



# Chaplaincy Support for Military Families: A Study of Pastoral Intervention during Deployment

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## ABSTRACT

Koffarnus correctly notes that many people talk about history in negative terms. However, without history and the historians who record it, we would be ignorant of the roots of our culture. While history can serve as a guide and sustenance of an effective military culture, the 21st century environment is one of unprecedented complexity, ambiguity, speed and organizational change. Conceptual skills provide the capacity to perform effectively in these conditions. Current and future chaplains serving in the military context are not exempted from this evolution of change. They are therefore expected to be versatile, flexible, adaptive and innovative in order to remain effective in the new millennium. The global complexity, rapid change, interdependence and multifaceted challenges demands chaplains to play a vital role in the future development of their environments. In this information age, future chaplains will have to act in the capacity of facilitators, coaches, designers and teachers to foster the transforming role of chaplains in revolutionizing the design of chaplaincy for the twenty first century.

**Key Words:** Chaplaincy, Deployment, Military Families, Pastoral Intervention, Support

## INTRODUCTION

According to Chuter (2011:125) "after all the strategy and preparation, after all the theory and analysis, comes the moment when the military has to be deployed on operations." Chuter (2011:128) further maintains that military operations tend to be undertaken for one of a fairly small number of reason including the following: Defence of national territory against attack, support for wider economic and political interest, protection of borders and economic assets, Internal security and counter terrorism, playing a part in regional and international operations, and improving the nation's international or regional profile. The military conflicts of the past decade have increased stress and strain on service members and their families. Frequent deployments, separations, and relocations are hallmarks of military life and can greatly affect military families. The past decade has also seen increased rates of traumatic brain injury, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicide among service members (Meadows et al., 2015:1).

With view to the above, a conclusion could be drawn that, the demands of military service presents enormous challenges both for those who serve and their families. Therefore a basic premise of collaborative leadership between military leaders and the chaplain service division is to recognise that no one person has the solutions. Collective action is based on shared vision, ownership, mutual values and respect. The aim and purpose of this paper is to explore and discuss the role of military chaplain pastoral intervention in supporting military families during deployment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as provide military leaders, with recommendations, which would serve as a practical guide and application for chaplaincy ministry of the future.

## The History Of Military Chaplaincy

Evidence of the philosophy and history of military chaplaincy can be found even in the Ancient Near East (Crick 2011:125). The word "chaplain" comes from a fourth-century fable involving a soldier, Martin of Tours. The story goes that Martin encountered a beggar and shared his cloak by cutting it in half. Later, in a dream, Martin believed he saw Jesus Christ wearing the cloak. Martin was so moved by this; he left the military and became a



Christian. Many years after his death, Martin was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church and St. Martin of Tours became the patron saint of medieval French kings. Rulers carried into battle a part of the cloak as a reminder of the presence of God. A custodial priest or *capellanus* carried the sacred cloak as well as attended to the religious needs of the king. *Capellanus* soon became *chapellain* in Old French and "chaplain" in English. The resting place for the *capella* as well as the place for religious services became known as a "chapel." Therefore, chaplains originated in biblical times and have been serving in Western armies since the fourth century (Jones 1996:5).

A chaplain is a clergy who may serve at a chapel and/or provides caring service to community agencies, institutions, the poor and wounded (Popejoy, Saylor & Smith, 2014:18). Though the words "chaplain" and "chaplaincy" do not appear in Bible, Crick (2011:125) observes that, in the Old Testament, special priest were assigned to military units as indicators that the war was a special, spiritual one. Jones (1996:4) noted that the involvement of the clergy in the military is traceable back to Old Testament days. Texts such as Deuteronomy (20:2) identify the expectation of these priests in battle. They were commissioned by God and the community leader (often a King or Prophet) to go out onto the battlefield ahead of the army (Crick 2011:125). King David had his Nathan (2 Samuel 7:1-17), King Ahab had his Elijah (1 Kings 21:27 -29), and King Josiah had his Jeremiah (2 Kings 22:1-20, 23:1-25; Jeremiah 1:1-3).

