

- [Christian World News](#)
- [CBN NewsWatch](#)
- [Commentary](#)
- [Contact Congress](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Rebuilding Iraq](#)
- [Israel](#)
- [Health & Science](#)
- [Staff](#)



military evangelism

The Challenges of a Military Chaplain

By Lee Webb
CBN News Anchor

CBN.com – (CBN News) - On April 29, 2004, Army Chaplain Tim Vakoc was driving a Humvee in Iraq when a roadside bomb detonated.

The 44-year-old Vakoc lost his left eye and suffered massive head injuries. Miraculously, he survived the blast.

But today, he remains in a Minneapolis veterans hospital, where doctors say he is only minimally conscious. They say his chances of a full recovery are slim.

Chaplains will tell you that the risks are real, but they will also tell you they are necessary if they are going to do their jobs the way they should be done.

One chaplain declared, "You have to be visible. You have to run with the troops. If you go into an Army airborne unit, you got to be jumping with the troops."

Dave Peterson knows something about that. He served 30 years as an Army chaplain, including two tours in Vietnam and one during the first war with Iraq.

Today, Peterson works with several evangelical denominations, helping them supply the military with seminary-trained pastors willing to wear the uniform.

The number of evangelical chaplains is up. In the Air Force, for example, the Full Gospel Fellowship had no chaplains in 1994, but today they have 10.

At the same time, the number from more liberal mainline denominations has fallen.

The chaplaincy provides evangelicals with a great opportunity to spread the gospel, but some say doing so can be hazardous to a career.

Gordon Klingenschmitt was the chaplain onboard a Navy cruiser. He says his skipper had a problem with a sermon he preached.

"It was advertised as a Christian memorial service," Klingenschmitt said. "And it honored the Christian faith of one of my sailors who had passed away in a motorcycle accident. And, in that sermon, when I was preaching at his memorial, trying to honor his faith, I quoted John 3:3. I said, 'You must be born again.' I quoted John 3:36. I said, 'If anyone has the Son, he has eternal life. If you do not have the Son, you do not have



[Watch CBN Newswatch Now!](#)

Related Articles

[Providing Hope When Hope Seems Far Away](#)

[Christian Evangelism Grounded at Air Force Academy](#)

[A.F. Academy Report: No Overt Religious Intolerance](#)



[Pledge Express](#)



Become A CBN Partner

and receive Pat's new book: *Miracles Can Be Yours Today*

CBN Partners

See how you can make a difference everyday



- CALL TO ACTION -

- [Protect the Sanctity of Marriage](#)
- [Operation Supreme Court Freedom](#)
- [Support the Pledge of Allegiance](#)
- [Pray for our Troops](#)
- [Contact Congress](#)

eternal life."

Klingenschmitt said that sermon is the main reason he was given an unfavorable performance rating and reassigned to a shore job.

Navy brass remains tight-lipped about the formal complaint that Klingenschmitt filed.

Hillary Rodham Clinton is among two senators and three House members who have asked the Navy for an explanation of why it disciplined Klingenschmitt.

But even he admits that his active duty career probably is sunk. And Klingenschmitt is not the only one complaining.

A group of more than 60 chaplains have filed suit against the Navy, alleging bias against evangelicals in the recruiting and promotion process.

But not all evangelicals have encountered problems.

Some chaplains, from the conservative Presbyterian Church in America, were asked if there had ever been any incident in their careers where a commanding officer had told them they could say anything they wanted, but keep Jesus out of it.

One remarked, "I have not experienced that, ever."

Another said, "Commanders, by and large, are very supportive. They understand that you represent your denomination. In my case, I always tell people... forthrightly, I say, 'First and foremost, I am a Christian.'"

And another chaplain added, "There are certain occasions where you have to be thinking about what you are doing, how you're communicating - because we live and work in a pluralistic environment. So it's not like being in my church, and I'm the pastor of that church."

And this would be one of those occasions, the Memorial Day service at Arlington National Cemetery, attended by President Bush and hundreds of people of different faiths.

Captain George Ridgeway delivered the prayer, and was faced with the question of whether to pray in Jesus' name.

"And I thought about it," Ridgeway said. "And I prayed in a way that I thought would be comfortable to people: 'As a Christian minister, I ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, the One who showed us that true love is self-sacrifice. Amen.'"

When asked whether chaplains were allowed to pray in Jesus' name, Ridgeway replied, "There is no prohibition on praying in the name of Jesus. We just ask our chaplains to use the wisdom God has blessed them with."

Federal law states, "An officer in the Chaplain Corps may conduct worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member."

Admiral Burt himself is an evangelical, a Pentecostal. But he admits that the chaplaincy is not for everyone.

"If you feel the call of God, and you don't make the transition into institutional ministry, you may find it very difficult to continue just down, you know, the avenue that you've been raised in...I mean, I don't hold a Pentecostal service everywhere I go. I look at the people," Burt said.

Klingenschmitt remarked, "Every chaplain has their own decision on where they cross that line. And that is a very personal decision for every chaplain. And I appreciate my evangelical brothers. I appreciate the message that they're preaching. They're out there winning souls to Jesus Christ. And that's exactly what I was trying to. If they can do it and not get in trouble for it, more power to them. For me, I wasn't so lucky."



Klingenschmitt's evangelical brothers acknowledge that there are challenges out there, but they also affirm that the rewards are great.



[Printer-Friendly Version](#)



[Email to a Friend](#)

CBN IS HERE FOR YOU!

Are you seeking answers in life? Are you hurting?
Are you facing a difficult situation?

- [Find your way to peace with God](#)
- [Send us your prayer request online](#)
- [Call The 700 Club Prayer Counseling Center](#) at 1 (800) 759-0700, 24 hours a day.

A caring friend will be there to pray with you in your time of need.

[Home](#) | [The 700 Club](#) | [CBN News](#) | [Spiritual Life](#) | [Daily Life](#) | [Community](#) | [Shop CBN](#) | [About CBN](#)

© Copyright 2006. The Christian Broadcasting Network. [Contact](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Copyright](#) | [Jobs](#)