

COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS TO HM FORCES MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Thank those who serve in His Majesty's Forces as Chaplains for their service to Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force personnel, their families, and the wider military community, and commend them, and their own families, to the prayers of the Church (*Section 2*).
3. Note the significant contribution of HM Forces personnel in a variety of theatres, notably the NATO response to the war in Ukraine, actions in the Red Sea and preparations for potential Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) in the Middle East and beyond (*Section 2.1.2*).
4. Welcome the increased level of applications for military chaplaincy while continuing to encourage all eligible ministers of the Church to consider service as a Chaplain to HM Forces, Regular or Reservist (*Section 3*).
5. Encourage those eligible to consider service as Chaplains in any of the Cadet organisations and thank all serving Cadet Chaplains for their work with these organisations (*Section 3.3*).

Report

1. THE COMMITTEE

1.1 The Committee gives thanks for the work of its outgoing Convener, Rev Scott Brown CBE, who resigned from the committee due to ill health, ending his Convenership after two years, into the usual four-year term. The increase in recruiting (*Section 3*) is testament to his tireless efforts to promote military and naval chaplaincy.

2. THE WORK OF CHAPLAINS

2.1 Routine and Operational Work

2.2 The operational tempo continues to affect the whole of the Armed Forces and their families. Over Christmas in 2024 over 10,000 UK personnel were deployed overseas on 60 operations in 40 countries.

2.3 The Committee congratulates Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery RN, (a Church of Scotland Chaplain) on his appointments in 2024 as Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet at Navy Command HQ and as Honorary Chaplain to His Majesty the King (King's Honorary Chaplain, or KHC). The Committee also congratulates Rev Dr Mark Davidson, a Church of Scotland Chaplain serving with the Royal Navy, likewise appointed KHC, so that two of the 4 KHCs in the Navy are currently Church of Scotland chaplains.

2.4 Rev Dr Mark Davidson has recently been selected to be the next Chaplain of the Fleet, the senior appointment for a Naval Chaplain.

3. RECRUITMENT

3.1 Since the Committee's deliverance to the 2024 General Assembly, highlighting the significant risk posed by low recruitment numbers to military chaplaincy, there has been a positive response. At the time of writing, the Committee, as a part of its constitutional role as Endorsing Authority for potential chaplains, has endorsed five candidates for ministry in HM Forces since the last Assembly, and is in discussions with another three who are considering applications. This increase in interest is very welcome, as our numbers remain at an historic low and the Committee is expecting a significant number of retirements of serving Chaplains in the next 3 to 5 years. Please continue to pray for an increase in vocations to this important and valued ministry.

3.2 The Committee encourages all eligible ministers to discern if God is calling them to serve as a Chaplain in the Royal Navy (including the Royal Marines), the Army or the Royal Air Force, whether Regular (full time) or Reservist (part time). The Committee welcomes suggestions or advice on how we respond to the need for steady recruiting to minister to our fantastic Service communities. The Committee notes the special demands that service as a Reserve Chaplain places on ministers in full-time parish charges and has produced a letter defining the role, rights, and deployment commitments of Reserve Chaplains to reassure the Kirk Sessions and congregations of ministers considering Reserve service.

3.3 The Committee also commends chaplaincy in the Cadet Forces as a mission to youth which also assists with the development of ministerial skill sets in the course of parish (or other civilian) ministry.

4. CHAPLAINS AND THE CHURCH

4.1 Tri-Service Conference 2024/25

The Tri-Service Conference (Continuous Professional Development) for Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) Chaplains was held at the Leuchars Station in Fife, in September 2024. The Committee very much values the shared fellowship with PCI and the cooperative relationship developed with its parallel committee in the PCI.

4.2 Pastoral Care

As well as recruiting, pastoral care for Chaplains is a primary component of the Committee's remit. The Committee continues to offer regular pastoral contact with Chaplains and their families, organised by the Vice Convener. If

necessary, the Convener responds to more acute pastoral situations, which may involve ill-health, discernment conversations, or care concerning professional issues.