Within the South African context, Van Niekerk (2002: x) asserts that, the work of the South African chaplains during the First World War was of an extremely high standard. The post war military failed to recognise this contribution. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the chaplaincy was allocated an inferior position within the military. It was only in 1938 that the first chaplains were appointed in the Permanent Force. During the Second World War, the unwillingness of the UDF hierarchy to appoint a single chaplain as the head of a Chaplains' Branch influenced the ministry negatively. Inter-denominational issues were resolved on a basis of consensus amongst Principal Chaplains who were granted very little executive power. Van Niekerk further explains that, the establishment of the SA Corps of Chaplains in 1946 confirmed the permanency of the chaplaincy within the UDF. The appointment of the first Deputy Chaplain General in 1949 did much to ensure effective ministry. The discontinuation of this post in 1954 had a detrimental effect on the chaplaincy. With the establishment of the Department of Physical and Spiritual Welfare in 1966, no clear-cut division was made between the responsibility for spiritual (pastoral) care and physical care (social welfare).

This anomaly was rectified in 1968 when an independent directorate for the chaplaincy was created and in 1970 when a Chaplain General was appointed. The chaplaincy in South West Africa grew from a single chaplain at Walvis Bay in 1963 to an immense organisation with hundreds of chaplains. In 1980, the SWATF Chaplain Service was formed under command of its own director. The presence of SADF/SWATF chaplains in South West Africa ceased in 1989 with the implementation of UN Resolution 435. The 1990s was a decade of great transition and turmoil for the Chaplain Service. In 1994 the military chaplaincies of the TBVC countries, as well as members from MK and APLA, were integrated into the Chaplain Service. The implementation of the transformation policy of the Department of Defence resulted in the Chaplain Service becoming more representative of the communities it serves (van Niekerk 2002:x).

**Deduction** The evolution of the term from *capellanus* to "chaplain," and the establishment of the "chapel" as a place of worship tied to this role, supports the conclusion that chaplaincy has deep theological and historical roots. Therefore, military chaplains have a long-standing presence, originating in biblical times and formalized in Western military structures since the fourth century.

## The Profession Of Military Chaplaincy

Smith (2017:3) quoting Robert Baron, who wrote in the Journal of the American Medical Association (May 2015), in referencing the actions of 31 physicians, states, "Their action (toward professional self-regulation) illustrated a core challenge that remains today: How does the public know who is qualified to practice medicine? Given the critically important responsibility that practicing physicians assume every day, and given the inability of patients to judge independently the quality of their physician's training, knowledge, and skill, the profession has always been involved in efforts to better serve the public by defining medical competence in a consequential



way.” Even though Baron’s viewpoint are with specific reference to the medical profession, could directly be applied to the profession of chaplaincy.

According to (Crick 2011:43), chaplaincy is a call to minister to people, families, and communities at their weakest moments. Pastoral authority comes from taking the time to get equipped for ministry. This may come through specialised training, formal Christian education, and/or years of mentoring by a more mature pastor or chaplain. Whatever the path, individual chaplains have committed to preparing themselves in spirit, intellect and practice for this specialised ministry. This means therefore that, chaplains are well studied in a variety of areas to assist people. Van Niekerk (2002:423 - 424) with regards to the chaplain’s profession, identifies the following:

- A chaplain is characterised by professional conduct in behaviour and vocation.
- The chaplain is a well-qualified and professionally equipped spiritual leader.
- The chaplain's religious organisation has recognised this professionalism and spiritual leadership and has thus seconded the chaplain to the military environment.
- The chaplain is a professional manager within the military structure and is capable of effective time management and determining priorities.
- The chaplain ensures that the military personnel are well acquainted with the role, nature and scope of the chaplaincy.
- The chaplain's professionalism is not static, but improves and expands continuously.
- This endeavour is supported by the chaplain's religious organisation as well as the military. The chaplain's professionalism emanates from an unshakeable inner calling.

