

KEEPING FAITH: MANNING THE ARMY CHAPLAIN CORPS DURING PERSISTENT ENGAGEMENT

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**KEEPING FAITH: MANNING THE ARMY CHAPLAIN CORPS DURING PERSISTENT
ENGAGEMENT**

by

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By all predictions, the United States Army will continue to be involved in some form of persistent conflict or engagement for at least the next decade. In order to meet expanding mission requirements, the Army, and consequently, the Army chaplaincy, is likewise expected to continue to grow in officer allocations. In the active component deployable units, current doctrine and manning criteria call for one chaplain per battalion/brigade headquarters and between three to five chaplains per Division and higher headquarters. Since 1997, despite diligent efforts in chaplain recruiting and accessioning, those two means by themselves have not been sufficient to fill all the authorized active duty chaplain officer positions. This paper briefly examines the current strategic environment; it evaluates some current chaplain personnel management practices; it identifies possible Department of the Army level strategies for addressing the growing shortage of active duty chaplains; and it uses a systems approach and critical thinking to analyze potential second and third order effects inherent in each identified strategy with the aim of optimally shaping the Chaplain Corps to provide world-class religious support to the Army Family.

KEEPING FAITH: MANNING THE ARMY CHAPLAIN CORPS DURING PERSISTENT ENGAGEMENT

The United States Army of 2009 is faced with a crisis of manning. Like many of the other officer branches, the Army Chaplain Corps has been significantly challenged to recruit, accession, and retain sufficient numbers of qualified chaplain officers to keep pace with the growth of the Army's expanding force structure. History shows that having too few qualified clergy to minister to Soldiers at war is not a new phenomenon. In September of 1756, nearly twenty years before the United States declared its independence, a young George Washington, fighting in the French and Indian Wars, bemoaned his unit's lack of a chaplain to Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia when he wrote, "The want of a chaplain does, I humbly conceive, reflect dishonor upon the regiment."¹ While the challenge to fill the ranks of Army chaplains may not itself be a novel thing, meeting that challenge in today's world may require some new ways of thinking and new methods of personnel management that go beyond those to which the Army Chaplaincy has been accustomed.

In light of the personnel challenges the Army Chaplaincy faces today, this paper briefly examines the current strategic environment as it affects Army manning in general and current chaplain personnel management practices. It identifies possible Department of the Army level strategies for addressing the recurring shortage of active duty chaplains. Finally it employs both a systems approach and critical thinking to analyze potential second and third order effects inherent in each identified strategy. While the Army Chaplaincy faces manning challenges in the Reserve and National

Guard Components as well as the Active, this paper will focus, for reasons of space, primarily on the Active Component.

The Active Duty Army Chaplaincy Manning Situation

Since shortly after the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, the US Army has been heavily involved in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. In order to fight that war and continue with other ongoing missions, the active Army end strength has grown from 480K in 2001² to nearly 543K as of December 2008³. As a result of Army force structure growth, the number of active Army Chaplaincy allocations has likewise grown from 1,364 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2001 to 1,574 in FY 2009.⁴ By 2011, active duty Chaplain allocations are projected to reach 1,696,⁵ an increase of almost 25% in just ten years, with most of the growth at the Captain and Major levels.

However, chaplain accessioning and retention efforts have not, in recent history, kept up with the growth of the Chaplaincy allocations. The gap between allocations and on hand strength is compounded not only by force structure growth, but also by the annual attrition of chaplains who leave active duty due to retirement, resignation, inter-service transfer, administrative discharge, medical release, or death.

Simply put, for the last eleven years, there have typically been more chaplain allocations ("spaces") than chaplains in the inventory ("faces") to fill those spaces. From FY 1997 to FY 2007, the on-hand chaplain officer end strength lagged behind allocations for all but two years.⁶ In the worst years, 2001 and 2006, the total shortages were 81 and 91 respectively, representing a significant proportion of the total force not on hand. In 2007, the number of on-hand chaplains barely reached annual target

allocations by the ending day of the FY on 30 September. One day later, simply due to force structure growth projected for the new FY, the Chaplaincy immediately experienced a discouraging shortfall in on-hand end strength (faces) versus allocations (spaces) as the new FY began on 1 October.⁷ Fortunately, due to an increase in accessions and a decline in attrition, FY 2008 ended with a sufficient number of chaplains to meet projected end strength allocations for FY 2009. As the Army continues to grow, however, chaplain shortages, and the turbulence that accompanies those shortages, are likely to reappear.⁸

