

Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation

Getting Started



Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation

How to Begin Your Ministry and Program Suggestions

*“Having somewhere to go is home.
Having someone to love is family.” unknown*

**Making Our Congregations Safe and Caring
Places for All**

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TO: Pastors/Team Leaders
Veteran/Military Friendly Congregations

FROM: CAPT Lyman Smith, CHC, USN, Retired
Executive Director, Military Chaplains Association

SUBJECT: Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation Ministry

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation or Ministry Center. Our veteran and military members and their families are the bedrock of America. They have served our nation with pride and great sacrifice and continue to be integral and contributing members of our communities. Though not damaged goods, they often have special needs and are always worthy of commendation for the ministry they have and continue to perform. By undertaking this task, you join with many others in bearing a special ministry to provide these members and friends with the love and support they need.

This Manual is provided to assist you in becoming a Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation (VMFC). The process, though not difficult, does take time and dedication. Here you will find suggestions and guidelines as well as a list of ministry programs. These programs have been developed in congregations, just like yours, and have been proven in the pews. You will need to make them your own as each congregation and organization is unique. Overall, they will provide a starting point from which you can move forward in this exciting and rewarding new ministry.

The Ministry Programs here and in the reference, are designed to:

- Help your congregation maintain an awareness of the existence and needs of those sacrificing their time and effort to support our country, including those in your congregation who are veterans or currently serving members.

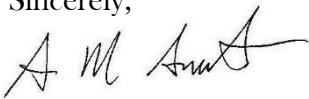
- Create an environment of acceptance for extended family members who worship with you or may visit your congregation.
- Provide an acceptance of the physical, material, and spiritual needs of military members, veterans, and their families.
- Assist your congregation and your members in a ministry designed to meet the special needs of veterans and their families.

We have sought to make these suggested programs simple and straight-forward, low cost, adaptable within any faith-context, and customizable to fit the profile and demographics of your congregation.

Thank you for your commitment to implement a Military Ministry for your congregation. Please refer regularly to MCA-USA.org and go to the [Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation](#) drop down box where updates to this document can be found. Additional information can be found on the site's web pages by clicking on the Red Menu item entitled "Congregation Programs".

The use of names in this document is intended to be applicable to all faiths and terminology and not be restricted to any one group. We realize men and women from every faith or non-faith serve our nation and we believe all should receive support. Please let us know if terminology can be updated to ensure this inclusiveness. All contacts should be made to our office at info@vmfc-usa.org, 703-533-5890.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lyman Smith", written in a cursive style.

Lyman Smith, Executive Director

Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation Ministry

Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation Implementation Manual

GETTING STARTED

The Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation Ministry's purpose is twofold. First, to provide a visible sign to those that visit the congregation that they understand and are sympathetic to the needs of veterans and their families. Second, to provide acknowledgement to the congregation and their leaders of their sincere and earnest efforts to support veterans and their families.

Research shows that clergy and congregation leaders, not psychologists or other mental health experts, are often the people first sought for assistance in times of distress. Often the clergy person can not only assist through spiritual guidance but also assist distraught individuals in receiving therapy from professional clinicians, often with the help of their community of faith.

A. Congregational Leaders/Lay Leaders

Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation leaders are instrumental in forming a Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation (VMFC). The VMFC Program's purpose is twofold.

First, it provides a visible sign, demonstrated through the congregation's activities and communications, to members and visitors that the congregation recognizes the needs of veterans and their families.

Secondly, it acknowledges sincere and earnest efforts to support veterans and their families. It is an "intentional" framework for support and ministry instituted, adopted, and supported by the congregation.

B. VMFC's annually renew their participation as below:

1. *Adopt one or more of the Military Ministry Programs or other programs as approved and agreed to in discussions with the **Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation Oversight Council (OC)**.
2. Advertise the existence of the Military Ministry Program(s) in one or more of the congregation publications (service bulletins, newsletters, etc.) at least twice a month throughout the year, so that their existence is easily visible to visitors, members, and leadership of the congregation.
3. Grant permission to **OC** to list the congregation as a *VMFC* on the Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation website.
4. Annually renew your commitment to the three items above.
5. **OC will send a renewal letter and will ask that you return it within 30 days.**

Each *VMFC* will receive a certificate from OC for establishing and maintaining a program ministry that elevates awareness and creates an environment of acceptance toward, and supports the needs of active military, veterans, families, and caregivers.