4.3 Moderator's Visit to HM Forces

In February, the Moderator and Vice Convener visited the Royal Navy at Portsmouth, including Navy Command Headquarters at HMS EXCELLENT & the training establishment at HMS COLLINGWOOD. The Committee is grateful to the Chaplain of the Fleet and the wider Naval Service community for their welcome and hospitality, and to Rev Dr Mark Davidson RN, the Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy, for coordinating the visit.

4.4 Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

The Committee continues to work with the new Presbyteries to appoint Armed Forces and Veterans Champions for each. Further work will develop as we continue to understand the needs of those in such roles and hope to be able to offer them training and support through the Committee.

5. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 Tri-Service Advisory Group

The Committee invites the church to note continuing changes to Defence policy on chaplaincy to the Services. Following last year's decision to allow non-religious chaplains to serve in HM Forces, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has been accepted as an Endorsing Authority and discussions are in progress to establish Muslim and Rastafari Endorsing Authorities. The Committee welcomes these changes and is assured that they will complement the well-established and successful Christian and World Faiths chaplaincy to HM Forces.

5.2 The Committee welcomes to the Assembly representatives of all Endorsing Authorities, (Christian, other world faiths and humanist) and thanks them for their support as we all seek what is best for our serving personnel and their families across the Defence community.

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW TAIT, *Convener*
AMY BENDER, *Vice-Convener*
DARAN GOLBY, *Secretary*

Appendix 1 – Royal Navy Report

Rev Fergus Cook RNR

Chaplain Fergus Cook completed his Phase 2 training at Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC), Dartmouth in Nov 24. He is the oldest person ever to pass out from Dartmouth. On completion of training, he was appointed to the role of Chaplain, HMS SCOTIA in Rosyth. He has had a busy few months there with his appointment directly preceding the annual Remembrance Service at Pattiesmuir Cemetery, Rosyth. Since then, Chaplain Cook has conducted Christmas Divisions, provided ongoing pastoral support to the Service Personnel, and advised on Chaplaincy Recruiting.

Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery KHC RN

Chaplain Stephen Ashley-Emery had a busy start to the year working in Naval Chaplaincy Service HQ as Staff Chaplain. In Jul 24 he was selected as Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet (DCOTF), and made a seamless transition to this demanding role. Appointed a King's Honorary Chaplain (KHC), he has spent the last nine months focusing on Branch Management and developing policy. Highlights of the year have included Defence Engagement in Baghdad, where he officiated at the Remembrance Service for the Embassy staff, and time in Indonesia planning multinational chaplaincy support for the Navy-led OP HIGHMAST deployment taking place this year in the Indo-Pacific.

Rev Mark Dalton RN

Chaplain Mark Dalton has spent this past year providing spiritual and pastoral care to the Service Personnel and their families in and around HMNB Clyde. He has sought to offer an holistic, inter-agency approach by establishing and improving relations with other military agencies and charities both locally and nationally across Scotland. He has also extended the reach of RN chaplaincy, through regular visits to HMS Caledonia in Rosyth, where he provides pastoral care for an eclectic range of Service Personnel. At Easter, Chaplain Dalton moved to a Phase 2 training establishment in the Portsmouth area, where he provides pastoral support and teaches ethics to new Service Personnel.

Rev Dr Mark Davidson KHC RN

Over the past year, Chaplain Mark Davidson has continued in his role as Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, and Principal Denominational Chaplain, Church of Scotland and Free Churches. Both roles have been challenging and rewarding. Current academic projects include gathering Lessons Identified from the war in Ukraine, and editing a collection of essays on Spiritual Resilience. As a member of the Chiefs of Chaplains Strategic Coordinating Group, he develops shared doctrine and policy with other senior NATO chaplains. He was appointed a King's Honorary Chaplain (KHC) in Nov 24, and awarded a medal from the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Feb 25 for his contribution towards the war effort. Mark has now been selected to be the next Chaplain of the Fleet.