The place of personal development in a leader’s life cannot be overemphasised. The following are the four of the hallmarks of any profession noted by Smith (2017:3):

- the mastery of a specific body of knowledge - usually obtained through higher education;
- the ability to practice autonomously making independent decisions based on expertise unique to the individual’s competency;
- the provision of a social good benefiting the interests of the public served; and
- the existence of a unifying body providing oversight for the profession as a whole and typically recognized by the overseeing governmental structure.

Chaplaincy in general qualifies as a profession given these hallmarks. Some of us may want to argue theological points regarding their applicability. However, as chaplaincy occurs, by definition, outside the organizational boundaries of our faith communities, there is a need for common understandings to permit public service. The manual for the functioning of the chaplain in the unit (2000: 7) confirms this by noting that, the chaplain is a highly professional officer, whose ministry forms an important and integrated part of the Defence Force. This ministry manifests itself in a well-qualified and equipped corps of chaplains, who witness to a shared vision of inspired professionalism and trust.

Unlike ministry in the church, ministry in the military context is very complex as it demands intellectual and spiritual dexterity. In the military, the chaplain is both clergy and officer and is designated to minister to a community of members from different religious affiliations and background. As clergy officer, the chaplain must meet the qualifications of both church and military.

Deduction Chaplaincy is fundamentally a calling to provide spiritual and emotional care to individuals, families, and communities during their most vulnerable moments. The authority of a chaplain does not arise merely from



position, but from deliberate preparation—through formal education, specialized training, or mentorship. This commitment to equipping themselves in spirit, intellect, and practice demonstrates that chaplains are not only called but also thoroughly prepared to serve. Therefore, chaplains are well-versed in diverse disciplines, enabling them to offer informed, compassionate, and effective support to those in need.

## Definition of Family

According to Clinebell (1984:283), the family is the social system of primary relationships from which individuals derive their major sources of psychological and spiritual nature. Clinebell further sees the family as also a social organism or system. Ackerman (1961:231) suggests that the term “organism” connotes the biological care of family, its qualities of living process functional unity, and its natural history, “a period of germination, a birth, a growth, and development, a capacity to adapt to change crisis, a slow decline and finally dissolution of the old family into the new. Demarest and Matthews (2010:148) in their definition of family remarks that, the family is a communion of people related by blood or by vows, and it represents the closest of all human relationships. According to them, the family provides for not only physical sustenance but also the nurture of emotional and relational needs and guidance for intellectual and spiritual needs, such as learning to love others and finding meaning in life.

Looking at the above definitions it is important to also to note Atkinson et al, (1995:372) who clearly indicated that, modern families are under immense pressure. Social pressures include the separation of work from home, often-involving long working hours or shift work, which cuts the time family members, can spend with each other. In dealing with the influence of deployment on families, every family therapist must develop a method of therapy, using concepts derived from one or more schools of family therapy – unless he/she aims at inventing a totally original method. According to Papp, (1983:8) family members are not seen as possessing certain innate characteristics but manifesting behaviour in relation to the behaviour of others. Rather than attempting to understand the cause of the behaviour, the therapist must attempt to understand the fluctuation of the pattern from which it derives its meaning. The role of the chaplain therefore is to prepare the family for family readiness. (Hall 2008:73) defines family readiness as a family’s ability to adapt to and deal with the stressors associated with military danger and military life style, such as frequent moves, deployments, unaccompanied tours and overseas assignment.

As per the preceding concise definition of family, I would like to conclude here in the words of (Augsburger 1986: 213) that, the pastoral counsellor as family therapist must function with a flexible psychological theory and an inclusive theology that addresses the great breadth of paradox in family systems while maintaining faithfulness to the central values and commitments of living in relationships of integrity.

