

Reaching Out to Military Young Adults in Your Community

*"The difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer."
—U.S. Army Corps of Engineers motto during World War II*

Military chaplains arguably reach more young adults than any other young adult ministry. About two in three active-duty service members are between the ages of 18 and 30.¹ However, military chaplains are not the only people who minister to young adults who are currently serving in and who are veterans of the armed forces. Just like the people who care for them, those in military service come from a wide range of backgrounds and theological beliefs. Our churches can be sanctuaries of grace for veterans, current service members, their families, and us. When we care for service members and their families in our congregations, we're not caring for an outside group. We're caring for our siblings in Christ who may have spiritual needs we're not aware of.

The following are a few ideas on how your worshiping community can reach out to and support young adults in the military and veterans.

1. **Pray for peace.** Pray for our armed forces, for service members' families, for our leaders, for the areas of our world engulfed in violence, and for civilians caught in violence. Keep an ongoing prayer list of military members from the congregation or family members of someone in the congregation who are serving. Name them during the prayers of the people. Especially lift up those deployed in hostile environments.
2. **Get to know your worshiping community.** People in your community may have different relationships to military service, including:
 - a. Veterans
 - b. Current service members—including those in the reserves and National Guard
 - c. Spouses and/or children of service members
 - d. Parents and other family members of service members
 - e. Young people who will go into military service

1. "2012 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community," Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, accessed October 27, 2014, www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2012_Demographics_Report.pdf. That figure does not include those in reserves.

3. **Respect their boundaries.** Many service members and their families are reluctant to talk about their experiences. They may have a “you wouldn’t understand unless you were there” attitude, and many believe civilians don’t really care. Develop relationships with local therapists who specialize in military service treatment, and make connections if you believe a service member needs help beyond an empathic ear.
4. **Ask a veteran to help your church leaders understand the needs of service members.** Because of how frequently service members move, their families often live far away and are not able to help in emergencies. The congregation can step in as a surrogate family during times of crisis. Ask a veteran or service member to help your session or church leaders think about how they can support service members and their immediate family during a crisis. Be aware that reservists who are leaving active duty and returning home may have difficulty with readjustment and isolation as well.
5. **Talk with your children’s ministry and youth leaders about welcoming military children.** Children of service members constantly deal with being “the new kid,” even in church. While Sunday school and youth group may be great places for them to make connections, they may feel alienated by being new or may not be willing to make those connections because they think they’re just going to move again.
6. **Maintain contact with service members and their families.** Military families move regularly, and the service member may be split from his or her family because of deployment or other causes. Check the published military guidelines when sending care packages to service members abroad. Local papers, personal care items, handwritten notes, and emails are appreciated.
7. **Offer support groups for both veterans and active military members, or reach out with Stephen Ministers or deacons.** The veterans in your community can be key to reaching out to service members.
8. **Find ways to recognize your veterans and service members on Veterans Day and Memorial Day.** For example, encourage the wearing of military uniforms on special occasions.
9. **Reach out to military families.** Parents’ morning-out programs and specific Bible studies for service members and their families mean a lot, especially when the service member is away on duty or deployed.

10. **Learn about moral injury.** Veterans and service members coming home from war zones can have a huge impact on your ministry to the military. For more information, read *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* by Rita Brock and Gabriella Lettini.

11. **Connect with Presbyterians Caring for Chaplains and Military Personnel.** PCCMP endorses and provides pastoral care for Presbyterian military chaplains and their families. If you live near a military base, PCCMP can help connect you to local Presbyterian military chaplains. Learn more at pccmp.org or email info@pccmp.org.

For more ideas, see “Ministering to Military Families” by Rev. Hershel Don Yancey (available at <http://pccmp.org.s173675.gridserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Caring-for-Military-Families.pdf>).

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