Appendix 2 – Army Report

It is clear that we are living in interesting times. The changing nature of the geopolitical landscape and its challenges continue to bring hard choices for government. That inevitably works itself out through Defence. HM Land Forces continue to work to support those challenges be it: training Ukrainian soldiers and chaplains for the front line; supporting our partners and allies 'staggering on' in Estonia and joining them in large-scale exercises in Romania; offering Peace-Keeping duties on the green line in Cyprus; supporting other nations to develop their Army skills; and the generic duties of preparing to protect and defend our nation on and from the land. Chaplains are very much at the heart of all that we do 'caring for the Army's people' spiritually, morally and pastorally.

We currently have 10 Regular chaplains and 5 Reserve chaplains serving in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. David Anderson has been promoted to CF1 moving to take up his new role as Assistant Chaplain General Field Army Troops.

Alan Cobain has been promoted to CF2 and has taken up his new role as the Senior Chaplain 38 (Irish) Brigade & Joint Military Command (Northern Ireland) and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General Regional Command.

Nathan McConnell has recently been commissioned as a Reserve chaplain and has completed his training and is assigned to 215 (Scottish) Multi Role Medical Regiment.

Sadly, we have had to say farewell to three of our long-serving chaplains who have come to the end of their time in the Army. Rev Duncan MacPherson, Rev Dr Jim Francis, and Rev Geoff Berry between them have served for over 50 years. They have been involved in caring for our soldiers and families through some of the most difficult operational commitments the country has known. That service has encompassed duty in Northern Ireland during 'The Troubles', Iraq and Afghanistan; as well as representing our denomination at some of the most Senior levels of service in the Dept. Rev Dr Jim Francis leaving as Assistant Chaplain General and Rev Duncan MacPherson serving our denomination well as the Denominational Representative Chaplain for many years. Their contribution will continue beyond them and we wish them well as they journey to new challenges beyond the RACHD.

The following notes give a flavour from a few of our chaplains of some of the continued and interesting ministry and work that we are privileged and humbled to be a part of.

'Over the last several months, I have been getting to grips with living in a different devolved nation with its own distinctive language, culture and traditions. As Senior Chaplain 160th (Welsh) Brigade, I am involved with the Brigade's efforts to support the Army in Wales and engage with the civilian population. This makes for a hugely varied role that so far has ranged from attending meetings of the interfaith and bereavement cross-party groups at the Senedd (the Welsh Parliament) to engaging with Churches Together in Wales at the Royal Welsh Show, visiting Army Cadet Camps and participating in a virtual school assembly with an astonishing 14,000 young people from across the country. I continue to be surprised and enormously grateful for the varied opportunities to bear witness to the love of God whether leading prayers at a public event, saying grace at a mess dinner or quietly holding space for conversation with a soldier in distress.'

Rev Nicola Frail, Senior Chaplain, HQ 160th (Welsh) Brigade

'Being posted to a training establishment is a huge privilege. The tempo can be high, with a significant pastoral load, yet the sense of reward puts everything into marvellous perspective. At the Infantry Training Centre, Catterick chaplains are at the forefront of supporting recruits joining the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps: helping to ease them into their new surroundings early on, exploring matters relating to mental and spiritual resilience, giving insight into important moral dilemmas such as the 'right to kill' and providing spiritual and pastoral support. The ministry of chaplains in 'the early days' of Army life, provides a foundation whereby soldiers, and their families, know that they matter not only to Christian chaplain, but also to the God in whose name they minister.'

