

Alliance Profile

Rev. Craig Muehler

President, Chaplain Alliance For Religious Liberty

By Chris Potts

What flavor are you?" It may seem an odd question, but it's a common one for chaplains in the U.S. military — and to the serviceman or woman asking, a pretty important one, says Rev. Craig Muehler, recently retired after 28 years as a Navy chaplain.

Understandably, a Methodist sailor likes to learn his chaplain is Methodist; a Catholic pilot hopes his *padre* is a Catholic. But come the crunch of life issues, unforeseen circumstances, or military crisis, "flavors" can quickly seem irrelevant. A soldier just wants someone to talk to.

"That's what's so beautiful and rewarding about being a chaplain," Muehler says, "the ability to be among them and serve them." And once a chaplain — whatever his faith — has been living, eating, running, slogging with those he serves for a while, "they know you're *their* chaplain. They don't even care what faith group you are."

Except when they do. Sometimes, the particular service a person in uniform requires contradicts the faith beliefs of a particular chaplain, or the traditions of his or her church. Baptists don't give last rites, Muslims don't believe in infant baptism, Catholics don't do same-sex weddings, etc.

At that point, it's the chaplain's responsibility to find a colleague who can better accommodate the soldier's request ... and Muehler's responsibility to defend that first chaplain's right to refrain from a duty that would violate his or her conscience.

Muehler is president of Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty (CALL), a nonprofit group that defends the religious freedom and constitutional rights of all military chaplains, whatever their denomination or religion.

Organized in 2011 with the help of Alliance Defending Freedom, CALL's work includes answering congressional questions on military issues, educating


officers on religious freedom in the military, helping chaplains navigate the military bureaucracy when they are questioned about their choices, and — when necessary — linking them up with attorneys from ADF and other groups who will defend their freedom through litigation.

It's a role steadily taking on more importance, Muehler says, as "encroachment from the government is getting stronger and trying to dictate what a chaplain can or can't do, what they can or can't believe." Although ADF attorneys helped CALL secure crucial legal protections for chaplains years ago through a resolution in the National Defense Authorization Act, Muehler says the so-called "Equality Act" that's been working its way through Congress this year could soon undo much of that.

Should the Act pass, Muehler says, he and many other chaplains are concerned over who will define some of the terms being thrown about in the escalating culture wars. "Extremism," for instance, is a label that, carelessly used, could "effectively outlaw certain churches and faith traditions for military personnel. It's just a slippery slope," he says.

"That's the struggle I see a lot of my young chaplains having," says Muehler. "They're getting pushed to ... compromise their conscience on some of these things. And I say, 'No. Don't do that. Be faithful to your God and your vows.'"

Muehler draws deep hope from the fact that God continues to raise up men and women who want to do something for their country through the military. "When you look at these young kids still going, volunteering to serve our nation," he says, "it's humbling.

"They know how to maneuver those waters, be faithful ... walking that line without compromising. [Serving] God and country — they still think that's achievable." 



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