

Federal Chaplaincy Resources

Supporting Families with Members in the Area of Conflict

The length of the war in Iraq has put financial and emotional strains on military families, especially National Guard and Reserve families. The American Red Cross is offering many programs to assist those families as many of them approach or enter crisis stage.

How can congregations support their members and neighbors?

- We put the names of the military men and women in our Wednesday prayer sheet along with the branch of the service they are in, where they are serving or stationed and who they are related to in our congregation and how they are related to them. We are working on a display with their pictures on it and their addresses so that people can write to them or send them a card if they would like. Submitted by P. Moore.
- Use the ELCA resource, “Suggestions for Chaplains and Congregations in Time of Military Involuntary Call-up”.
- In preparation for sending one of our members into military service, we are having a service of blessing and sending. We have invited member veterans to lay their hands on the person, along with their family as prayers are offered for safety, protections and peace of mind and well-being as they serve. Submitted by Pastor Jaime Olson, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Duncansville, PA.
- Provide a place for military families or families with members in the area of conflict to meet to support one another.
- Be prepared to refer family members to appropriate counseling services. Use assets to provide interest-free loans (or gifts) to those whose incomes have been drastically reduced due to the war.
- Offer day-care and after-school opportunities for children affected.
- Have a regularly scheduled prayer vigil during the time of conflict.
- Pastors and congregational personnel dealing with the military should know the phone number of the nearest military chaplain or military family assistance office. In addition, the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, in conjunction with the Army Family Liaison Office, has established a toll-free Family Assistance hotline 800-833-6622, which can make referrals to the other military services. The ELCA Office for Federal Chaplaincies can also help. Submitted by The Rev. Terrence M. Walsh, Chaplain (Major) U.S. Army, Fort Knox, KY.
- “Guy and Gal time”. Men and women in the congregation can include children of deployed soldiers in their time, taking them to ball games with their own kids, doing things that dad or mom would usually do.
- “Parent help”. Women and men whose children are grown can offer to help get kids ready for church and then sit with them during worship so the home parent can worship without distractions.
- “Telephone time”. Congregation staff and leaders can call families to just listen to their concerns, pray with them over the phone, or visit in the home to pray

together and include the children. Submitted by a pastor in a community with two military bases.

- On military members' birthdays, baptismal anniversaries, wedding anniversaries or other special occasions, send a signed card and possibly a small gift from the congregation. Submitted by Richard Sipe.
- Especially as National Guard units are called into service overseas, congregations can offer sending-off rites, with members, family and friends offering laying on of hands and pastors anointing with oil those who are going into harm's way. Submitted by the Rev. Linda Rahe, Whitehouse, OH.

How can individuals support their Christian family members and neighbors?

- Offer "spouse respite" by borrowing the children for an afternoon or offering to baby-sit while the "left behind" spouse does something fun.
- Pray (and invite others to pray) for the military and for their families and for all the innocent victims of war.
- Share telephone minutes with people whose families are in the areas of conflict, or make your Internet access available to them.
- An article in the March 2003 issue of *The Lutheran* magazine suggests sending food to the service members overseas and to their families, sending a devotional book and communicating often with them.
- Don't take "no" for an answer; military families do need your support, and sometimes are reluctant to admit that need or afraid they are asking too much. As time goes by, the needs grow, and spouses particularly need help maintaining their psychological as well as their physical health. Submitted by military spouse Brandy Stewart.
- Keep up to date with current events from a Christian perspective and become an advocate for peace and justice for people serving in conflict situations and their families. Encourage your lawmakers to work for peace in the Middle East and elsewhere.