Rev Hector MacKenzie, Senior Chaplain Infantry Training Centre and Soldier Academy North

'Even reserve unit chaplaincy provides the opportunity to come alongside people in their highs and lows, often when dark humour is relied upon. For me as the padre it is about trying to represent the hope of a God who knows and loves them, whatever else is going on. As in a civilian parish, funerals offer an opportunity to address spirituality head on. In the serving military community those funerals tend to be younger people, and so it was I was asked to conduct the funeral for one of my Battalion's senior warrant officers. The army is not a very big organisation, and if someone has served a long time they will likely have made many connections over the years and I witnessed the coming together of this big family. It is inspiring to be part of an organisation that does so much for its members and their families in times of death. Even in death, humour is important, and that this particular soldier's parents were called Mary and Joseph and that he was born on 25th December, was not lost on many. For a reserve unit the Annual Continuous Training -annual camp to a previous generation -is a key opportunity to spend time with the troops, finding time to seek out those who might be struggling, lead some ethics training and join in with the compulsory physical training (usually accompanied by some irreverent humour about praying harder padre). Alongside a large military funeral with elements of ceremonial, there were less polished encounters when I joined the Corporal's Army Leader Development Programme - a fairly arduous fortnight's course for the reserves which was very much in the bleak mid-winter in late November on the military training area at Otterburn, when the temperatures were dropping below minus eleven, and the windchill was ferocious. In such circumstances it is less about words and more about presence, a few rounds of 'if you're happy and you know it clap your hands' before they went out on patrol and plenty of sweets. But these are the times that build the shared memories that open the doors for people to seek you out when there might be something more personal or spiritual to discuss.'

Rev Christopher Rowe, Parish Minister Colston Parish Church and Reserve Chaplain, 5 Military Intelligence.

'On November 11th 2024, Revd Alan Cobain CF was invited to preside over a service of rededication at Busan United Nations Cemetery for four recently identified British Soldiers of the Korean War: Major Patrick Angier, Sergeant Donald Northey, Gloucestershire Regiment and Rifleman Mark Foster, Corporal William Adair, Royal Ulster Rifles. The visit was hosted by the British Embassy through His Excellency Ambassador Colin Crooks and the UK military's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre. The visit included a trip to Imajin River the site of Hill 235 or 'Gloster Hill' where the bitter battle of April 1951 had been fought close to the modern border with North Korea.'

Rev Alan Cobain, Senior Chaplain 38 (Irish) Brigade & Joint Military Command (Northern Ireland) and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General Regional Command

'As the Senior Chaplain 51st Infantry Brigade and Joint Military Command Scotland, it is a privilege to support the efforts of the Army across our country. Our *raison d'être* is to Lead, Enable, Sustain, and Promote the Army in Scotland. That has seen our chaplains deploy to support all of those involved in the iconic Royal Military Tattoo in Edinburgh; to participate in the National Acts of Armistice and Remembrance in the Scottish National War Memorial and across the country; and amongst many other things to continue to provide day-to-day pastoral care for our Regular, Reserve and Army Cadet Force communities.'

It continues to be a privilege 'caring for the Army's people' in the name of the God we serve. I commend our ministry to anyone who might be considering taking on the 'King's shilling' and would be happy to discuss further the many opportunities the Royal Army Chaplains' Department offers.'

Rev David Anderson, Senior Chaplain 51st Infantry Brigade and Joint Military Command Scotland and Denominational Representative Chaplain for the Church of Scotland.

List of Church of Scotland Regular Chaplains (Actively recruiting)

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev David Anderson	Assistant Chaplain General, Field Army Troops	Andover
Rev Chris Kellock	Senior Chaplain Army Special Operations Brigade	Andover
Rev Nicola Frail	Senior Chaplain HQ 160th (Welsh) Brigade	Brecon
Rev Alan Cobain	Senior Chaplain 38 (Irish) Brigade & Joint Military Command (Northern Ireland) and Deputy Assistant Chaplain General Regional Command	Lisburn
Rev David Thom	Northern Ireland Garrison Support Unit	Lisburn
Rev Paul Van Sittert	3rd Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland	Inverness
Rev Hector MacKenzie	Senior Chaplain Infantry Training Centre and Soldier Academy North	Catterick
Rev Richard Begg	Headquarters Hereford Garrison	Hereford
Rev Stewart MacKay	Senior Chaplain Army Training Centre Pirbright and Soldier Academy South	Pirbright
Rev Neil McLay	Senior Chaplain 11 Brigade	Aldershot