As the first quarter of FY 2009 closes, it is evident that the Army is nowhere near finished with its force structure growth, nor is it finished with the resultant manning shortages. Besides the ongoing GWOT commitment, the US Army will no doubt continue to play a major role in, what the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has recently called, an era of “persistent engagement.”⁹ The projected increase in Army missions that comprise these persistent engagements over the next decade has forced senior Army leadership to recently ask for an additional 30K Soldiers (including as many as 80 new chaplain allocations) beyond the 547K target established by the FY 2009 Defense Budget.¹⁰ It is clear, then, that for at least the next several years, the active Army chaplaincy can expect to see a continuation of the current trend: a corresponding growth of chaplain force structure and continued potential shortfalls in on-hand chaplain officer end strength. One aspect of Army policy that appears to compound this trend is the way chaplains are authorized. That policy is explained below.

How Army Chaplains Are Authorized and Allocated: The Unit Ministry Team Concept

For several decades now, Army doctrine (Field Manual 1-05, *Religious Support*) and manning criteria have established that a Unit Ministry Team (UMT), consisting of at least one Chaplain and one Chaplain Assistant, be assigned to authorizations within Army units.¹¹ Unlike the U.S. Air Force which primarily assigns chaplains to Air bases, and unlike the U.S. Navy which primarily assigns chaplains to vessels or installations, the Army intentionally embeds UMTs within units beginning at the battalion level. By authority of either a Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) or a Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA), Army UMTs are organic to the units they serve.¹² These TDAs and MTOEs—the bedrock force structure documents—identify the varying number, rank, and special qualifications of chaplains required in each UMT, depending on the mission, organization, and level of the unit. While there are many different types of units and authorizations where chaplains serve, in general, at least one chaplain is authorized for the headquarters of each battalion-level and higher unit, and is tasked to “support the religious, spiritual, and ethical needs of Soldiers and their Families, members of other services, and authorized civilians.”¹³

As with other officer branches, the Army G-1 allocates a certain number of active duty chaplain officers of each rank based on force structure authorizations and the Army Personnel Management Authorization Document (PMAD). The PMAD is used to develop a Congressionally-approved and budgeted Chaplaincy end strength for each FY. The total number of chaplain allocations is calculated by using the units' PMAD chaplain authorizations as a base, and adding to that number another allocation known as the Trainees, Transients, Holdees and Students (TTHS) account.¹⁴ The TTHS figure accounts for the number of chaplains in school, in medical hold, or in some other form

of transition status that makes them unavailable for assignment to a unit for religious support.

Since the UMT is the only structure the Army authorizes for providing religious support within a unit, an Army-wide shortage in the on-hand strength of chaplains means that some units must temporarily go without an assigned chaplain. A chaplain shortage, therefore, means that the Soldiers of units with no assigned chaplain do not receive organic, dedicated religious support. Commanders from units without chaplains must “borrow” religious support from Chaplains of other units, who fill in the gap via “area support” religious ministrations as they have time and resources available.¹⁵ In the current era of persistent engagement, it is no simple matter for each assigned UMT to accomplish the myriad tasks subsumed under the three major religious support functions of nurturing the living, caring for the dying, and honoring the dead¹⁶ within its own organic unit of anywhere from 300 to 1000+ Soldiers, let alone taking on the additional burden of attempting to provide the same level of support for units of equal size that are short of chaplains.¹⁷

One apparent solution which has been suggested for addressing similar shortages of chaplains in times past is to change the policy of assigning chaplains to units, and instead place them in chaplain “pools,” from which they could be dispatched to units “as required.” This model was extant during the Viet Nam era, and the persistent lack of religious support for troops in combat formations was one of the primary rationales for implementing the current practice of embedding UMTs in units. Reinstating such a model to relieve current chaplain shortages may on the surface appear to add some value by spreading the pain of too few religious support assets

over the entire Army. This would consequently lower unit commanders' and Soldiers' expectations of how often UMTs would be available and for how much support.

