



FOR THE MILITARY CONTACT PASTOR:

Providing services on a military installation

It is ideal for military members to become active members of your congregation, but there are circumstances where it may be beneficial for you to conduct worship on a military installation. This may be as simple as individual communion, or in the case of multiple service members, as broad as a “satellite worship site.” This information is meant to help you start the process.

When is worship on a military installation appropriate?

Any time a member is restricted to the installation. Basic training is the most common situation, but restriction to the installation for punishment and temporary assignment for combat training are common as well.

When can you enter an installation and lead worship?

Only the service member can trigger this process. Your presence on the installation generally can happen only at their request. This right, known as “religious accommodation,” only applies when the regular process for providing religious services is found to be insufficient. If you want to know the process the service member needs to follow to make this request, see the Military Services Committee’s help guide for the service member at csm.welsrc.net/military.

When can this process start?

It should start right away. While you can’t compel the military to allow you on the installation, being known by the local chaplain community before a service member requests religious accommodation will help the process go smoothly.

How do I start?

Call the installation chapel and ask to speak to a chaplain. Explain who you are and that you want to be available as a resource for the day they have a WELS or ELS member in the command. Asking him or her to lunch would be appropriate.

Lunch? Really?

Yes, or something similar. Chaplains are legally responsible for taking care of their service members. Professional interaction will help them see what a positive resource you are. Take the opportunity to ask them about their duties. It can help you advise your members in the military on what they should and should not expect from their chaplain.

What can I expect?

No two chaplains are the same, and you may get anything from a cold refusal to a warm welcome to be part of the Command Religious Program. Each service, installation, and chaplain will handle outsiders a little differently.

What can I do to make this interaction go well?

You should respect that there are two aspects of a military chaplain's duties (see the table below), and most of what they do is not directly worship-related. From their perspective, even if the service member goes to you for worship, they still "belong" to that chaplain. This is not in a religious sense, but in the sense that they have been delegated by their commander with the responsibility to ensure that the service member is cared for.

Role of a military chaplain

As a religious ministry professional:	As part of their military duties, responsible to the commander to:
-Provide worship to those of their faith group. -Be a confidential counselor on life and morale matters to all members of the command.	-Enable the free practice of religion for all the members of their assigned command. -Maintain a knowledge of the morale within the command. -Provide ethical guidance to the members of the command, especially commanders.

Having trouble?

If you know that a service member has officially requested services and has been routinely denied, contact the WELS National Civilian Chaplain, Paul Ziemer (military@wels.net). He is connected to the chaplain program at the Department of Defense and can request assistance in ensuring that local commands respect their service members' constitutional rights.

Have you run into an unfriendly chaplain when trying to make a connection on base?

Unfortunately, there's not too much that you can do if they aren't denying someone the right to worship. Chaplains rotate every two to three years, so be persistent and look for new opportunities. Do you have a high-ranking active duty officer or enlisted member in your congregation who would be willing to make introductions?

What does this right look like?

A request for religious accommodation should either result in the command helping the service member get to your church for worship or official sanction for you to enter the installation to worship with that service member. That may mean a chaplain or enlisted member escorts you to and from a private area to conduct worship. It is unlikely you will get open access to the installation or permission to hold regular services. The only exception would be if there is a large and regular WELS or ELS presence on the installation, but this generally only occurs during wartime mobilizations.

IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY

The military is known for being specific about the use of terms. However, across branches and even installations, you will still find wide variation in the terms being used. In general, explaining in plain language who you are works the best, but here is a list of key words that you might use or hear.

Military installation/Installation: Property that falls under military jurisdiction and is generally off-limits to civilians. Each service uses different terms, and some services have multiple terms to describe the type of facility it is. Here are a few: camp, post, base, air base, air station, naval station, dockyard, arsenal, armory, training center.

Military chaplain: Chaplains are formally-trained religious ministry professionals and staff officers that are endorsed by an ecclesiastical organization and commissioned in the Armed Forces by the U.S. Government to ensure the free exercise of religion, provide specific religious ministry, and advise the commander within the pluralistic and unique military environment. To be a chaplain, they must have a master's degree with at least 72 semester hours, 36 of which must be in theology, as well as two to three years (depending on branch of service) of professional work experience in a civilian setting.

Enlisted religious affairs personnel: Sometimes called a chaplain assistant, the official name has recently been changed in both the Army and Air Force to "Religious Affairs Specialist," while the Navy calls them "Religious Program Specialists" or "RPs." Chaplains are paired with enlisted personnel that aid and supplement the chaplain's religious advisement and religious support missions. Each service trains their respective enlisted religious affairs personnel specifically for their service's chaplaincy prerogatives. The skills vary by service and mission set. One specific duty they often perform is the scheduling of worship facilities on the installation.

Civilian chaplain: A WELS term to describe a ministry professional called specifically to serve our military members, but not commissioned in the military. Military chaplains may or may not know exactly what this means.

Military contact pastor: A WELS term to describe pastors who serve the military communities near their congregation. This term will not be known outside the WELS.

Distinctive religious group: This describes a religious group that has its own distinct identity. WELS is officially recognized as a distinctive religious group by the Department of Defense through the Armed Forces Chaplains Board. This fact is not well known by WELS members in the military or military chaplains and may need to be explained.

Religious accommodation: The official term to describe the service member's right to request religious services that meet their specifications.

Ministry Day/Partner Day: These or similar terms describe an open house hosted by the installation chaplain community to get to know local church pastors. Not all installations offer this, but some do annually. You should attend whenever possible and get to know the local chaplains.

Head chaplain/Senior chaplain: These or similar terms describe the senior military chaplain on the installation. It is unlikely that you will meet or get to know this person. They are responsible for the religious programs for the whole installation and often have responsibilities to commands at the general or admiral level. Requests to see them will most likely be denied. Working with the subordinate chaplains is often better.

Unit chaplain: A chaplain who holds responsibilities to one specific unit. These chaplains deploy with the units they are assigned to.

Installation chaplain: A chaplain who is responsible for religious services on the base. They manage the local chapels and often hold regular religious services for their denominations.

Command Religious Program: This term describes the religious program established by commanders to ensure that the religious needs of everyone in their command are met. It is written and managed by the chaplain and can include outside religious professionals to meet the needs of the unit.

Have you encountered other terms and concepts that you would like to learn about? Contact the Military Services Committee of Special Ministries at specialministries@wels.net so that they can improve this document.