, that I even asked myself on occasion, "Could I have done that, in that way...that well?" And, the answer is, "No." I learned a great deal from watching my Chaplains, and they collectively made me a better Chaplain and leader.

2. LESSON #2: Now, I still think I'm pretty smart, but I'm not as smart as I thought I was.

I spoke about the innovation they applied to ministry, the products they created, their understanding of and willingness to apply my philosophy and approach to ministry, which is not

a once size fits all approach to doing life, while maintaining their own autonomy and vision for serving. That was a tall order, but they made it work. I acknowledged and appreciated their execution of my guidance even when they were uncertain of where we were going or why. This lends itself to my #3 lesson learned below.

### 3. LESSON #3: My communication needs work.

Leading this Team reinforced to me the importance of clear, concise communication and the stark difference between one's intentions versus their perceptions of their own words and actions. I told them I see things, not dead people like in M. Night Shyamalan's "The 6<sup>TH</sup> Sense", but that I often struggled to clearly communicate my thoughts and to clearly communicate what it is I'm seeing in my mind. Then, to double down, I fill in discussions with the details in my head but fail to communicate those details out loud. As a result, my listener gets a lopsided account of what it is I "think" I'm saying. Then to add insult to injury, I'm shocked when others aren't getting my point. I acknowledged that my communication failures were a source of pain for some of them. While I couldn't understand what was wrong with them, I was starting to realize what was wrong with me. I promised to work on it.

### 4. LESSON #4: Mistakes can be relationally expensive.

I told them that I knew I made some real mistakes as their Brigade Chaplain and that I knew there were times when I'd been inconsiderate, a little thoughtless, and a little too quick to both speak and act. So, I apologized. We all learn at the expense of those nearest to us. We learn to be better husbands at the expense of our wives, we learn to be better fathers at the expense of our children (particularly our firstborns), and we learn to be better Brigade and Supervisory Chaplains at the expense of our Battalion and Squadron Chaplains. We make emotional withdraws as we learn, and these "mistakes" can be relationally expensive. I was guilty of that.

### 5. LESSON #5: Keep riding the self-awareness train.

I said, "I have some regrets, Team. I would, if I could, which I can't, go back and do some things differently. At times, I've been far too reactive – stress, my natural aggressive bent, hubris (that word reads so much better than "pride"), and a warped need for confrontation combined with a short fuse, as some of you know, is clearly a cocktail of sorts for potential problems. But, just imagine if I wasn't tracking it! Clearly, I'm still growing up and maturing personally, spiritually, and professionally. Keep praying for me. My time with you has taught me that while I'm doing better, I have by no means arrived."

### 6. LESSON #6: Sometimes your best mentors are those you supervise.

The truth is that they all made me better. I acknowledged that they all had a hand in raising me as a Supervisory Chaplain and Field Grade Officer, and for that I remain grateful. Lastly...

### 7. LESSON #7: You really can have friends in the Chaplain Corps: those you work for, those you work with, and yes, those you supervise.

You know, I watched with some measure of curiosity at the way my relationships with these seven Chaplains formed then reformed, particularly after we returned from Iraq and Syria, over those 23 months as their Brigade Chaplain. I told them that that I genuinely sought to honor them, their callings, and their gifts by treating them as colleagues in ministry and now as friends.

That's it. That's what I shared with them.

**QUESTION:** Well, Chaplain Fisher, our time is up, but I really appreciate you sharing what you called your limited perspective with me and our audience. I certainly found it insightful.

**CH FISHER:** It was my pleasure. Thank you for having me on the show.