

Report of the Chaplaincy Ministries Study Committee

I. Committee mandate

The executive committee of the CRCNA Board of Trustees asked this committee:

- To review and evaluate the nature of chaplaincy ministry with a view toward formulating a clearly worded mandate.
- To identify guiding biblical and theological principles that need to be integral to the gospel ministry as expressed in Chaplaincy by CRC personnel.
- To recommend an appropriate organizational placement for the Office of Chaplaincy Ministries within the denominational structure.

II. Introduction

The earliest reference to chaplains in our synodical record is in 1918 and deals with chaplains in the military. In 1942 synod officially organizes chaplain ministry as a ministry of the CRC and appoints the first Chaplains Committee. Further references during the Second World War describe this chaplaincy as a ministry of Word and Sacrament. Hospital chaplaincy began in our church-related institutions, Bethesda and Pine Rest, as early as 1913.¹ A prison chaplaincy and general hospital chaplaincy is common by 1959 when the Chaplains Committee is mandated to give ecclesiastical endorsement. In 1980 the first industrial chaplain is appointed. In 1998 synod allows women to be endorsed and ordained as chaplains. By 2002, the *Yearbook* has an impressive list of more than 100 active and reserve chaplains in the armed services and in ten civilian categories.²

It is surprising, at first, that no mandate is given for these chaplains and that their ministry seems not to be included in the Church Order, which mentions pastor of a congregation, missions, and other work which relates directly to his/her calling.³ The Form for Ordination has adaptations for pastor in established congregation, foreign missionary, home missionary, and teacher of theology, but again no section for chaplains.⁴ The surprise lessens with the realization that chaplaincy has always been seen as a ministry of the Word and is simply included with that ministry. This understanding of chaplaincy as a ministry of the Word also leads to the requirement to demonstrate that new positions are consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word.⁵ In the 1980's the issue of endorsing non-ordained persons as chaplain-associates arose (see section VI and Recommendation D).

The CRC has a high view of the chaplaincy as a ministry of the Word and sacrament, but it lacks a recognition in liturgical forms, Church Order, and synodical mandates that this aspect of the ministry has a special focus and some unique challenges.⁶ This lack became apparent especially when denominational restructuring took place and a new place was needed for Chaplaincy Ministries in our agency structure. A chaplain task force has submitted an extensive report⁷ which we have consulted and found most helpful in understanding our mandate.

III. The nature of chaplaincy

Chaplains are ministers of the Word. The distinguishing mark of this ministry is that it is a pastoral ministry in specialized settings to people who are hurting or in crisis, uprooted or dislocated.⁸ Chaplains minister in the armed services, visit those in prison or hospital, and encourage others in their workplace.

As ministers of the Word, ordained and sent by the church, chaplains extend the church's ministry and the presence of Christ into the world by proclaiming the Word, by administering the sacraments, and by a shepherd's care.⁹

A. *A mandate for chaplain ministries*

Chaplains are called by the church to extend the ministry of Christ to persons in institutional and specialized settings.

B. *Characteristics of chaplain ministries*

1. It is **pastoral**. It seeks those separated from the settled congregation and extends a ministry of compassion, healing, and reconciliation.
2. It is **wholistic**. It is a ministry of word and deed, concerned about the well-being of the whole person; it encourages healing in a hospital, hope in a prison, and freedom for the addicted; it speaks for the voiceless and advocates for justice, bringing the shalom of God's kingdom to the groaning parts of our world.
3. It functions **within total institutions**.¹⁰ The military, the hospital, the prison, the large corporation are all worlds-unto-themselves with an environment that tends towards regimentation, depersonalization, and loss of freedom, which places any citizen or worker, but especially a Christian, in a situation with dual, sometimes conflicting, loyalties.
4. It is **public**. It is often conducted in a public, inter-faith setting where a witness to the faith is welcomed, but proselytizing is not fitting. The inter-faith setting requires sensitivity to other faith traditions and readiness to work with them. At the same time it provides a unique opportunity to let the Light of Christ shine.
5. It is **team work**. Hospital, prison, and military chaplains work with staff in other disciplines for the health and well-being of those they serve. Chaplains as members of a professional team trust that their part, faithfully done, will add to the whole enterprise.
6. It requires **special training**. The settings in which chaplains minister are so different from each other and from the parish ministry that specialized training is needed.

C. *Guiding principles*

The following principles apply to chaplaincy in a special way.

