FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2023

Free Training for Community Clergy on Advancing Veterans' Whole Health

PHILADELPHIA, PA— From May 11-12, 2023, Cranaleith Spiritual Center, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center (CMCVAMC), is offering a two-day training to educate community clergy about issues facing returning Veterans and their families following deployment. The Reverend Chris J. Antal, DMin., a veteran of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, and staff chaplain at the CMCVAMC, will facilitate the training.

"We are so pleased to partner with the U.S. Veterans Affairs to present the Community Clergy Training Program," says Marianne Trainer, of Cranaleith Spiritual Center. "We are a safe and serene place of hospitality where veterans and those who work with them have opportunities for quiet reflection and sharing to address the spiritual dimension of healing trauma. At Cranaleith we tend the soul-wounds of war, rekindle hope and compassion, and reconnect to the wisdom of your heart."

Community clergy from all faiths and organization chaplains are invited to attend. Training topics will address post-deployment readjustment challenges, the psychological, physical, behavioral, and spiritual effects of war trauma on survivors, such as moral and spiritual injury, and the important role of community (clergy/congregations) in helping to reduce mental health stigma and support Veterans and their families. Attendees will learn about VA and community mental health services and who clergy can connect with at their local VA to request information or assistance. All attendees can receive contact hour certificates from VA.

After attending a recent training provided by Chaplain Antal, Reverend Nicholas Seeberger, Pastor of Church on the Sound, wrote "Your presentation was compelling, challenging and extremely helpful. Your style was inclusive and thoughtful. As I shared, I thought the sessions were primarily going to be about information and problem-solving. Instead there was reflection, discussion and soul-searching in addition to well-researched material. You are well-suited to this task of clergy training. Your commitment to providing a pathway for healing and hope to this often overlooked or misunderstood part of our population is quite evident. Thank you!"

It has been estimated that one-fourth of individuals who seek help for a mental health problem do so from clergy. Clergy and houses of worship are an important contact point for Veterans. Clergy may recognize Veterans who are struggling in their return to civilian life, but not

know how to support them. This training will help clergy understand the differences between military and civilian culture, provide guidance for pastoral care to Veterans and their families, and teach them to recognize some signs and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and how to minister effectively to moral injury.

This training is to build capacity of faith communities so clergy and congregants (active members of religious communities) are both welcome to attend. Ideally, faith communities would register a team that includes their spiritual leader and at least one Veteran from their congregation who are committed to implementing lessons learned in their context.

The two-day event starts May 11 at 8:00 a.m., and ends May 12, at 1:00pm. The training is provided free of charge, and includes breakfast and lunch both days. Cranaleith Spiritual Center, 13475 Proctor Road, Philadelphia, PA 19116, is generously donating the meeting space, which is handicapped accessible, and meals.

Cranaleith has ample parking and is a 7 minute (.3) mile walk from the Somerton SEPTA station on the West Trenton Line.

Registration is limited to 40. Register here no later than May 7, 2023.

Cranaleith has limited overnight lodging Wednesday and/or Thursday at a rate of $75/night per person. People with lodging needs can reserve a room online here. For more information about lodging reach out to programs@cranaleith.org or call 215-934-6204, ext 100 and speak with Elizabeth Hoffman.

Participants travel from Cranaleith to the VA Medical Center, 3900 Woodland Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19104, on Thursday afternoon to participate in a Community Healing Ceremony and need to provide their own transportation or pay the SEPTA fee ($6 at station or $7 on train, each way). The ceremony is open to the general public and requires separate registration here.

For questions or concerns about the training contact:

Chris J. Antal, Staff Chaplain, CMCVAMC, (215) 823-4392

For media inquiries, contact:

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