



UMNS photo by Nella Hobson, U.S. Army

Chaplain assistant Jayme L. Kendall (left foreground) protects a worship service in the field during a training exercise at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School in Ft. Jackson, S.C., in this file photograph. Kendall is now a second lieutenant and a seminary student at Asbury Theological Seminary.

## Guidelines help churches with pastors in military

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) – The mobilization of U.S. military forces for duty in Afghanistan or Iraq puts added stress on United Methodist churches whose pastors serve as chaplains.

In response, the denomination's Section of Chaplains and Related Ministries has revised and updated its guidelines for helping chaplains, local congregations and bishops' cabinets deal with pastors being called to active duty in the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserve programs.

The guide was last revised a few days after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorists attacks, according to the Rev. Greg Hill, director of endorsement for the section.

The material today covers diverse topics, such as annual conference relationship, the length of mobilization, how to help the chaplain's family, and questions about housing, health benefits and pensions. The guide also

suggests ways for assisting the chaplain before deployment, during active duty and after the return home. It contains expanded resources and links for additional information.

The guidelines were developed by staff from the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which includes the chaplains' section; the Board of Pension and Health Benefits; members of bishops' cabinets; and chaplains in the National Guard and Reserves.

The guidelines needed to be enhanced, in part, to ensure that bishops, cabinets, ordained ministry boards and local churches understood the distinction between voluntary mobilization and involuntary mobilization, said Hill, who retired Feb. 1 as an Army chaplain after more than 25 years of active service.

With voluntary mobilization, a chaplain responds to a request for mobilization that may be refused or

initiates voluntary service on his or her own. "Voluntary mobilization must be an agreement between the bishop, cabinet, staff and pastor-parish relations committee and the chaplain that the mobilization may occur," Hill said.

Involuntary call-up occurs when a chaplain's unit is activated for duty or an individual reserve chaplain is called into active duty.

The guidelines help the church understand its obligations under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994. The church is not exempt from providing a comparable position, job restoration and continued benefits to an employee returning from military service. Bishops and cabinets must restore a returning pastor to a church or charge comparable to the one he or she served before being mobilized.

When the guidelines were written in 2001, chaplains and reserve units

were on active duty for up to 90 days. Today, given the current crisis with Iraq, troops will be mobilized from 180 days up to two years. The new plan addresses longer periods of military service, Hill said.

The Section of Chaplains and Related Ministries endorses ordained ministers to serve as chaplains and pastoral counselors in settings such as the military, correctional institutions, and mental and health care centers.

Hill, who has been director of endorsement since Jan. 1, wants to hear from chaplains, bishops and boards of ordained ministry if they find the new guidelines difficult. "We need those comments because this is a major revision," he said. "We do not know if this is perfect. ... In the future, things such as law and policies might change, but we are at the point where we should be now."

Complete guidelines from the Section of Chaplains and Related Ministries may be found at [www.gbhem.org/chaplains](http://www.gbhem.org/chaplains).

**"During the Vietnam War, there were soldiers who felt that they were not welcome in the church."**

Although confident in the training and resources that chaplains have to do their jobs, Hill said his primary concern "is for timely and effective pastoral care to be provided to military members and their families." The leaders and members of the United Methodist Church should understand that "prayers are needed for all military members, their families and the chaplains as the chaplains go into harm's way," he said.

The Section of Chaplains and Related Ministries and the worship section of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship have been inundated with requests for prayers and worship resources as the crisis with Iraq has intensified. In response, Hill offers "Prayers for Today" at the