

## COMMITTEE ON CHAPLAINS TO HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES MAY 2024

### Proposed Deliverance

#### The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note with concern the lack of applications for military chaplaincy, and encourage all eligible ministers of the Church to consider service as a Chaplain to HM Forces, Regular or Reservist (*Section 1*).
3. Encourage those eligible to consider service as Chaplains in any of the Cadet organisations and thank all serving Cadet Chaplains (*Section 1.3*).
4. 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*).
5. Note the significant contribution of HM Forces personnel in a variety of theatres, notably the NATO response to the war in Ukraine and current operations in the Red Sea area (*Section 2.1.1*).
6. Welcome the review by Lord Etherton KC into the historic treatment of LGBT+ personnel, and urge HM Government to implement the recommendations in full and note with regret any breach, in the past, of the pastoral relationship between Chaplain and military personnel (*Section 3.5*).

### Report

#### 1. RECRUITMENT – CRITICAL ISSUE

**1.1** The Committee, at the time of writing, and as a part of its constitutional purpose, has not endorsed any candidates for ministry in HM Forces since the last Assembly. Our numbers are at an historic low, with an anticipated number of retirements in the next 3 to 5 years. Please pray for an increase in vocations to this important and valued ministry. We are at historic lows numerically: 3 in the Royal Navy, 13 in the Army, and 2 in the RAF. (These are our full-time numbers, with gaps too in our Reserves) The issue is that we are no longer seen as a significant contributor to Chaplain numbers across Defence.

**1.2** 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, full-time or part-time. The Committee would welcome any suggestions or advice on how we respond to our recruiting crisis. It is a fantastic community in which to minister.

**1.3** Chaplaincy in the Cadet Forces provides many benefits too – mission to the young and development of ministerial skill-sets – in the course of parish (or other civilian) ministry. We highly commend this ministry to the Church too.

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#### 2. THE WORK OF CHAPLAINS

##### 2.1 Routine and Operational Work

**2.1.1** The operational tempo continues to affect the whole of the Armed Forces, and their families. For example, over 6000 UK personnel were deployed overseas over the Christmas period 2023.

**2.1.2** The Committee commends Rev Dr Mark Davidson RN, (a Church of Scotland Chaplain), Principal of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, for the training given to Ukrainian military Chaplains, and welcomes the bonds of friendship, fellowship and support that have now been forged.

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#### 3. CHAPLAINS AND THE CHURCH

##### 3.1 Tri-Service Conference 2023/24

**3.1.1** The Tri-Service Conference (Continuous Professional Development) for Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) Chaplains was held at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, in Wiltshire, in September of last year, where the visiting speaker was Dr Rick Hill from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The Conference was attended by the Convener and his counterpart in PCI. The Committee very much values the shared fellowship with PCI.

##### 3.2 Pastoral Contact

**3.2.1** This 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. The Convener responds to more acute pastoral situations, which can involve a Chaplain's ill-health, professional issues, or to discuss discernment of future service.

##### 3.3 Moderator's Visit to HM Forces

**3.3.1** In February, the Moderator and Convener visited the Royal Air Force. Time was spent at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at the Defence Academy, at RAF Brize Norton to see the hub of the RAF's humanitarian effort on the C17 aircraft, to meet personnel who fly the Chinook helicopter at RAF Benson and at RAF Halton to meet with those under training. The Committee is grateful to the Chaplain-in-Chief and the wider RAF community for their welcome and hospitality. It was a rewarding and challenging few days, as the Moderator was briefed on the challenges facing the Armed Forces today, including recruitment, retention and reducing resources.

### 3.4 Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

3.4.1 The Committee has invited the new Presbyteries to appoint an Armed Forces and Veterans Champion, and is grateful to those who have responded. Training and support are offered to all who have taken up this role.