However, placing chaplains in pools would only exacerbate the problem of Soldiers not receiving adequate religious support, as government resource managers, charged with "creating efficiencies," would likely view large numbers of chaplains in chaplain-pure units as performing redundant functions and would no doubt eventually find ways to drastically reduce the number of allocations.

More importantly, decades of experience have proven that each commander and each unit at battalion level equivalent and above needs its own organic UMT that develops social, cultural, and spiritual bonds with that unit by intentionally and actively training with, fighting with, and sustaining that unit on a regular basis. The current situation of having a relatively few units that are temporarily without an organic, assigned chaplain due to the overall shortage is better than an entire Army receiving piecemeal religious support from a very few, randomly attached chaplains that have no significant spiritual connection with the units they are dispatched to serve. Rather than expecting commanders and senior chaplains in the field to "make do" with current and future chaplain shortages, the force needs a Department of the Army (DA) level strategy, devised and implemented by the Office of the Chief of Chaplains that will effectively minimize those shortages and manage the personnel needs of chaplains as a system.

DA Management of Chaplain Shortages: A Systems Approach

From a DA-level perspective, the shortage of chaplains means that the Office of the Chief of Chaplains (OCCH) must accomplish three missions. First, it must actively

recruit chaplains from a pool of clergy who are qualified to apply for accession to active duty. Second, it must assign already accessioned chaplains carefully, attempting to prioritize assignments of too few assets to units in greatest need. Third, OCCH must develop a strategy for accessioning and retaining qualified chaplains so that the end strength can keep up with the growing number of allocations. While chaplain assignment and recruitment are themselves monumental tasks worthy of study, this paper will focus primarily on the third mission: accessioning and retaining chaplains to maintain the end strength in order to keep pace with the growing force structure.

A key factor that the CCH must keep in mind when attempting to accomplish this mission is that officer personnel management (chaplain officers included) is best viewed as a system. Several Joint and Army publications define a system as “a functionally, physically and/or behaviorally related group of regularly interacting or interdependent elements that form a unified whole.”¹⁸ As with any true system, because of the inter-relatedness of its parts, it is not possible to ever just change one, single part of the Chaplain Corps’ personnel management system without that change having an effect on some other part of the system. As sociologist Robert Jervis says, “In a system we can never merely do one thing.”¹⁹ A solution that seems to perfectly solve one isolated problem in a system can easily create new problems in another part of that system; thus, any potential solution’s benefits needs to be balanced with the potentially negative effects it will have on system as a whole. A systems approach, therefore, is absolutely essential to Army chaplain personnel management, so that the CCH and his appointed personnel experts can see the potential effects each policy decision will have on all aspects of individual officers’ careers, the various demographic groupings of chaplains

(denominational affiliation, vocational specialty, rank), and the health and future viability of the Branch as a whole.

From an ends, ways, and means perspective, the end or objective that the Army's Chaplaincy Officer Personnel Management System hopes to meet is that all Soldiers and Family members have a fully-qualified chaplain to whom they can turn for religious support.

Following is a suggestion of some of the personnel management tools (means) available to the Chief of Chaplains and some projections for how those means can be used (ways) to maintain the number of on-hand chaplains at or near the number of allocations. As each ways and means is considered, the possible second and third order effects of its implementation on the overall system of chaplain personnel management are also presented.

Adjust Accessioning Standards. In order to increase the number of clergypersons who are accessioned to active duty, the Army Chief of Chaplains (CCH) has some limited power to adjust accession requirements. This is done in consultation with the Army G-1 Officer Accessions Branch and by approval of the Secretary of the Army by means of waivers for age, professional work experience, and other exceptions to law and policy. The active duty Chaplaincy needs ministers who can meet not only the Army's Officer commissioning requirements, but who also have the specialized education, moral leadership, spiritual maturity, and pastoral competence needed to serve as chaplains. To accession chaplains from among the best qualified applicants, the Chief of Chaplains (CCH) conducts several Advisory Selection Boards each year modeled after Department of the Army Secretariat Selection Boards. The CCH

provides guidance to these Advisory Boards regarding what percentage of applicants are to be selected, what qualifications are absolutely required and where, if any, exceptions to those qualifications can be made.²⁰

One accession standard where exceptions can be made is maximum age. The current maximum acceptable age for fully qualified applicants with no prior military experience is 42 years.²¹ To increase the number of applicants who are qualified for active duty, the CCH could waive the maximum age standard within certain limits of the law, so that those who would have been otherwise disqualified because they were too old are now eligible to serve. For many ministers, the older they are, the more experience they have had in providing ministry. This experience could certainly be viewed as a plus when dealing with the many, complex religious support needs of today's Soldiers and Families.

