

# Mission Fields Nebraska

February 2010

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## Military Missionaries in Nebraska

Chaplain Rev. Rodney Armon, St. Paul, Doniphan

**There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Cor. 12:25-26)**

Since September 2001 we have heard hundreds of times that our world will never be the same. This is, of course, a reference to the terrorist attacks that occurred on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of that month. It is certainly true that our world is different now than it was then, and that event certainly has contributed significantly. There is another, more personal, aspect of that event that has affected many members of our churches. For those connected in any way with the uniformed military services, our lives have been affected not just through the news reporting and economic factors. Our service members and their families have lived the global war on terrorism. Whether we like to hear those words doesn't really matter. The truth is that among our members are those who have deployed and those who have faced the loneliness of deployment back here at home.

When a service member deploys, they are not the only one that faces the loneliness and struggles of separation. The families back home have their own struggles. We watch the news and hope that the latest attack isn't near where our loved one is. If it is, we sit in fear waiting for the doorbell to ring, and if it does our hearts pound out of our chests. When a service member deploys, so does the family.

With that thought in mind, there are several things that we as members of Christ's Church can do for one another.

- First, **pray** in your worship services by name for the service members and their families. If you say you are going to pray for them personally, do it, and offer to pray with them.

**We, too, have many who literally have not heard about Jesus. Our mission field wears a uniform.**

- Second, **don't worry** about not knowing what to say. A smile, a meaningful touch or a card of encouragement helps the family. Sometimes, like Job's friends, being quiet and reassuring is comfort enough.

- Third, **correspond** regularly with the deployed person. Don't stop even if you don't get a ready reply. When they are on missions, their days are pretty busy. Remember, when there is free time, they want to talk to their families. It doesn't mean they aren't appreciative of you, they just need the ones who God has blessed their lives with in the closest way.

National Guard and reserve chaplains are parish pastors just like your pastor, with an additional Call to serve in a unique mission field. Not unlike the rest of the world, our own nation has a huge percentage of people who are unchurched.

Our military reflects our society in many ways, so we, too, have many who literally have not heard about Jesus. **Our mission field wears a uniform.** We not only share

Christ with the warriors and their families, but we are there when they suffer a loss in their family. Chaplains are part of the Notification Team that goes to families who have lost loved ones. We also offer education on how to cope with the separation of deployment and how to have a successful reunion after deployment. When all hope seems to be gone and contemplation on ending life seems to be the only option left, Chaplains are the first who are called to provide pastoral ministry.

Our District has been blessed with many faithful pastors who have served in our nation's military. Currently, we are blessed with three pastors serving in the Nebraska Army National Guard, one serving in the Nebraska Air Guard, and one who serves in the Naval Reserve. There are also two chaplain assistants who have answered a very special call to serve and who are members of congregations of the District. We all stand ready to assist you or your congregations with information and education, or Mission Sunday support.

Contact Pastor Armon for more information at 402-845-2340.



### Nebraska Military Missionaries

The following have served or are currently serving military chaplaincy in some capacity:

- Rev. Rod Armon
- Rev. Steven Bartelt
- Rev. Don Cooper
- Rev. Daniel Fullerton
- Rev. Carl Groh
- Rev. James Hoke
- Rev. Philip Houser
- Rev. Doug Irmer
- Rev. Harold King
- Rev. Greg Lucido
- Rev. Michael Moreno
- Rev. David Otten
- Rev. John Reehl
- Rev. Pat Riley
- Rev. Randall Russell

# A Military Missionary in Action

## Chaplain Lt. Col Douglas Irmer, St. Paul, Beatrice

What a great Reformation Day in Kyrgyzstan! The weather was beautiful – clear skies, sunny and temperatures in the high 60's with no wind.

The Transit Center (TC) at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, is a bustling and busy place. Every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine in Afghanistan passes through Transit Center Manas, usually both ways. Thirty thousand troops transiting per month is not unusual.

The Wings of Hope Chapel stands in the midst of the business of TC Manas. Our facility is small, but our outreach is great. A military chaplain is responsible to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to practice their religion freely. So although I do not share his faith, I helped a rabbi get kosher Meals Ready to Eat (MRE's) and sacramental wine as he prepared for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.



In my "other life" I'm the senior pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Beatrice, Nebraska. I've been a "Traditional Guardsman" my entire military career, serving one weekend each month and 15 days during the year. Since 2006 I have spent two months in Antarctica (including 3 days at the South Pole); one month in New Mexico on the

border mission; two weeks in Louisiana for hurricane relief; and now four months at TC Manas.

While I cannot actively proselytize or evangelize, I am free to confess my faith, especially if someone asks. For example, I counsel several individuals each week. Many are seeking answers to difficult questions. Many are wondering whether anyone really cares for them or about them. I can tell these

individuals that I know someone who cares for them, who cares for them so much that He was willing to suffer and die, just for them.

I've been amazed at the number of people who really believe that they are so evil and so wicked that God can't love them. What a great opportunity to not only tell them of God's love, but to show them the love of God in Jesus

Christ through the forgiveness of sins.