List of Church of Scotland Reserve Chaplains

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev Mike Mair	32 Signals Regiment	Glasgow
Rev Mike Goodison	105 Regt Royal Artillery	Newtonards
Rev Dr Ken Jeffrey	7 th Battalion Royal Regiment of Scotland	Perth
Rev Christopher Rowe	5 Military Intelligence Battalion	Edinburgh
Rev Nathan McConnell	215 (Scottish) Multi Role Medical Regiment	Glasgow

List of Church of Scotland Army Cadet Force (ACF) Chaplains (9 Vacancies out of 20)

Chaplain	Unit
Rev Alen McCulloch	1 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Sean Swindells	1 Bn Highlanders ACF
Rev Shuna Dicks	2 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Keith Blackwood	2 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev George Hunter	Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders ACF
Rev Fiona Wilson	West Lowland, ACF
Rev Ecilo Selemani	Glasgow & Lanarkshire, ACF
Rev Sean Swindells	Angus and Dundee, ACF
Rev Cameron McKenzie	Lothian & Borders, ACF

Appendix 3 – Royal Air Force Report

At the end of 2024, the Chief of Air Staff spoke of challenging times in our world and for our country, and that it has never been more important that we retain our skilled people, so that we can fulfil our duty to provide global air and space power to protect our nation and help it prosper. What the RAF does really matters, arguably more so today than at any time over the past three decades. That's why caring for our people remains such an important part of our strategy. RAF Chaplains play a central role in supporting our people and strengthening the faith, hope and resilience of RAF personnel in these days. Their highly valued, incarnational and sacrificial ministry within the RAF community, both at home and abroad, supports the spiritual, pastoral and moral wellbeing of our people.

The RAF continues to provide training for Ukrainian pilots, ground staff and troops and patrols NATO airspace, deterring future aggression on NATO's eastern flank. We also continue to patrol the skies above the UK, with our Quick Reaction Alert Typhoons ready 24/7/365 to fly and protect our nation.

Our two Church of Scotland RAF Chaplains continue to contribute strongly to the ministry of our Profession:

The Reverend (Wing Commander) Craig Lancaster is the Senior chaplain at RAF Cosford, a training unit preparing aircraft engineers, physical training instructors, photographers, and many more, for their specialist roles. Our chaplains at Cosford provide pastoral care to these trainees and the many training staff, and teach the Beliefs and Values Programme (BVP), helping trainees to understand their own moral beliefs and values in the context of military service and prepare them to meet the challenges and ambiguities of life on the front line. Encouragingly, our chaplains are noticing a significant increase in the number of personnel enquiring about the Christian faith. Craig has also led a team of chaplains reviewing and rewriting the BVP training material. By the time of the General Assembly he will have taken up post as chaplain to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium, with an area of responsibility covering most of Western Europe and as far as The Republic of Türkiye.

The Reverend (Squadron Leader) David Young is station chaplain at RAF Honington, supporting the trainee Gunners of the RAF Regiment and the Junior Regiment Officers' Course from start to finish of their training, and is very proud to give the blessing at the Graduation ceremonies at the end of the courses. He also led, at short notice, the NATO Remembrance Service at the Reichswald Commonwealth War Graves site in Germany, where in excess of 6400 British and Commonwealth service personnel are laid to rest; a very poignant event.

We are grateful to God for Craig and David's vocation to this valuable ministry, and to the Church of Scotland for releasing and supporting them in their service.