1. **Chaplains represent Christ and his church.** Jesus links his own sending by the Father to his sending of disciples into the world (John 17:18) The church receives the task to represent the Lord and does this in person, through a cup of cold water, and especially by the means of grace. A chaplain's presence, therefore, symbolizes the Lord's care.
2. **The image of the Shepherd guides the pastoral ministry of chaplains.** He who was sent by the Father, calls himself a shepherd, and instructs Peter to tend his sheep (John 21:16). Chaplains may travel far for one lost one (Matthew 18:10-14) or to be with those in distress (Luke 19:10), which causes them to express the threefold office in their own way.¹¹
3. **Chaplains concentrate on the fringes.** Like the Great Physician who was accused of not spending more time with the healthy, chaplains work with those who are sick and suffering, mixed-up, or in jail (Luke 5:27-32) to bring change, healing, faith, hope, and justice.
4. **Chaplains minister for God in inter-faith settings.** Since chaplaincy often happens in public institutions, like the military or a public hospital, it must be carried out in these religiously pluralistic settings with integrity to the chaplain's faith and that of colleagues and other members of this institution. The expectation is that chaplains perform for your own, provide for others, care for all.¹² Christian chaplains work with persons and chaplains of other faiths in the conviction that their witness will help bring into the Kingdom these scattered children of God (John 11:51, 52).

IV. **Chaplaincy ministry in the denominational structure**

Most chaplains work at a distance from the local congregation that called them. They rarely attend a classis meeting. Chaplains want and need to be *connected*. A solid connection to the church is vital to their recognition, credibility, and survival within the total institutions they serve.¹³

A. *Office of Chaplaincy Ministries*

This office is maintained by the Board of Trustees to implement and regulate the denomination's commitment to chaplaincy by recruiting, training and endorsing persons to provide ministry in specialized settings, including military chaplains, pastoral counselors, institutional spiritual care-givers, hospice care, and others called to minister in places where the institutional church is not present. The office supports

and promotes the development of chaplaincy and related ministries for the denomination (for purpose, staff functions, and staffing see Appendix A).

B. Governance and administrative placement

The Office of Chaplaincy Ministries (OCM) shall function under the governance authority of the Board of Trustees of the CRC. To assure that adequate guidance is provided, the Board will establish and maintain a Chaplaincy Ministries Advisory Council (CMAC) of eight (8) persons.

- The executive committee of the Board of Trustees shall nominate a slate of regional candidates for these positions.
- The Director of Chaplaincy Ministries will advise the Executive Committee on the proposed slate of CMAC members.
- The Board will select from that slate.
- The CMAC shall function as a standing advisory committee of the Board of Trustees. The terms of those serving on CMAC shall be staggered and each member shall be limited to one six (6) year term.

This Chaplaincy Ministries Advisory Council will represent both Canada and the United States. It will be advisory to both the Board of Trustees and the OCM. The Executive Director of Ministries will monitor the Council's activities as part of the supervision of the OCM (for recommended responsibilities of the CMAC see Appendix B).

C. Ecclesiastical connections

Chaplains are connected to the CRC and the CRC to chaplains, through a complex of administrative and personal connections, which are summarized in Church Order Article 12-c and its supplement. (The recommended steps to entering the chaplaincy and the further policies and practices for calling churches, classes, and chaplaincy ministries are found in Appendix C.)

V. Church Order and liturgical changes

In order to make the work of chaplains more visible in our official documents we recommend some changes in the Church Order and our liturgical forms.

A. The Church Order should include chaplaincy as a category under Article 12-b so that it reads:

A minister of the Word who (1) enters into the work of missions or *chaplaincy*, or (2) is appointed directly by synod, or (3) whose appointment is ratified by synod shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, which acts in cooperation with the appropriate committees of classis or synod.

B. We judge it important that the material on the nature of chaplaincy and the guiding principles for chaplaincy be inserted in Church Order Supplement, Article 12-c (section c).

C. We judge it important that the form for ordination/installation provide a section 5, "For a chaplain."

VI. Chaplains who are not ordained ministers of the Word

While this committee studied chaplaincy it also examined the current practice of endorsing as chaplains or chaplain-associates some persons who are not ordained ministers of the Word. Since the mid-eighties the OCM has provided several endorsements of that kind. Once a position was established as being a chaplain s position, the person to be hired for it sought endorsement from Chaplaincy Ministries.

Generally, it was second career people who sought such endorsement. Although these chaplains have not completed the denominational requirements for ordination as ministers of the Word, Chaplaincy Ministries has maintained standards for these endorsements that are comparable to the ministry of the Word requirements for endorsement. The standards for such endorsement include theological and ministry competence, clinical training and the ordination into an ecclesiastical office other than the minister of the Word. The office into which that endorsed person is ordained has been left to the discretion of the local church. This practice has led to inconsistency and a lack of clear guidelines for the local churches.

