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**The Voice for Chaplaincy - Chartered by Congress - Serving Since 1925**

## **Weekly Newsgram - January 16th 2019**

### **National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces Holds Annual Conference**

#### **Excellence in Leadership for Religious Advocacy**



**George Washington's Battle Flag  
- adopted by NCMAF as a symbol  
of their advocacy for chaplaincy**

Over 80 of the nation's endorsing agents are gathered in Arlington, VA this week to participate in the annual conference of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces.

NCMAF is a uniquely American organization, sustained by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and found nowhere else in the world. Its members represent all major faith communities in America in a mutually supportive relationship. They are Protestant and Roman Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox, Buddhist and Islamic and span the total theological spectrum of religious life in the United States.

NCMAF's members endorse chaplains for service in the Armed Forces on behalf of their respective religious organizations. They are the point of contact between the Department of Defense and over 150 religious denominations and faith groups. Member's recruit, endorse and provide oversight for clergy-persons who desire to serve as chaplains in any one of the branches of our Armed Forces. Their common vision is clergy-persons who are credible, committed to their faith, open to all persons, able to meet all military standards, and who represent the highest standards of their faith communities.

In 2018 NCMAF and the MCA sponsored a well attended conference for women serving as military chaplains. The event brought together over 100 currently serving chaplains to discuss the challenges of serving in the military and to provide mutual support and care. These same two organizations worked together to advocate for the retention of the ranks of Chiefs of Chaplains of the military services as O8s - Major General for the Army and Air Force and Rear Admiral (upper half) for the Navy. This was after the Navy announced its new Chief of Chaplains would not be promoted on assuming office. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2019 included direction to retain the ranks of the Chiefs of Chaplains and the Navy Chief of Chaplains was promoted in December.

Annually the Armed Forces Chaplains Board holds a briefing for all endorsing agents in January timed to take advantage of the NCMAF annual conference as well as the meeting of the

International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers (ICECE). The AFCEB briefing including all three currently serving Chiefs of Chaplains is scheduled for Thursday, the 17th of January.

Your endorsers come together and work hand in hand to support and advocate for military and VA chaplaincy. NCMAF and other similar organizations are key components of supporting and defending chaplain service to the men and women who serve our nation.

## Executive Director Notes

This will be another two part column, with the first part being very timely and the second part being my first impressions of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF) and the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Board (AFCEB).



**Chaplain Jay Johns,  
Director, AFCEB**

The first note is that my trip to Arlington this week was very timely as I was able to be present at the national headquarters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for a press conference at which they held a news conference to highlight their press release about the ongoing impact on military retirees, veterans and their families for whom the partial federal shutdown is, as either furloughed or essential personnel- such as the entire US Coast Guard and their career civilians- are not getting paid. The numbers of those who have called the VFW and other Military Service Organizations (MSOs)/Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) requesting information and guidance on how to survive this period of loss of pay has increased significantly. It is clear that the House, Senate and Administration need to figure out how to end the "partial" shutdown, and as I keystroke this, I am watching the news and finding out that only 25% of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is staffed with essential personnel (working without pay) and the rest are furloughed. Would any part of the country have a disaster right now, the response would take weeks, not hours or days. Clearly this is a situation that needs reasoned, compassionate action- and from the perspective of many of us informed by our theological grounding- prayer for resolution as soon as possible.

With regard to the NCMAF conference, as your Executive Director so far it has almost been like a MCA conference. I am pleasantly surprised by the number of our MCA members here as endorsers or exhibitors, such as The Rt. Rev. Carl Wright, retired Air Force chaplain, who is now the Bishop of the Armed Forces and Federal Ministries (AFFM) of the Episcopal Church in the United States, Chaplain Mike Heuer, retired Air Force chaplain who is now on our NCMAF Board, Chaplain Ken Sampson, retired Army chaplain who now represents Guideposts, Chaplain Jack Lea, retired Navy chaplain who is the Executive Director of NCMAF and of course, Chaplain Lyman Smith, retired Navy chaplain who is both an endorser of four Presbyterian traditions and a newly elected board member of NCMAF.