Deduction The family, whether bound by blood or vows, is the most intimate and foundational human community. It serves not only as a source of physical support but also as the primary environment for emotional, relational, intellectual, and spiritual development. Within the family, individuals do not act in isolation but express their identities and roles through interactions with one another. Therefore, the family is best understood as a dynamic communion, where each member’s behaviour both shapes and is shaped by the others, fostering growth, love, and meaning in life.

## The Chaplain Of The Future In The Context Of Military Of The Future

According to (Crick 2011:130) Military chaplains are pastors in uniform, therefore chaplains must always take into consideration the current context, military personnel and family members and take their diverse faith backgrounds, and individual spiritual needs. Military leadership is a continuous activity of a military leader and a sub-concept of military command. The function of military leadership is to commit people to their task and mission. The basis of military leadership is the potential of a military leader. The activity is seen as effective leadership behaviour in changing operating environments. Military leadership behaviour is followed by measurable organizational outcomes. The future demands that military leaders must lead from the front and display courage to motivate their Soldiers. However, it is important to maintain an acceptable level of confidence without it turning into excessive egotism.



Military leaders must also acquire skills that differ from skills that were valued in the past. The future operating environment will be:

- a. Less predictable and diversity will increase both within and outside the armed forces.
- b. Characterised by higher political/public visibility from media presence and speed of communications. Increased visibility may result in higher potential for immediate interference and critical scrutiny of leader decisions and actions.
- c. Urban rendering some weapons and equipment ineffective.
- d. Marked by more complex chains of command.
- e. Having information overload. Leaders will have to make decisions at all levels and sort out critical information from high volumes of data.
- f. All leaders should have a shared view of the goals of the mission at all stages and have confidence that soldiers have a shared set of core values and ethics.
- g. Levels of uncertainty and ambiguity will be higher.
- h. More difficult to distinguish friend from enemy; military from civilian.
- i. Focus on knowledge. Most valuable asset in the 21st century is the knowledge worker (Drucker). Wealth is moving from industry to knowledge and services. How can we leverage this growth in knowledge?
- j. Impact recruiting specially officers. Outsourcing will increase dramatically; Contractors will be present in the battlefield.
- k. Interwoven with continued technology growth. Use of computers, cellular phones and internet will continue to grow exponentially. How can we use these digital systems for leadership development?

The concept of military a chaplain envisions a leader who is aware of his responsibilities, capitalizes on his strong traits, corrects his weaknesses, and is guided by the principles of leadership. He applies appropriate actions and orders to influence and military personnel. He must also be able to evaluate his unit in light of the indications of leadership in order to mould the members of the group into an effective unit. After being theologically qualified and meeting military requirements pertaining to physical condition, age, educational level, and security clearance, chaplains should endeavour to be lifelong learners because their ministry and calling demands it for them to maintain a professional posture. They cannot continue to give without replenishing the supply of their spiritual energy.

Deduction The evolving demands of military leadership require leaders who exemplify courage, lead by example, and inspire those under their command. Yet, true leadership also calls for humility—balancing confidence with self-awareness to avoid the pitfalls of ego. From a chaplaincy perspective, the ideal military leader is one who understands their responsibilities, leverages their strengths, addresses their weaknesses, and consistently upholds core leadership principles. Therefore, effective military leadership is not only a matter of skill and strength but also of character, discipline, and moral guidance.

## **The Impact Of Operations On Military Families**

Military families are threatened by lengthy deployments and family separations. As Smith (2017:3) noted, our goal is, in many ways, the same as that of so many other professionals – to better serve our public in a more consequential way. But unique to our profession, we do so within the unique parameters of the faiths to which we have been called. A formidable challenge, but as chaplains we are to live by faith.

### **Emotional Cycle of Deployment**



Figure 1.1: Adapted form (Deployment Readiness Handbook, n.d.:7)

The following cycle describes changes in family behaviour and emotions during deployments.