### 3.5 The Etherton Review

3.5.1 The Committee welcomes the Etherton Review into historic abuses of LGBT+ personnel prior to the lifting of the 'gay ban' in 2000. The Committee hopes that all of the recommendations of the review will be carried out in full, bringing justice, closure and compensation to those directly affected. The Committee regrets that military Chaplains were implicated (in the Review) in breaching the code of confidentiality at the time, and is fully committed through the 3 Heads of Chaplaincy, to ensuring that Chaplains are completely confidential in their pastoral relationships with Service personnel.

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## 4. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

### 4.1 Tri-Service Advisory Group

4.1.1 The Committee invites the church to note a change in Defence policy, allowing 'non-religious pastoral officers' (Humanist Chaplains) to serve in HM Forces. The Committee welcomes this change, and is assured that this policy change is not to the detriment of well-established and successful Christian and World Faiths chaplaincy to the Defence community.

4.2 The Committee welcomes to the Assembly today representatives of all MOD Endorsing Authorities, (Christian, other World Faiths and Humanist) and thanks them for their support as we all seek what is best for our people across the Defence community.

*In the name of the Committee*

SCOTT J BROWN CBE, *Convener*  
ANDREW TAIT, *Vice-Convener*  
DARAN GOLBY, *Secretary*

## Appendix

### Royal Navy

Over the past year, the Royal Navy has continued to serve across the world, playing its part in multiple alliances committed to policing the seas, protecting civilian shipping, and delivering disaster relief. Despite its small size – with just over 32,000 Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel – the Royal Navy continues to operate on a global scale, whether that be training in the Arctic Circle, patrolling the waters of the Antarctic, capturing drug smugglers in the Caribbean, destroying Houthi drones in the Red Sea, delivering aid to Gazan civilians, or protecting the integrity of British territorial waters. This year, as every year, Royal Naval chaplains have deployed around the globe in support of these endeavours.

Over the past year, our Church of Scotland chaplains have been busy in key roles within the UK. Chaplain Mark Dalton has continued to serve in his role as a member of the Chaplaincy Team at HMNB CLYDE (Faslane). This continues to be one of the most challenging postings within the RN, with increased pressures upon the submarine flotilla translating into higher demands upon chaplaincy. Over the past year, Mark has also developed chaplaincy links with RN CALEDONIA (Rosyth) and provides regular support to service personnel there.

After a successful period as Chaplaincy Team Leader in HMS SULTAN, Chaplain Stephen Ashley-Emery was appointed Staff Chaplain to the Naval Chaplaincy Service headquarters in Portsmouth in early 2024. In this role, he provides support to the Chaplain of the Fleet and the Deputy Chaplain of the Fleet. This vital role is complex, fast-paced and challenging.

Chaplain Mark Davidson has spent the past year serving as Principal, Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre. In this role, he oversees all tri-service chaplaincy training. Over the past year, the AFCC has also provided training to multiple groups of Ukrainian military chaplains. In January 2024, he assumed the role of Principal Denominational Chaplain (Church of Scotland and Free Churches).

Rev Mark Dalton RN

HM Naval Base Clyde

Rev Dr Mark Davidson RN

Principal, Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom

Rev Stephen Ashley-Emery RN

Staff Chaplain to the Chaplain of the Fleet, Portsmouth

## Army

There are currently 13 Regular and 4 Reserve Chaplains serving in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

Of note, Rev David Anderson has promoted to CF2 and will move to HQ 51 Inf Bde as Senior Chaplain Scotland.

Rev Nicola Frail leads the RACHD Working Group on Moral Injury (in conversation with the Australian Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service) seeking the best pastoral and spiritual response to this growing need within the Services community alongside the important work that Veterans' Chaplaincy Scotland delivers.

Rev Chris Kellock serves as the Staff Chaplain responsible for coordinating and caring for all Chaplains on Operations across the globe from the Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood in London. He writes -

"My role as the staff chaplain at PJHQ is to advise the Commander on the provision of chaplaincy across operational areas and to assure it through the preparation and deployment of tri-Service chaplaincy. In practice this means ensuring that any chaplain who is about to deploy overseas is ready to do so and that once they are deployed, they are pastorally and practically cared for as they conduct their ministries.