6. Principles to consider:

- No faith community is required to violate the tenants of its faith.
- No congregation is required to adopt the programs of another *VMFC*.
- Each congregation is to implement the sample programs as best fits their need. Every military ministry is customizable to each congregation. The leaders of the congregation will determine the shape or their ministry.

- **C. Step One (1): Forming a Core Team**

Congregational Leaders/Lay Leaders should obtain approval for this ministry through their congregation's usual and customary methods. Each VMFC should seek a volunteer or volunteers from the congregation who is(are) not part of the official ministry team of the church. Experience has proven this to be vitally important to the ministry. These volunteers may be veterans of families or veterans themselves. They must have a heart for the ministry and have time to invest in the project.

Once identified and given opportunity to agree to the call, these members should be formally constituted as the ***Veteran's/Military Friendly Core Team (VMFCT)***. Ideally this would be done at a public meeting so other members can recognize the ministry and those who have committed themselves to its support. The VMFCT should then work out its relationship to the spiritual leader and the other official members of the leadership team. Clear lines of communication and support are essential to avoid disappointment and frustration. The VMFCT should select a leader from their members to serve as the lead liaison for the team. This individual would then be identified as the main point of contact for all VMFC ministry related to the congregation.

Suggestion - List the key persons, Ministry Leaders, etc., with which to discuss this ministry, i.e., Congregational leader, lay leadership ministry, and administrative board. (Expand list as necessary)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

D. Step Two (2): The VMFCT decides on the meeting time and agenda

E. Step Three (3): The VMCT decides how to initially implement the veteran friendly programs chosen for the congregation

A list of suggested programs is on page eleven (11) for your consideration. You may also decide on your own when starting your *VMFC*. You can also implement other ideas that your congregation creates on its own.

In considering your ministry programs, please add the following in your planning process:

- Have a solid program or statement available on a regular basis to publicize your ministry. **DO NOT** publicize only on veteran/military holidays or during special events.
- Seek military families and other veterans and currently serving members. **DO NOT** wait until they come to you.
- Speak out regularly so all can hear about the *VMFC* ministry.

List of Ideas and Programs

1. Use your church website to advertise: “We are a Veteran/Military Friendly Church,” or “We support military and their families.” Include military missions in your website, e.g. ***WE SUPPORT OUR VETERANS.***
2. Create a logo that can be recognized as a church that is a safe place for military, veterans, and supporters of military. You may use the VMFC logo if desired.
3. Get the word out through social media – Facebook, Twitter, etc.
4. Coordinate with other ministries in your congregation, and with other congregations.
5. Structure your military ministry thoughtfully – homeless veterans, pastoral care, re-entry, etc.
6. Create a re-integration TEAM to focus on the veterans and families in special need.
7. Conduct a survey of your congregation to determine who are veterans, who is currently serving, and who are family members of these two groups. Once identified it will be easier to focus your activities around these individuals and their unique needs.
8. Provide forums to inform your congregation of how they may volunteer to support the ministry.

F. Step Four (4): Initiate this ministry in your congregation

1. List ways in which you plan to initiate this ministry in your congregation by using ideas from the list above or add additional thoughts.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

2. Determine your approach to communicate and advertise the *VMFC* ministry throughout the congregation, i.e., monthly newsletters, weekly service bulletins, emails, lawn signage, websites, social media, etc. Designate responsibilities and support arrangements. Get buy in.

3. Program Leader	Strategy	Funding
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		

Funding is critical. The *VMFC* Ministry is a fairly low demand program financially. But funding is still critical to its success. Consider various fund-raising events for your congregation and community.



Ministry Program Descriptions

Successful programs in use at VMFCs

(for full details see the Program Guide)

Prayer List Identification - Spiritual Support and Care

GOAL: Highlight in the Congregation Prayer - List those who are deployed and/or those who have returned. This will help build awareness of the military needs in the congregation and create acceptance for those that see that this congregation ‘cares’. This list should include people directly associated with the congregation as well as those related to or indirectly associated.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: \$0 to \$50 - Some costs might occur if you decide to send letters or provide a quality book to display the lists for view in a public location of the congregation

Dedicating An Existing Program to The Military Serving Overseas

GOAL: By dedicating an existing meeting or event to the military members in your midst, and advertising the dedication to the congregation, awareness of the ministry is communicated to each member of the congregation. The acceptance of military members and their families is reinforced to those military family members who are part of the congregation or are considering joining the congregation.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: \$0 (as this is meant to merely ‘piggyback’ on an already existing funded event.)