However, if the CCH continued to modify accession age standards to allow ministers of increasing age to serve, another problem could result. Newly accessioned chaplains serving their first two or three tours of active duty are usually assigned to battalion-level units, where physical fitness expectations are often at their highest. While some exceptions certainly exist, it is true for most adults that physical conditioning, flexibility, and energy levels tend to decrease with age. Thus, relaxing the maximum age standard could cause not only adjustment issues for older chaplains attempting to assimilate to Army life, but could even result in those chaplains being given officer evaluation ratings (OERs) below that of their younger peer captains (non-chaplains) for failing to maintain as high a physical conditioning standard or for failing to

display as youthful a vitality as their peers. Either consequence could then cause higher attrition, which would only serve to worsen the shortage problem.

Another accessioning standard that the CCH can adjust in order to receive greater numbers of clergy applicants is professional work experience (PWE). The Army Chaplaincy currently requires a minimum of two years PWE which must be validated by the applicant's faith group as legitimate pastoral ministry work prior to becoming an active duty chaplain.²² By reducing the PWE time to eighteen months or one year, the CCH could potentially reap a number of clergypersons who were otherwise qualified, but simply lacked the required minimum experience. The 24-month requirement could then be reinstated once the force is stabilized.

The question for the Army Chaplaincy then becomes whether it is preferable to accept the risks associated with less experienced Chaplains or conversely, to take the risks involved when units must temporarily be without the direct support of an assigned chaplain. The high stresses today's Soldier faces, including frequent exposure to danger, carnage, and death; multiple separations from loved ones; and long-term deprivations from creature comforts are well known and well documented. Such stressors demand that the Army bring in and keep Chaplains whose experience equips them to provide spiritual coping skills for Soldiers at all levels of distress, give sage advice to Commanders and other leaders, and offer a wide variety of religious support venues in even the most austere environments.

While no official studies that correlate pre-Army Chaplaincy pastoral work experience with performance as an active duty Army chaplain are known to exist, it is reasonable to assume that at least in a number of cases, the more experience a

minister has in helping people with vast and intense spiritual needs—like Army Soldiers have—the better able he/she is to provide for those needs. Arguably, day-to-day ministry at the battalion level may not appear to have a lot in common with the day-to-day ministry of most civilian clergypersons. However, the more experience would-be chaplains have at mastering the fundamental pastoral skills of practicing spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines, establishing pastoral identity, conducting religious rites, relating meaningfully to people, and helping others establish and nurture their relationship to God, the better able they will be to minister to Soldiers. Thus, reducing PWE requirements to less than two years may incur some risks that need to be considered.

Increase Promotion Opportunity. Another set of ways and means for maintaining on-hand chaplain strength in a time of shortages has to do with officer promotions, specifically promotion opportunity. Promotion opportunity, as defined by Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 1320.14, “is calculated by taking the maximum number of recommendations that may be made by the promotion selection board and dividing that number by the number of officers in the zone [of consideration].”²³

Since the implementation of the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) in 1981, Army Officer Personnel Management Systems (OPMS) have used the field grade officer promotion opportunity targets of 80% for Major, 70% for Lieutenant Colonel, and 50% for Colonel.²⁴ Because the Army Chaplain Corps manages its own personnel with regard to promotion, it is not bound by the “year group” restrictions that the Active Competitive Category uses. As a result, the CCH has been able to adjust the number of officers being considered for promotion at each board,

thereby allowing the Chaplain Corps to regulate and modify its proximity to DOPMA promotion opportunity targets throughout the implementation of DOPMA.²⁵

As an example of how promotion opportunity can be a means for mitigating chaplain shortages, imagine that the Army Chaplaincy is faced with a shortage of chaplains at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (LTC). In that case, the CCH, in consultation with the Army G-1 and upon approval by the Secretary of the Army, has the authority to request that the next promotion selection board select a greater number of chaplains from the number of those Majors being considered for promotion to LTC than was previously scheduled. Rather than constraining the board to only select officers until the DOPMA recommended target of 70% is reached, the CCH can, on a board by board basis, request that the selection rate be raised to 80%, 90%, or any number above 70%, even up to 100%, if the CCH has ample justification (such as Army manning requirements) to warrant such an increase. This measure alone would temporarily yield more promotable chaplains than the normal promotion target opportunities would have yielded, who could be assigned at the next higher rank.