Counseling doesn't just take place in the chapel. I spend hours each week wandering around the base, stopping to chat with airmen who are working, or eating lunch in the dining facility with soldiers, or marines who are obviously in transit either down range or homeward.



My uniform immediately identifies me as a chaplain. Although I wear a rank insignia on my shirt collar, I wear a cross on my chest and my hat. People know right away that I'm a chaplain, "a visible reminder of the holy."

The symbol of the cross doesn't bring anyone to faith, but on this Reformation Day I sat down at a picnic table outside with a young airman. After some small talk, he asked me what my denomination was. After I told him I am a Missouri Synod Lutheran, he asked me what that meant. Next we had a nice, relaxed discussion about Jesus, faith, God and forgiveness.

On Sunday I have the joyous opportunity to proclaim Jesus Christ and the salvation He gives freely. One of my services is even a "Lutheran Service of Holy Communion." Countless times people read this on the chapel schedule around TC Manas. It doesn't bring anyone to faith, but it has brought questions, and I've given answers. In addition, God promises in His Word, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." This is the pure, loud, clear proclamation of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. More loudly, more clearly than we could ever possibly do on our own. This is missions.

## In His Own Words

The following stories are from Pastor Irmer's blog, <http://dougirmer.blogspot.com>.

### All Saints' Day

Today was a day of solemnity for me, and a reminder to me of what is really going on. Last night the Command Post called to inform me that early this morning a flight carrying human remains would land at Manas.

This morning, on the flight line a cargo jet landed. Two flag-draped remains containers (caskets will come later) were on board along with a number of passengers. The passengers got off of the plane and then the TC Manas Honor Guard took over.

With dignity and reverence the containers were removed from one aircraft, and saluted by a group of officers and enlisted members as they were placed in transport vehicles.

The vehicles moved the containers and the Honor Guard to another aircraft, where they were saluted again and placed on the airplane; and they departed.

I don't know the names of these departed warriors and heroes. I know that they were brave Americans who gave their lives to uphold and support the liberties and freedoms and the safety that we enjoy every day. Often we don't think too much about those things we enjoy and their cost. Their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country, for my security and my way of life gives me solemn pause and makes me thankful and proud to serve along side them.

*(One of the dignified transfers Rev. Irmer performed was for five of the C.I.A. officers killed by a double agent in Afghanistan in December.)*

### Nebraska Generosity

These boys are warm now with generous donations from the good folks at St. Paul Lutheran Church and School in Beatrice. A recent trip to one of the local orphanages provided coats, sweaters and hats for a number of special need orphans in the local area.

Those coats look really good in Kyrgyzstan.

Thanks again to the folks in Nebraska and those here who made the trip to the orphanage.



# Operation Barnabas—A Network of Care

Taken from <http://barnabas.lcmsworldmission.org>

Since 9/11, the nation has called upon our military reservists in numbers unknown since World War II. And our reservists and their families have responded, serving their nation with honor and determination. Often times, they feel very alone. The churches of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) would like to help.

**Operation Barnabas** consists of two initiatives: The first initiative is to help congregations whose pastors are recalled to active duty as chaplains.

**Operation Barnabas** works with these congregations to create a deployment plan that cares for the deploying pastor, his family, and the congregation. Each District has an **Operation Barnabas** Counselor to lead this effort.

The second initiative is to help all military families during deployment, especially those families who live far from military services. Our congregations are uniquely

positioned to be able to assist with anything from child care to assistance with meals, and someone to listen. Many of our members either currently serve in the Armed Forces, or are veterans. Not every congregation will offer the same services. Each one is unique, with its own unique resources of talent and personnel.

**What kind of services are offered to congregations and military families?**

**Operation Barnabas** seeks to supplement local military units. If, for example, an Army Reserve Unit has a Family Readiness Group (FRG), our congregations may offer to host the meetings at its facilities. If there is not an FRG in the area, the congregation may

*Our congregations are uniquely positioned to be able to assist military families in many various ways.*

step up to provide pre-deployment counseling, and be available for other supports such as child care, and help finding military resources. We may not have all the answers, but we know someone who does. And we'll help you get the help you need.

Many of our congregations have support structures for military reservists and their

families. If you would like to find out more about help in your area, visit <http://barnabas.lcmsworldmission.org/> and click on "Families" on the top menu.

This is an excellent opportunity for ministry! If your congregation would like to investigate ways it can start a military ministry, please visit the **Operation Barnabas** website listed above and click on "Congregations."

## Celebrate Armed Forces Sunday

Visit [www.lcmsworldmission.org](http://www.lcmsworldmission.org) to find more information

**Free resources for your congregation** to celebrate **Armed Forces Ministry Sunday** are available from the LCMS website, [www.lcmsworldmission.org/armedforces](http://www.lcmsworldmission.org/armedforces).