The decisions of Synod 2001, which broadened the office of evangelist to include a variety of functions which extend the ministry of the Word may offer an appropriate place for ordaining lay persons under Church Order Article 23-b.

VII. Recommendations

A. That the Board of Trustees adopt the mandate, guiding principles, and administrative placement for chaplaincy ministries.

Grounds:

1. The mandate states the nature of chaplaincy as it has developed in our church s history.
2. The guiding principles emerge from Reformed theology and the reflections of our chaplains.
3. This administrative placement is the most appropriate choice at this time and is similar to the placement of the offices of Abuse Prevention and Race Relations.

B. That the Board of Trustees provide the Office of Chaplaincy Ministries (OCM) with an advisory council of eight (8) persons.

Grounds:

1. A group of persons familiar with chaplaincy will be able to assist the Board of Trustees and the Director.
2. This council is similar to those advising the Directors of Abuse Prevention and Race Relations.

C. That the Board of Trustees approve the operational Guidelines for the Office of Chaplaincy Ministries (Appendix A) and the Responsibilities of the Chaplaincy Ministries Advisory Council (Appendix B), and receive as information the policies and practices for calling churches, classes, and synod (Appendix C) and provide them as information to synod.

Ground: These operational guidelines are helpful to the OCM and to the churches in stating what each does and is to do.

D. That the Board of Trustees ask the Office of Chaplaincy Ministries to investigate and report on whether persons who desire to use their gifts as chaplains, but who are not eligible to be ordained as ministers of the Word under Church Order Article 6, can be examined and ordained as commissioned chaplains under provisions of Church Order Article 23.

Ground: Religious workers who were formerly recognized as chaplain associates have functioned as an extension of the ministry of the Word and appear to fit the parameters of the office of evangelist.

E. That the Board of Trustees recommend to Synod 2003:

1. That synod adopt the following mandate for the CRC chaplain ministry:

Chaplains are called by the church to extend the ministry of Christ to persons in institutional and specialized settings.

2. That synod adopt the characteristics and guiding principles for chaplaincy (see section III, B and C) and insert them into Church Order Supplement, Article 12-c (section c).

Grounds:

- a) The mandate states the nature of chaplaincy as it has developed in our church's history.
 - b) The guiding principles emerge from Reformed theology and the reflections of our chaplains.
3. That synod amend Church Order Article 12-b to read:

A minister of the Word who (1) enters into the work of missions or *chaplaincy*, or (2) is appointed directly by synod, or (3) whose appointment is ratified by synod shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, which acts in cooperation with the appropriate committees of classis or synod.

Ground: This addition re chaplaincy will help to regulate the ministry of chaplains as a significant part of the church's ministry.

4. That synod instruct the Board of Publications to develop an amendment to the forms of ordination and installation for use by the churches to install and ordain ministers of the Word as chaplains.

Ground: These amendments will recognize the significant ministry of chaplains as a regular part of the church's ministry.

Endnotes:

1 *A Place of Grace*, p. 7

2 *Yearbook 2002*, pp. 588-590

3 *Church Order*, Art. 13

4 *Psalter Hymnal*, pp. 995-1001

5 *Church Order*, Art. 12-c

6 Campus ministry by contrast is defined by a clearly stated policy (*Acts of Synod 1967*, pp. 79, 279, 280) and a recent study.

7 *A Place of Grace*, January 2001

8 *A Place of Grace*, p. 10

9 *Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 281: Leaders, particularly ordained leaders, must always seek to imitate Christ, to represent Christ as well as they can.

10 *The Churches and the Chaplaincy*, Richard G. Hutchinson, Jr., 1997, p. 34: . . . total institutions are distinguished from other institutions by the fact that they control, to a considerable extent, the total lives of the persons involved. He also notes that there is a barrier between those inside and those outside the institution, but that within the normal barriers between the spheres of life break down.

11 Now that the church has acknowledged that the special offices are not tied to one of the aspects of the threefold office of Christ, but rather that each office may have a different mixture of these functions (see *Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 267) the church can acknowledge a greater variety of ministry. In hospital chaplaincies the priestly side of the office may take up more space and time than the prophetic. Or the proclamation of the Word may happen without pulpit or lectern, as the shepherd going where the flock is, to small groups, or one to one

12 All Federal Government agencies which hire chaplains (Armed Forces, Department of Justice-Bureau of Prisons, Veterans Administration) state that chaplains are to care for the needs of all in the unit, perform religious ministry to those members of the unit in their traditions, and to ensure that religious ministry is provided to other traditions.

13 See Hutchinson, pp. 24, 25 for how important this is for chaplains in their role conflict where a substantial part of the perceived world in which they live and work is determined by church norms rather than by military norms.