Today, as I write on a rather damp day in February, we have chaplains deployed in eastern Europe, across the broader Middle East, in Cyprus, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Africa, and various naval assets around the world. My role also involves personal visits to these operations, having conducted such visits across Estonia, Cyprus, Poland, Germany and soon East Africa and the Middle East.

Chaplains who deploy overseas conduct their ministries as they would at home, but in sharing the deprivations and experience of those they serve alongside bring something of the love of Christ in to the heart of some very demanding situations. Chaplains are at the forefront of assisting in the process that prepare our service personal to contend with the moral and ethical issues and decisions they may face in difficult circumstances; they are also key in the process called Operational Stress Management, where service personnel are prepared for homecoming and reintegration with home life and family. Ministry is a privilege and across the spectrum of operations, Church of Scotland Chaplains alongside their colleagues, continue to look after the pastoral, moral, and spiritual wellbeing of all Service Personnel in the name of Christ. Please remember them all in your prayers and those they serve alongside in some very demanding circumstances; please also remember their families and friends and all who support them as you do."

From our training world, Rev Richard Begg writes -

"Serving with phase two soldiers is an exciting space. (Phase 2 two training follows Phase 1 Basic training and is where soldiers learn skills specific to their regiment or arm.) They continue to learn what it means to be a soldier and learn additional skills particular to the cap badge they are serving with. At Gibraltar Barracks I have the privilege of working alongside the Royal Engineer phase two training as individuals develop as Combat Sappers. The sense of joy on their faces as they receive their distinctive Royal Engineers stable belts and are referred to as Sappers is huge and a massive testimony to the hours invested by the Permanent Staff and of the Trainees themselves. Alongside the phase two Royal Engineers I also have many career courses which pass through the Station including the Student Bandmasters of the Royal Corps of Army Music. It has been wonderful to have them complete their Church assessment with a live band on a Sunday morning during worship in St Andrew's Garrison Church, Aldershot. The church was dedicated nearly 100 years ago as a memorial to the soldiers of the Church of Scotland and kindred Presbyterian Churches."

Rev Christopher Rowe, the Reserve Chaplain serving with 5 Military Intelligence writes of accompanying his soldiers home as they visited the battlefields of Monte Cassino in Italy -

"This provided an ideal place for me to explore with the troops the ethics of warfare (the ancient Benedictine Abbey was deliberately bombed and utterly destroyed by the allied air forces), to introduce the idea of moral injury (the damage done to our own sense of who we are by witnessing or taking part in actions that transgress our own moral code), and to remember with gratitude the thousands who died trying to liberate Italy. Our act of remembrance was very poignant, and visiting the destroyed but now fully restored Benedictine Abbey was a surprisingly spiritually significant moment - entering under the word PAX - and many of us sensing the importance of retaining places of sanctuary and peace, even amidst the evil and violence of war."

Rev Dr Ken Jeffrey is a Reserve Chaplain serving in his first post at 7 SCOTS

'It was my pleasure, towards the end of September, to participate in Sava Star (an annual Exercise that takes place in Croatia between British and Croatian Forces) along with colleagues from 7SCOTS, 6SCOTS and 3SCOTS. I enjoyed the opportunity of deepening relationships with friends from 7SCOTS and was glad to make new friends from the other Battalions. I continue to be humbled by the acceptance and welcome I receive from everyone. It is a great privilege and pleasure to receive the opportunity of serving a group of such dedicated and hard-working men and women. Most of my time is spent listening to people. I am also delighted to have regular times of reflection and worship with everyone too. I have the impression folk are glad that I am simply around, while the banter and craic is always good. It is only three years since I commissioned. Nevertheless, I am delighted to have received the opportunity to serve as Reserve Padre. I have received abundantly from the whole experience.'

Rev Geoff Berry is in his final post as Chaplain to 3 SCOTS at Fort George, Inverness.