However, the tool of increasing promotion opportunity is not without its potentially negative side effects. When a larger than usual number of officers is promoted in a short time span, that large number creates what is sometimes called a “bubble,” that is likely to cause future problems for career management. As that bubble of promoted officers becomes eligible for the next grade, unless the promotion opportunity is again increased far beyond the norm, that particular cohort of officers will experience what appears to be a heavier than usual toll in terms of non-selection for promotion. This could have a negative impact on morale, which may then increase attrition.²⁶

A further negative side to an increase in promotion opportunity is the vacancy that the promotion creates in the next lower rank. To continue with the example given above, the only way to create more LTCs is to promote more Majors than were originally scheduled for a given FY. More Majors becoming LTCs means there are now less Majors to fill the Major positions. As a result of “fixing” the shortage of LTC chaplains by increasing promotion opportunity, the fix has created a new problem—a shortage of Majors. That new shortage in Majors can then only be remedied by an increased promotion of Captains, which then creates a new shortage at *that* rank, where the Chaplaincy historically has its greatest shortage of chaplains. Thus, given that the Captain rank is the most under-resourced, accelerating promotions via greater promotion opportunity may create more challenges than solutions. This is a perfect example of why chaplain personnel management requires a systems approach, in that every action on one apparently isolated part of the system affects the rest of the system.

Perhaps one of the most significant ramifications of increasing promotion opportunity is that the quality of officers selected then comes into question. If there is value in the Army’s time-honored promotion system that requires selection boards to choose only the best qualified officers based on their performance records and professional files, then one must ask how much value there is in promotion operations when the selection rate nears 100% and virtually all who are considered are selected?²⁷ Again, common sense and experience indicate that the Army needs some form of criteria that can be used to promote the best officers, while simultaneously preventing officers who are clearly not performing from advancing too far.²⁸ While chaplains who are non-select for promotion can certainly continue to make valuable contributions to

the Army, the Army Chaplain Corps must participate in the current Army-wide “up-or-out system,” and thus must consider the quality vs. quantity argument when it comes to adjusting promotion opportunity.

A final negative effect of increasing promotion opportunity is that when there is a promotion opportunity “jump” in one single board, officers who were not selected for promotion by other boards that were more stringent could potentially feel slighted, which could then result in equal opportunity grievances being filed with the Inspector General. An officer non-selected for promotion by boards immediately preceding or following the high-opportunity board could even file a lawsuit claiming that his/her selection board was comparatively unfair, in accordance with Department of Defense guidance²⁹ and Title 10, U.S. Code.³⁰ These documents state that the military services will offer relatively similar promotion opportunities over any given five-year period in each grade. Even if no official litigation or grievance is initiated, the appearance of a “favored” cohort of officers that were the beneficiaries of an abnormally high promotion opportunity board could have a considerably negative effect on morale, which could again increase attrition and worsen the shortage problem. Thus, increasing promotion opportunity, while it remains a viable tool for stabilizing the force, should be employed with great caution.

Adjust Promotion Timing. Another promotion-related tool that the CCH can use as a ways and means to manage chaplain shortages is the adjustment of promotion timing. Promotion timing is defined as the “12-month average of the total active commissioned service for due-course officers promoted during each month of the fiscal year.”³¹ In other words, the promotion timing for a given cohort of Chaplains measures

the average of how many years it took for clergypersons in that cohort with no prior commissioned officer experience to go from their initial date of commissioning until they pinned on the rank being measured. The DOPMA targets for promotion timing for all Army field grade officers is 10 years +/-1 year for Majors; 16 years +/-1 year for LTCs; and 22 years +/-1 year for Colonel.³² Historically, the CCH has been able to manage active duty chaplain promotions so that field-grade promotion timing measurements for due-course chaplains have remained fairly close to the DOPMA targets.³³

In order to relieve shortages of chaplains at any given rank, the CCH can, in consultation with the Army G-1, reduce promotion timing by granting specific cohorts of promotable officers earlier promotion dates than were previously scheduled. Typically, the list of a cohort of chaplains selected for promotion will be exhausted within the fiscal year following the release of that promotion list. The more the CCH reduces the time a chaplain waits between the date of the announcement of his/her selection for promotion and the date he/she actually pins on the rank, the more rapidly the allocations for that rank will be filled. However, rank allocations being attained more quickly than normal can again cause either the “bubble” effect or the perception of unfairness by other cohorts as mentioned above under promotion opportunity.