On a different level, I was reintroduced to my former Active/Guard Reserve senior chaplain, and Chaplain Assistant, who was tasked with making the Strong Bond retreats so remarkably successful, when I was the Commanding General of the 99th Regional Support Command at Ft. Dix, NJ, and the chaplain who was willing to go support the one Navy chaplain at the US Merchant Marine Academy when new plebes arrived to start their indoctrination, and who volunteered to be one of the very first Army chaplains to support families of Fallen Soldiers who were welcoming back their sons at Dover Air Force Base during their Dignified Transfers. So far, for my first NCMAF/AFCEB meeting I've attended, it has been like my life in review, both for MCA and for my Army Reserve career.

Next week, I'll provide a wrap up of the rest of NCMAF and the AFCB from the rest of this week. That said, if the rest of this week follows the first evening and full day, it will be quite busy!

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## **Chaplain Juliana Lesher Announced as New Chief Chaplain of the Department of Veterans Affairs**



We congratulate [Chaplain Juliana Lesher](#) on her selection as the new Chief Chaplain of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Chaplain Lesher currently serves as Chief Chaplain at the Audie L. Murphy Memorial VA Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. She is endorsed for chaplaincy by the Evangelical Congregational Church and holds her Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University.

Her prior positions in healthcare chaplaincy include positions in Pennsylvania, California, Wisconsin, Kentucky, and North Dakota.

Chaplain Lesher is the recipient of the VA Under Secretary's Award for Excellence in Chaplaincy, and the VA Secretary's Heart and Hands Award. She is also the author of the God Understands series.

We give thanks for Chaplain Lesher's selection and look forward to working with her as she now provides leadership for chaplains and religious ministry in the Department of Veteran's Affairs.

## **Veterans Call for End to Government Shutdown**

Several veterans groups held a joint press conference Tuesday demanding an end to a partial government shutdown on Tuesday, January 15th, saying that tens of thousands of veterans who now work as federal employees were paying the price as they are either furloughed or required to work without pay.



"We ask the president and the Congress to get together, get your act together and get this situation resolved," Regis Riley, national commander of American Veterans, or AMVETS, said.

The White House Office of Management and Budget estimates that the agencies impacted by the shutdown employ at least 150,000 veterans.

The press conference, hosted by Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), comes as the shutdown entered its 25th day, extending its record as the longest

shutdown in U.S. history. About a quarter of the government has been without funding since Dec. 22, and 800,000 federal employees have missed a paycheck.

Veterans who work in agencies other than the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, as well as uniformed services such as the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Public Health Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), have already been deeply impacted by the shutdown.

One third of federal workers are veterans even though just 10% of the U.S. population are federal employees.

Based on Office of Personnel Management data, about 155,000 veterans work at the agencies affected by the shutdown. And of those veterans, nearly 50,000 have VA disability ratings.

Veterans are already a vulnerable population, and this partial government shutdown can cause severe financial hardship for veterans-which sadly, often means mental health woes and potential for mental health crisis in our community, where we struggle with alarming suicide rates. 380,000 federal employees are now furloughed; 428,000 are working without pay, including 41,000 members of the U.S. Coast Guard and thousands of commissioned officers in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and U.S. Public Health Service.

Your MCA was pleased to join the VFW and many other veteran support organizations to support this call for opening of our government.

## **2019 Four Chaplains Awards Dinner**



THE 51st ANNUAL FOUR CHAPLAINS DAY BANQUET

Honoring

THE FOUR CHAPLAINS & THE CREW OF THE USAT DORCHESTER

Along with our 2019 Gold Medallion recipient:

Jim "Mattress Mack" McIngvale Southwest USA Community Servant Extraordinaire

2019 Humanitarian of the Year:

Charles and Mary Ann Strange of the Michael Strange Foundation For Gold Star Families

Charles W. David Lifesaving Medallion recipient:

LT Tyree Glen Bacon, III

New York State Court Officer at 9/11

**On Thursday, February 7, 2019**

At the South Philadelphia IATSE Ballroom 2401 South Swanson Street Philadelphia, PA 19148

[reservations](#)

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