Ministry Connectivity - Leverage Existing Ministries

GOAL: This program is a simple idea but can make a significant impact both on the help provided to veterans and family members, as well as speeding up how quickly the ministry can be effective.

The goal is to review all the other Ministries that exist in your congregation and determine if the need(s) satisfied by each can be useful to a veteran or someone in a military family. You want to see if the integration of the Military Ministry into regular Congregation Ministries and vice versa is possible. Once the review is done, then conduct follow-up discussions and negotiations with these ministry leaders to gain their support and determine how the combined resources and processes can be made available to the goals of both ministries.

Partners In Care (PIC) – A National Guard Outreach Program

GOAL: This program is designed to provide help and support from Faith Congregations to Chaplains who are working with National Guard units. The intent is to assist the Chaplains in their efforts to help the unit personnel they support. By establishing an intentional “one-to-one” linkage and communications between the parties involved, this program can help the Chaplain identify to the congregation's ministry team how they can most effectively use the congregation's resources to help the Chaplain achieve his/her mission. This will result in needs and resources being more successfully deployed and matched upfront; and by meeting periodically, the deployment of the congregation's resources can evolve over time to stay matched to the needs required.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

- Contact info for the assigned chaplain
- Contact info for the congregation's focal point

- Contact info for the Local Clergy focal point
- Contact info for the Lead Chaplain of the program at the State National Guard office

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET:

This clearly depends on what programs and support needs that are agreed upon between the Congregation and the Chaplain. There will be some funding needed, so this is key element to have understood before any agreement is made.

Operation International Children – School Supplies Kits

GOAL: To help our soldiers help the children of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world by supplying the soldiers with simple school supplies kits or just pens which they, will in turn, give to the children of these war-torn countries. This will promote goodwill between our troops and the citizens of these countries and help them all in their efforts to heal the wounds of war.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: \$200 to \$500 (depends on how large a display and how many displays are used around the facilities; also depends on postage (how many packages and how often sent))

Assistance and Practical Help to Congregation Members

GOAL: Provide material and physical assistance to the State-side families of those military who are currently deployed. This program can go far in developing an ongoing awareness of the needs of the military, can greatly expand the atmosphere of acceptance in the congregation, and sends the message that your congregation cares about helping military families.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: >\$200 (this is very dependent on what is done, and the cost of the materials required; this can be a much larger dollar figure if extensive work is done, so be careful; be prepared to do some fundraising work.

Assistance and Practical Help Outside the Parish

GOAL: Provide material and physical assistance to military family members stateside for those soldiers currently deployed. This program can go far in developing an ongoing awareness of the needs of the military and greatly expand the atmosphere of acceptance by those in or near the congregation that the congregation cares about helping military families.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: >\$200 (this is very dependent on what is done and the cost of the materials required; this can be a much larger dollar figure if extensive work is done, so be careful; be prepared to do fundraising.

Recognition of Congregation Veterans

GOAL: Provide public recognition to the members of the congregation that are veterans of military service. This can also include widows who might be in the congregation

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: >\$0 - none is expected.
Should you plan a special ceremony some funds may be required.

Writing Our Way Home

GOAL: Researchers have found that writing about traumatic events can help service people sleep better, work more efficiently, strengthen their relationships and even enhance their immune system. This program is designed for returning veterans, allowing them to explore and share their experiences of the spiritual and emotional impact of war through writing and dialogue.

COORDINATOR(S): [names, phone numbers, emails of those responsible for the program]

ESTIMATED ANNUAL BUDGET: \$100 to \$200 (it is expected there would be a charge for the class which pays for the instructors or they do it gratis; the budget is for refreshments)

Fuller descriptions and examples of implementations of the above programs are available in the VMFC Program Guide. Please consult it for more ideas and practical tips.

Acronyms

VMFC=Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation

VMFCT=Veteran Friendly Congregation Core Team

VMFCOC or OC = Veteran/Military Friendly Congregation Oversight Council

Thank you

Thank you for expanding your tent to include a focused and planned ministry to the men and women who serve our nation in the uniformed services. These patriots' examples of modern day volunteers who set aside personal gain for the well-being of our community. Your recognition and support of them will go far in providing the love, acceptance, and appreciation they so richly deserve.

VMFC **Family Friendly**



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