Another method for reducing shortages at the lower ranks of Captain and Major, where Chaplaincy shortages are often most critical, is to *increase* promotion timing for only LTCs and/or Colonels. Forcing promotable Majors and LTCs to wait longer between promotion selection date and pin-on date allows a corresponding delay in the time required for Captains and Majors to fill the vacant allocations of those Majors and LTCs, respectively, who are promoted to LTC and Colonel. As indicated earlier, for

every Colonel the Army promotes, an LTC is necessarily taken out of the LTC on-hand inventory; subsequently, every LTC that leaves the LTC inventory must be replaced by a Major, who must be replaced by a Captain. Since the Army Chaplaincy usually suffers its most crucial shortage at the Captain level, where attrition is highest, any strategy that helps preserve Captains in the inventory must be considered.

Increasing promotion timing has its potential negative effects, however. As with other aspects of promotion mentioned above, morale issues again come into play. Officers, including chaplains, who have waited years for promotion and have watched others before them reach the respective higher ranks within fairly consistent and predictable time periods can become distraught if they are suddenly told that their cohort will have to wait several more months, if not a year or multiple years to reach the same ranks. Even if senior leadership tries to assure chaplains that their extra wait time to promotion is for the good of the Chaplain Corps, and is not being done with malice or because of mismanagement, but simply to help mitigate chaplain shortages due to unprojected growth, affected chaplains are likely to become somewhat discouraged. As stated previously, the impact of negative morale is the potential for greater attrition, which would again only exacerbate the original problem of chaplain shortages.

A further limit to the effectiveness of increasing promotion timing is that current Army policy mandates that promotions from a specific promotion list will begin within a period of no more than nine months after the date that list is released.³⁴ If promotion timing is increased too far, then there will eventually be an entire fiscal year, perhaps even multiple years, when no promotion selection board is necessary at all. This would again likely have a negative effect on morale and could possibly increase attrition.

Additionally, as pointed out earlier, Department of Defense guidance and U.S. Law indicate that a healthy, well-managed officer corps in any branch is one that is able to hold fairly predictable promotion boards on a regular, recurring basis.³⁵ Furthermore, an increase in promotion timing may temporarily solve a shortage problem, but at some point, if not used in moderation, it could eventually exceed DOPMA standards to the point that it jeopardized the otherwise healthy promotion pyramid of the Chaplain Branch.

Recall Retirees. Title 10, U.S. Code authorizes the Army to recall retired chaplains to active duty to serve additional years beyond their retirement date to meet the needs of the Army.³⁶ For each retiree recall, the CCH must request an exception to policy through the Army G-1 from the Secretary of the Army on a case by case basis. The CCH has been using this tool in a limited way for several years, especially to meet the needs of critically short faith groups, like Roman Catholic priests. Rather than promoting chaplains to the senior ranks of Major, LTC, and Colonel, which then causes a corresponding turbulence in the ranks of LTC and Major, as well as a worsened shortage of Captains as presented above, the CCH could utilize retirement recall in a limited fashion as a ways and means of mitigating shortages at the critically-short Captain level. This would entail recalling a relatively small number of qualified field grade chaplains to fill positions as needed across the Army.

If those recalled Colonels, LTCs, and Majors are assigned to positions of one rank lower than the rank they hold, then current Army manning policy allows them not to be counted against rank-specific end strength for the purposes of promotion projection.³⁷ Thus, recalling a limited number of retired chaplains, for periods of two to

three years, to fill critical positions at one rank below their retired rank would allow the active duty ranks to hold continued promotion selection boards, yet would help alleviate shortages. An additional benefit of the retiree recall option for the individual chaplains concerned is that they continue to earn increased retirement salary benefits while they are being paid for full-time military service. Retirees recalled to active duty also receive all the benefits (housing, medical services, life insurance) that any non-retired, active duty chaplain receives. Furthermore, recalled retirees do not receive OERs, and do not compete for promotion, which lessens the administrative burden on both the individuals and the command to which they are assigned.