Pre-deployment (varies)	Deployment (1st month)	Sustainment (months 2 thru 5)	Re-deployment (last month)	Post- deployment (3-6 months after)
Anticipation of loss Frustration Detachment Confusion Denial Shock Anger Rejection	Despair Irritability Confusion Loneliness Sleeplessness Overwhelmed by Responsibility	Calm Self-assured Self-assured Being alone Detachment Confidence	Joy Excitement Apprehension Expectation Hope	Renegotiation of marriage & family duties Disappointment Ecstasy Change Relief Guilt

a. Pre-deployment (varies) According to (Hall 2008:161) the first stage when the deployment order arrives. The predeployment stage is characterised by both denial and anticipation of loss. Each stage is characterized both by a time frame and by specific emotional challenges, which must be dealt with and mastered by each Family member. Failure to adequately negotiate these challenges can lead to significant strife - for both Family members and the deployed Soldier (Deployment Readiness Handbook, n.d.:7).

b. Deployment (1st month) The military spouses' departure creates an emptiness, leading to feelings of numbness, sadness, loneliness, or abandonment. Spouses often have difficulty sleeping and have a sense of anxiety about coping with things such as pay problems, safety issues, childcare concerns or other everyday issues (Hall 2008:163).

c. Sustainment (months 2 thru 5) According to the (Deployment Readiness Handbook, n.d.:10), during the sustainment stage, it is common to:

- Realize "Hey, I'm doing OK. I can do this!"
- Establish new family patterns/interactions that do work for them.
- Feel more comfortable with their situation, self, and the reorganization of roles and responsibilities that does occur.
- Attempt and successfully accomplish some goals, which add to self-confidence and feelings of being able to cope.
- Reach out for support through friends, church, work or spouse groups, etc.
- Have higher long distance telephone bills - but must learn to keep within the budget.
- Go through the "my" syndrome: my house, my car, kids, etc.
- Experience more sickness (at first), as the increased responsibilities tend to be more stressful until healthy coping skills are practiced.
- Feel vulnerable due to isolation from the family member, especially if recently moved to a new area without close friends or family.
- Spouses may feel uncertain of their abilities to cope and may experience self-doubt.



- Feel asexual - no longer in need of sex or affection;

d. Re-deployment (last month) the re-deployment stage is generally one of intense anticipation. Like the deployment stage, there can be a surge of conflicting emotions. On the one hand, there is excitement that the deployee is coming home. On the other, there is some apprehension. Some concerns include: "Will he (she) agree with the changes that I have made? Will I have to give up my independence? Will we get along?" Ironically, even though the separation is almost over, there can be renewed difficulty in making decisions. This is due, in part, to increased attention to choices that the returning employee might make. Many spouses also experience a burst of energy during this stage. There is often a rush to complete "to-do" lists before their mate returns - especially around the home. It is almost inevitable that expectations will be high (Deployment Readiness Handbook, n.d.:11).

e. Post- deployment (3-6 months after) Hall (2008:167) asserts that the post

deployment stage lasts from 3 to 6 months, starting with homecoming of the deployed service members. This can be both a wonderfully joyous occasion and an extremely frustrating and upsetting experience. The returning service members may expect to be received as heroes, only to find that they have to make their own way home. Eventually service members want to return to their role as members of the family, which may require considerable patience to accomplish successfully. They may feel passive to make up for lost time and want to take back their old responsibilities without realising that things have changed in their essence. Their spouses have become more autonomous, children have grown, and personal priorities may be different.

A proper understanding of the above deployment emotional cycle, calls for the chaplain to appropriately engage with the families. In regard I therefore agree with (Carter & McGoldrick 1989:5) that, therapeutic efforts needs to be directed to toward helping family members reorganise so they can proceed developmentally. When this is applied to the family system, as (Holland & Kilpatrick 1995:20) stresses that, a family is not simply a collection of individuals, but a coherent composite whose components behave as an irreducible unit. Therefore, the behaviour of each individual in the family is related to and dependent upon the behaviour of all others. It is therefore critical to bear in mind as (Becvar & Becvar 1996) noted, that, "understanding how to solve problems also requires understanding how problems are created and maintained." Factors that enhance a healthy cohesion is a good marital relationship, marital support, family members spending time together and a mutual commitment to promote the other's happiness and welfare (SANDF Chaplain Division Resilience Manual 2010 :9).