Geoff started out as an Officiating Chaplain to the Military with 2 SCOTS whilst Parish Minister in Penicuik before he answered the Call to Regular Chaplaincy 15 years ago. He has served with various units overseas and on Operations. He writes -

"I believe it is fitting that in the week preceding the Assembly this year, I shall be in France conducting the military funeral of a WW1 Black Watch soldier whose remains were recently discovered. This opportunity to honour their predecessors is special to the troops who will be there, both serving and veteran; and also, a stark reminder that those

who serve enter into a covenant with the people of our nation which may require them to make the ultimate sacrifice in defence of those they love and protect. It is also a reminder to those of us who serve in the name of Christ, that our troops have need of the prayers and care the Kirk and His people provide, whether they recognise it in the day-to-day of Barracks routine or not.

The last 15 years serving the military community both as a civilian and in uniform, have seen many laughs and tears, tragedies and celebrations. Everything seems more intense in-service life; the highs are higher ... perhaps because the lows can be so crushing. Throughout it all, I have remained proud of the people I minister to, even when they mess up big-time. It has been a privilege to be known simply as 'Padre' by thousands of young people over the years, with all that the name encompasses."

Rev Duncan Macpherson CF, Denominational Representative Chaplain for the Church of Scotland.

**List of Church of Scotland Regular Chaplains (Actively recruiting)**

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev Dr Jim Francis MBE	Regional Command	Aldershot
Rev David Anderson	HQ North West England	Preston
Rev Chris Kellock	Permanent Joint Headquarters	Northwood
Rev Duncan Macpherson	Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team	Tidworth
Rev Nicola Frail	Headquarters North England	Whittington
Rev Alan Cobain	Headquarters South West	Tidworth
Rev David Thom	Northern Ireland Garrison Support Unit	Lisburn
Rev Hector MacKenzie	2 Infantry Training Battalion	Catterick Garrison
Rev Paul Van Sittert	1 LANCS	Cyprus
Rev Richard Begg	Royal School of Military Engineering	Minley
Rev Geoff Berry	3 SCOTS	Fort George
Rev Stewart MacKay	3 Army Training Regiment	Pirbright
Rev Neil McLay	HQ Regional Point of Control for Central England	Cottesmore

**List of Church of Scotland Reserve Chaplains (2 vacancies in Scotland)**

Chaplain	Unit	Location
Rev Mike Mair	32 Signals Regiment	Glasgow
Rev Mike Goodison	105 Regt Royal Artillery	Newtonards
Rev Dr Ken Jeffrey	7 SCOTS	Perth
Rev Christopher Rowe	5 Military Intelligence Battalion	Edinburgh

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

Chaplain	Unit
Rev Fraser Stewart	1 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Alen McCulloch	1 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Shuna Dicks	2 Bn The Highlanders, ACF
Rev Keith Blackwood	2 Bn The 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

**Royal Air Force**

Over the last 12 months the world has seemed more uncertain, unstable and challenging. News of natural disasters in Türkiye, Syria, Libya and beyond, as well as conflict in Eastern Europe, and across the Middle East, have caused heart-wrenching suffering and loss of life. The Royal Air Force is often the UK's "first responder" flying humanitarian support into the aftermath of natural disasters, as well as acting to deter conflict or to defend our own nation and our allies – in the words of the Chief of Air Staff, "Ready to fly and fight".

Into this uncertain world, men and women are called to serve incarnationally and sacrificially as chaplains, and the RAF is blessed to have two Church of Scotland ministers serving in our Chaplains' Profession. Both have served with distinction overseas in recent times and now serve at RAF Honington and RAF Cosford, supporting the spiritual, pastoral and moral wellbeing of our community. We are grateful to God for their vocation to this ministry, and to the Church of Scotland for releasing and supporting them in their service.

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| Rev Craig Lancaster RAF | RAF Cosford   |
| Rev David Young RAF     | RAF Honington |