As with the other ways and means discussed above, because chaplain personnel management is a system, the retiree recall option can cause changes to the rest of the system that are not all positive. One problem with recalling retirees is that it can still create an unintended slow-down in the promotion timing (promotion rate), especially if the Army G-1 begins enforcing certain manning policies that have been somewhat relaxed during the GWOT era. In those cases, for every Colonel that is allowed to retire, then immediately re-enter active service, one less LTC is now eligible to either be selected for promotion, or if already selected, to pin on the rank of Colonel since the overall number of Chaplains in each rank has a cap mandated by law and enforced by the Army G-1.³⁸ There may also be a sense amongst both non-chaplain line officers and chaplains alike, that since recalled retirees do not receive official ratings, they are not as accountable to command authority as they would be or should be, if they were rated. While there is plenty of debate about how well the current OER system works,³⁹

this particular criticism does not appear too significant at present, but should at least be considered.

Offer Retention Bonuses. To encourage Captain chaplains to remain on active duty, especially those who would otherwise have chosen to resign due to the hardships associated with the current dynamic of multiple deployments, the CCH could seek funding for retention bonuses. In 2006, the Army G-1 requested the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) provide funding for Captains in certain year groups that were showing critical shortage levels.⁴⁰ So far, those bonuses, which included cash, schooling options, and assignments of choice in exchange for increased service obligations, appear to have helped the Army retain some officers who would have otherwise resigned.⁴¹ The Army Chaplaincy was not eligible for these retention bonuses, because Captain chaplain attrition rates were well below the cut-off figure of 8.5% established by the OSD.⁴²

Two significant facts that have previously been mentioned bear emphasis here: for the past decade and for the projected future, the majority of the Chaplaincy force structure growth is at the Captain level, and the highest attrition rates are historically also at the Captain level. Consequently, the greatest shortage of chaplains is always felt at the Captain level, typically, at the echelon of battalion or its equivalent. Therefore, any ways or means that helps “preserve” qualified Captain chaplains in the end strength has merit as a potential shortage mitigation option. It seems likely that a number of Captain chaplains who were otherwise planning to resign, would willingly accept another three-year service obligation in exchange for cash or some other retention incentive.

However, if the CCH were to request and receive approval for retention bonuses as an exception to policy, it could cause some of the same concerns that the Army-wide initiative caused. Those concerns include questions about what caliber of officer is retained in the Army if money is the primary incentive, and what may be the potential negative morale consequences on cohorts of officers that have sacrificed just as much, for perhaps even longer periods, but did not—and likely will not—ever receive a similar bonus. Because of its uniquely heightened emphasis on the chaplaincy as a sacred vocation that comes from a selfless allegiance to service “For God and Country” (the Army Chaplaincy motto), the Army Chaplain Corps should be extra careful in seeking retention bonuses, especially those involving cash.⁴³

Adjust Time In Service (TIS) Requirements. In order to alleviate shortages, some officer branches have requested that OSD approve war-time-only waivers of the statutory requirement for officers to serve a total of eight years.⁴⁴ Currently Title 10, U.S. Code and Army Regulations do not provide options for waiving this eight-year military service obligation (MSO). As of 2008, the CCH, in concert with other special branches, has requested an exception to law and policy in order for the Chaplain Corps to attract and acquire a limited number of otherwise qualified clergy who do not have sufficient time (either by way of age or time in service) to complete the full eight years MSO. Recruiters are likely to have numbers of applicants standing by who would be willing to serve for just three years of active duty. To protect both the Army and the applicants, these chaplains would be required to sign a legally-binding memorandum of understanding that the Army could not force them to remain on active duty after the last

day of their original commitment, and that they would not be eligible for retirement or other long-term military benefits.

A potentially negative result of implementing this program would occur only if the program were overused. In other words, if too many chaplains were accessioned with only a three-year commitment, eventually there would not be a sufficiently robust pool of longer-term Captains from which to promote Majors. Since it is probable that the OSD will only allow the MSO waiver program during a time of national emergency, and will expect the Services to submit thorough analyses regarding the effectiveness of the program on a regular basis, overuse of this option does not appear likely to occur.

