

Bishop Smith's reflections—April 12, 2016



Among the many needs for pastoral ministry that we might highlight, today I lift up Federal Chaplaincies. Historically, the ELCA and its predecessor-body pastors have been among the most highly-regarded and sought-after clergy to serve as chaplains among our armed forces and in correctional facilities. Emphasizing both Word and Sacrament, Lutherans provide an ideal perspective for serving a broad spectrum of Christians, from liturgical and sacramental to free-form expression, from more literal interpreters of scripture to those less so. Chaplains serve non-Christians as well.

Bishop Eaton has chosen a military chaplain to serve as one of her assistants. Chaplain Eric Wester oversees Federal Chaplaincy within the ELCA, but another focus is recruitment of possible chaplains in active duty, the Reserves, and correctional facilities. Read more about [chaplaincy opportunities in the ELCA](#).

The North Carolina Synod is home to more military bases and personnel than most other synods. Because of that, we also are home to a number of military chaplains, both retired and active. Last week I received an email from one of our NC pastors, Lt. Col. Chris Webb, who serves in the Air Force Reserves as a chaplain in addition to being called as the Senior Pastor at St. Mark's in Asheville. Normally his chaplaincy work involves a few weekends and maybe a few weeks away each year, but periodically even in the Reserves a chaplain is called away for what is usually an 8-9 month deployment. Pastor/Chaplain/Lt. Col Webb left his wife and two children and congregation in Asheville at the end of January and won't return home until this fall. He is serving in an unnamed overseas location among active duty soldiers.



He gave me permission to share with you the following excerpts from his letter:

Ministry here is busy with many joys and challenges. The troops appreciate our ministry and I am blessed to interact with so many different people each day. The needs are great, my work is fulfilling, but it requires me to use different skills than I naturally use in the parish. The hardest part is not having my All Star staff around me to help with worship planning, bulletins, and power point slides. I pastor/lead three different services - Liturgical, Contemporary, and Gospel.

On Easter, I was honored to baptize (full immersion) a 50+ yr. old man in a newly-constructed baptistry that the civil engineers made out of spare parts lying around the base; 115 people were in attendance, which doubled the normal Sunday head-count. The Gospel service has become my favorite. My team of volunteer musicians is so dedicated and cheerful. There was no "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" played on a pipe organ. Instead the congregation likes to clap, sing, and sway to the music.

Everything here is a great learning experience, but I will be happy to return to St. Mark's when my tour is over. To give you a flavor of what my deployment ministry is like, here is a snapshot of what my Weekly Activity Report (WAR) looks like:

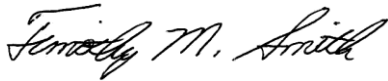
- Skilled counselor; devoted 5 hrs. to instill hope to 14 airmen
- Warrior Care focused; intentionally spent 27 hrs./52% of duty hours on unit engagement--visited/bolstered 953 troops

- Conducted nine worship services--spiritually nourished 300 attendees; Contemporary (60), Gospel (32), Palm Sunday Liturgical (6), Wed Night Liturgical (8), Maundy Thursday (6), Good Friday (9), Easter Liturgical (6), Easter Contemporary (115), Easter Gospel (58)
- Admired teacher/mentor; invested 7.75 hrs. on teaching/sponsoring 7 Faith Activities--enhanced spiritual fitness for 66 airmen
- Force multiplier; coordinated 25+ volunteers to donate/serve 101+ hours leading worship and/or Bible study
- A+ philanthropist; solicited church donations toward chapel coffee & worship ministry—saved USAF \$1,000+

I am sure that Chaplain Wester, Chaplain Webb, or any of the many active or retired military chaplains in NC, would be happy to speak with potential chaplains about possible service in this way. Southern Seminary has a new program for the training of military chaplains as well. Or you can let me, your bishop, know of your interest, and I'll try to point you in the right direction.

In the meantime, pray for Chaplain Webb and the women and men he serves and for all our military and correctional institution chaplains and the women and men and their families they serve. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. How about you?

In Christ,



Bishop Timothy Smith



North Carolina Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.