**Resources for 2010 include:**

- Suggested sermon
- Responsive prayer
- Theme bulletin insert

Themes include:

- **Changeless Warriors**
- **Strength for a Troubled World**
- **When I am Weak, He is Strong.**

**New This Year:** All congregations must place a new order to receive 2010 bulletin inserts due to the new ordering system. To receive the bulletin inserts, church



staff can complete a simple order form online at [www.lcmsworldmission.org/armedforces](http://www.lcmsworldmission.org/armedforces).

An online form is also available to register congregation members who are in the active military for "Ministry-by-Mail."

LCMS World Mission's **Ministry to the Armed Forces** thanks your congregation members for your participation in past Armed Forces Sundays. If you chooses to celebrate **Armed Forces Sunday** on a day other

than **May 16**, appropriate days could include a Sunday close to Memorial Day, Independence Day, or Veterans Day.

The Ministry to Armed Forces logo is available to be downloaded for use in bulletins and newsletters from the Armed Forces Ministry website.

For further information, please contact LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces at 1-800-433-3954, ext. 1337, or by e-mail at [lcmschaps@lcms.org](mailto:lcmschaps@lcms.org).

**Order by Friday, Feb. 19, to ensure delivery in time for LCMS Armed Forces Sunday on May 16**

# Timing is Everything

## Thoughts from Chaplain Curt Cizek

They say that timing is everything. It's true in comedy. It's true in athletics. It's true in combat. It's true in building relationships. It's also true in coming to faith.

Staff Sergeant Weathers (chaplain's assistant) and I have gotten to know the cops that work at Raven B pretty well. They are cops that were specially trained to fly unmanned aircraft. They use this asset to help protect the Forward Operating Base (FOB) and to let those that work "outside the wire" know about places that need to get checked out.

One of the Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) that works there is named Josh. Josh

is a very outgoing individual and also very inquisitive. He came to me a couple months ago to get some encouragement and words of advice for improving his relationship with his wife. She is also in the Air Force.

I gave him a copy of the "Fireproof" movie. He watched it and had some questions about it. We sat down and talked awhile about what it takes to make a relationship work. He has tried to implement some of these things with his wife, even though they are separated by a few time zones.

Josh and I have gone to eat together at the dining facility a few times. He usually stops by the chapel to pick up Sergeant Weathers and

me on his day off. A week ago we had a particularly good conversation. Josh started reading the Bible while he's been here. He had questions about the book of Revelation. I shared with him that it isn't intended to be the scary book that most people make it out to be, but it is really a book of comfort for those belonging to Christ.

In Ecclesiastes, it says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." (Ecc. 3:1)

It seems as if this is God's time to work faith in Josh's heart. I pray that He might use our conversations to bring that about. Please keep Josh in your prayers.

## Hospitality

Rev. Cizek is a military chaplain from the Texas District who served on a base in Iraq and is now stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri.

People talk about how Middle Eastern cultures are so much more hospitable than ours. We see a picture of Middle Eastern hospitality in Genesis 18.

*"The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.*

*He said, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.'*

Middle Easterners are much more hospitable than we are. I've seen it with my own eyes. One of the squad leaders from my unit here at Camp Bucca met an Iraqi man, Jawad. Jawad is a man of very humble means. He has an eight-year old son, Kazam. Jawad works as a bricklayer, but makes only \$70 a month. He tries to farm as well, but doesn't



Kazam, Jawad, and Ch. Cizek

have the money to make a go of it. He has two sheep, a goat, a few chickens and a goose.

We stopped by to see them yesterday. We brought a box of food and toys

(including a soccer ball) for the family. Having us as his guests, Jawad rolled out the red carpet. Within minutes, his son had brought in some delicious desert sticks, like shortbread, with coconut on them. Then Kazam brought in some Chai tea. A few minutes later, Kazam brought in some goat's milk. Fortunately, the interpreter told him that we should not drink it. We sat and talked for a few minutes.

As we were wrapping up our nice snack, Jawad invited us to have lunch. He told us that he would slaughter one of his two sheep for us. We respectfully declined because we had to get back on the road. He did all this while he was still observing Ramadan, which means he has to fast during daylight hours.

**Special thanks to Chaplain Cizek for sharing the stories and picture.**

## Please Pray for Us

- Pray for safety for all military personnel, including the chaplains, who are deployed around the world.
- Pray that the words shared by the military chaplains might offer hope to the service members and families.
- Thank God for the willing men in Nebraska who serve the military as chaplains or chaplain assistants.
- Ask God to bless the congregations that celebrate Armed Forces Sunday with a renewed mission to the soldiers and military families in their midst.
- Pray that the Christian men and women who serve in our military would be God's salt and light to the individuals God puts in their lives.

Reverend Richard Boring works with the ministries of the Nebraska District. He is available to visit with you about existing or developing ministry opportunities across the District. He is also available to help coordinate a servant event between your congregation's group and a ministry in Nebraska. Reverend Boring is available via phone or email to answer any questions you may have. Reverend Boring may be reached at the Nebraska District Office at 888-643-2961 or richb@ndlcms.org.

*The Mission of the Nebraska District is to resource congregations, leaders, and related organizations in their mission of discipling the saved and proclaiming Christ to a lost and changing world.*