## Summary

There is an increasing concern with the role of context in the investigation of leadership. Some have concluded that the varied domains, paradigms, and variables included across the studies found in the general organizational leadership literature are so diverse that it is unlikely that a meaningful integrated theory of leadership effectiveness can be developed in the foreseeable future (Osborn & Hunt, 2007). This predicament may also be true for the field of military leadership, within which a variety of unconnected research interests are being pursued in complex environments.

However, while changes in the global political and military situation over the last two decades have introduced, if anything, added complexity to military leadership, those same changes have helped to highlight and crystallize understanding of key contextual variables affecting the practice of military leadership. This in turn has helped to identify new issues (cross-culture skills, shared leadership) and highlight continuing issues (ethical leadership, communications, dispersed leadership), and other aspects of the contemporary environment not discussed here. It is an accepted premise within the military leadership community that these challenges will facilitate future growth, and the community will grow in response to these challenges. With view to the above changes and challenges in military leadership, it is important that the military hierarchy try to comprehend the role and influence of the chaplains within the military, because most of the pastoral care in military settings begins around various needs that are identified initially as social or relational, not religious. For example, couples may seek help for marital difficulties, a soldier may be depressed, or may have gone AWOL. Chaplains are the first lines



of defense when a military person or their family gets into trouble, even though the care recipients may not attend services or be a member of the chaplain's denomination.

## CONCLUSION

The definition of 'family' as well as the timing of life cycle phases and importance of different transitions varies depending on a family cultural background. Therefore, the overarching goal of pastoral care and counselling is to liberate, empower, and nurture wholeness. Pastoral counselling is one dimension of pastoral care. It is the utilisation of a variety of healing methods to help people handle their problems and crises more growthfully and thus experience healing of their brokenness. Historical changes have influenced the context and development of chaplaincy within the military environment and the level of professional expertise is therefore required. The modern chaplain must be prepared to be deployed and handle a wide range of different missions and complex tasks. Far and above being there for the deployed forces on deployment the chaplain must offer spiritual support to military members and their families to cope with the normal setbacks, hardships, frustrations and crisis of life in general. Without doubt, the current and future needs of the military chaplaincy call for a much higher level of skills even for junior chaplains as the increasingly complex technologies are to be combined in surrounding with operational, cultural, social, and political implications.

The chaplain as a pastor and therapist in facilitating the process as well as deriving effective interventions to help during the phases of deployment will not succeed without having the theoretical clarity of focus on the context of the community the military family is based/located. Chaplains cannot also afford to ignore that in their pursuit to helping, they are working with real families in a real world. Nothing will replace a chaplain's ability to think critically or inspire and motivate through physical presence. Finally, every chaplain needs a coherent theory of change and a systematic way of change of tackling family treatment needs. The explosion in information technology and the digitization of the future battlefield create an environment where knowledge is a key driver of Chaplain effectiveness. In the words of Caiazzo (2017:2) "not only are we accountable to a unique professional conduct, we must also pursue professional training, awareness, and leadership on an ongoing basis." Military personnel and their families face major deployment stressors that require redress, and spirituality may be a form of therapy and a coping mechanism (Johnson 2023:10).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order for military chaplains to be firmly grounded in the fundamentals of tactics, technology, and leadership. The basics of what was discussed in this paper must be integrated into chaplaincy development.
- Chaplaincy to re-evaluate its role and influence within the South African military and political spheres.
- We also need a more holistic educational approach that imbues a notion of "lifelong learning" to the profession.
- Greater fusion between education and training is needed.
- Then we will have proficient, disciplined and enthusiastic members with high morale.

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