MMU – October 12, 2026

Note from Lisa – How I am

Today is the second Monday of the month, and I'm sharing how my faith shapes me.

Having grown up in a Reformed Church and later transferring to a Presbyterian Church in college, my faith has always been guided by Scripture and Reformed theology. As a military chaplain, representing the Reformed tradition, I was able to baptize infants and serve the Lord's Supper at an open table. Because the Presbyterian Church has a long tradition of Ecumenical and Interfaith work as well as strong stances on social justice issues, I brought that understanding with me to my work in the military.

As a chaplain, my primary duties included leading worship, overseeing Christian Education programs, providing ministry to youth and young adults, visiting people in hospitals and prisons, and being with our military members in deployed environments. I trained alongside people as we learned to don chemical warfare gear and to care for the wounded. But most of the time, I spent time with young military members providing care and support for them as they grappled with the emotional and spiritual wounds of war, sexual trauma and abuse, or suicidal ideation.

Jesus reminds us to love God with our heart, mind, and strength. And so, as a chaplain, I worked with psychologists and physicians to care for military members' strength (bodies), minds (psyche), and hearts (soul). My work was crucial because chaplains are the only people military members can talk to about their concerns without those concerns being recorded or punished. The spiritual support we provided helped move many people towards healing.

The various chaplain services, although similar, differ because each service has a unique mission. Army chaplains focus on being with soldiers in the field. Navy chaplains spend time aboard ships or are stationed with the Marines or the Coast Guard. Air Force chaplains focus on meeting the needs of Airmen and Space Force Guardians as well as their families on bases. All chaplains spend most of the time with sailors, soldiers, Marines, Coasties, Airmen, and Guardians to help them deal with moral injury and spiritual brokenness.

In the past week, a great deal of attention has focused on Secretary Hegseth's establishment of an office of Religious Affairs that will report directly to him through a civilian appointee. In his directive, he emphasizes that chaplains should focus solely on religious matters and get out of the spiritual wellness business. In addition, he wants chaplains to oversee and support Christian homeschooling. I personally believe that this will cause issues related to

the unique nature of each service, force out chaplains who are not aligned with his religious point of view, and leave our military members spiritually broken. I'm concerned that there may be an increase in suicides. In addition, I am concerned about the six named colleges/universities that will provide elite training for military members, fast-tracking them to become officers ahead of ROTC students. The move away from traditional ROTC and the Service Academies for handpicked schools will create an officer corps lacking diversity of thought and a desire to support the spiritual needs of all our military members.

The changes being made to the Department of Defense are concerning. But mostly, I am concerned about the loss of spiritual care for our military members as the Chaplaincy shifts its focus to religious services rather than to meeting their spiritual needs. There seems to be a desire to build a force focused on a religious crusade rather than on defending the nation and protecting our allies.

Being a Presbyterian has shaped my faith. It has opened me to experiencing God in all things and informed my pursuit of social justice. My faith shaped my work as a chaplain, allowing me to help meet the needs of Airmen regardless of their race, gender, or religious affiliation. My faith also causes me to pause when I see civilian leaders in government changing rules and regulations to prioritize their personal religious views and priorities. I pray for our military members who rely so very much on a chaplain to be with them in their darkest hours. May our chaplains set aside their desire to preach and convert and seek to meet the needs of those who need to know the love of Jesus now more than ever.