The Way Ahead

It is evident from the available data and the analysis presented above that there are several ways and means available to the CCH for decreasing the current chaplain shortages and meeting the end goal of having sufficient numbers of qualified chaplains available for all Army Soldiers and Family members, despite projected allocations growth and continued attrition. In light of what is presented here, the best way to effectively mitigate the current shortages while still maintaining the health of the Chaplain Corps is to implement a combination of the options presented. The two options of increasing the maximum accessioning age beyond 42 years and waiving the professional work experience to less than two years appear to incur more risk than would outweigh the solutions they offer. They are the least viable options. However, the other options have greater merit, so long as they are used in moderation.

For example, a temporary, slight increase in promotion opportunity of between five and seven percent for field grades would help fill some vacancies without creating

too significant of a bubble effect or excessively affecting the quality of the officers selected. A concomitant, slight lengthening of promotion timing on a periodic basis for LTC and Colonel (three to five months every other FY for no more than six total FYs) would likewise slow down the rate of vacancies caused by promotions to Major and LTC, yet would not stagnate promotions significantly. The retiree recall option also represents a viable shortage mitigation tool, if used sparingly and in accordance with the “one-down” criteria presented above, so long as the number of retirees recalled per year does not cause a considerable, unintended slowdown in promotion timing. Likewise, the MSO waiver program, if approved by OSD and managed properly by OCCH, could be used to bring in ten to fifteen chaplains per year for shortened tours of two to three years, during times of crisis with minimal negative effects on the Chaplain personnel management system. As implied throughout this paper, since the greatest liability to force balance is in the Captain ranks, most of the shortage mitigation efforts need to concentrate there first.

To make these proposed changes effective, it is recommended that the OCCH maintain frequent and open communication with the rest of the Branch through the OCCH Monthly Newsletter and other methods about what policies are in effect and why. A clear understanding of why certain policies are implemented would do much to reduce the challenges to morale and the other personnel turbulence that the changes may cause. It will also be more necessary than ever for the OCCH to closely monitor the second and third order effects of any newly implemented shortage mitigation tool on officer grade distribution, proximity to DOPMA targets for promotion timing and

opportunity, quality of chaplains selected for promotion, and Branch morale as it affects attrition.

Whatever ways and means are used to shape the Chaplain Corps, the CCH should be wary of repeating mistakes like those made by senior service leaders during the military drawdown of the 1990s, when, as one military analyst put it, some leaders chose “policies detrimental to the long-term interest of their service, in favor of the immediate needs of current service members.”⁴⁵ Perhaps the most important point to remember is that because chaplain personnel management is a human system, any proposed method that appears to decrease chaplain shortages will need to be carefully evaluated in light of how it changes other aspects of the system as a whole.

Given the current shortage of chaplains and the potential for its continued duration over the next several years, the Army Chaplaincy cannot afford to wait too long to act, but must continue to take careful, prayerful steps to relieve that shortage, while simultaneously ensuring that the long-term health of the Chaplain Corps continues to be a high priority. In these challenging times of persistent engagement, the Army’s Soldiers and Family members deserve to continue to receive the very best religious support that the Army Chaplaincy can provide. Likewise, the chaplains who serve those Soldiers and Family members deserve the highest quality personnel management and branch management that the Army can provide them.

Endnotes

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³⁰ *Establishment of Promotion Zones*, U.S. Code, Title 10, Chapter 36, Section 623, (b), (4), <http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/10C36.txt> (accessed January 1, 2009).

³¹ DoD Instruction 1320.14, 15.

³² Schirmer, *Challenging Time in DOPMA*, 12.

³³ Chaplain (LTC) Whiteside, telephone interview by author, December 30, 2008. Unlike most active competitive category officers who enter the Army as Second Lieutenants and are promoted to Captain after four-plus years of active federal commissioned service (AFCS), chaplains with no previous commissioned officer experience enter active duty as First Lieutenants and are promoted to Captain after six months service on active duty. This is due to the three years or more of constructive credit given to chaplains because of their pastoral experience. Therefore, when the Army G-1 calculates AFCS years for chaplains, that figure typically includes at least three years of constructive credit.

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