

Serving Soldiers During a Pandemic

A military deployment is never easy. But the coronavirus (COVID-19) has added an extra layer of anxiety for many serving in the U.S. military as they worry about their own health and the safety of their loved ones back home.

Thanks be to God, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s (LCMS) 200 military chaplains are there alongside members of the military, providing the hope and comfort of the Gospel — even during a pandemic.

“One of the great things about being an Army Chaplain is that I’m able to go to people where they live, where they work and where they play,” said Chaplain (1st Lt.) Michael Kearney, who deployed to Afghanistan in March. “I’ve been able to bring Christ to pilots on the flight line, soldiers gearing up to go outside the wire, mechanics and engineers as they fix and build equipment, soldiers and civilians sitting in quarantine, and people going about their lives in a deployed setting.”

Soldiers have reacted to COVID-19 in different ways. Some have reflected on their lives and looked to their chaplain to answer questions about the faith. For many soldiers, the chaplain and religious affairs specialist — who together make up the Unit Ministry Team — may be the first people of faith they have gotten to know.

“This time has made me a sounding board as soldiers are reevaluating priorities and looking at what they want to do next when this mission ends and their ‘regular’ life starts back up



Left: Chaplain (1st Lt.) Michael Kearney (left) stands with a soldier.



Right: Chaplain (Col.) Robert Carter Jr. (far right) stands with the 377th TSC Chaplain Directorate at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans.

again,” said Chaplain (Col.) Robert Carter Jr., who is in the Army Reserve and was mobilized and sent to New Orleans to assist FEMA with the COVID-19 response. Carter also serves as director of Pastoral Care for Montefiore Nyack Hospital in Nyack, N.Y., and leads Sunday worship at the Old Cadet Chapel at the United States Military Academy, West Point.

For some, the pandemic has increased their existing struggles, whether that’s with substance abuse, thoughts of suicide or other issues. As Carter provides individual

counseling and spiritual care, he’s always ready to refer someone to the right resources when he notices warning signs.

Even amid a pandemic, the task of the Synod’s chaplains is still the same, as they care for their flocks and share the hope of the Gospel. “The Chaplain Corps is committed to ... cultivate community, physically and virtually, regardless of the operating conditions,” Carter said.

Give God **Glory...**

... for Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., which worked with Just Neighbors Interfaith Homeless Network, a local emergency homeless shelter, to place a portable toilet for the homeless on the church’s property. Emmanuel also runs a monthly community food bank for those in need in the church’s zip code.

... for Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF), an LCMS Recognized Service Organization that translates, publishes and distributes books that are Bible-based, Christ-centered and Reformation-driven. LHF has provided these books in more than 80 countries and 100 languages. Learn more at lhfmissions.org.



... for Tom and Debi Going, who have served as LCMS missionaries for over 25 years. The Goings and their twins, Megumi and Isaac, are currently serving in Japan. Tom teaches

English at Urawa Lutheran School, which was founded by LCMS missionaries in 1953. Learn more about their work at international.lcms.org/the-dedicated-service-of-the-goings.

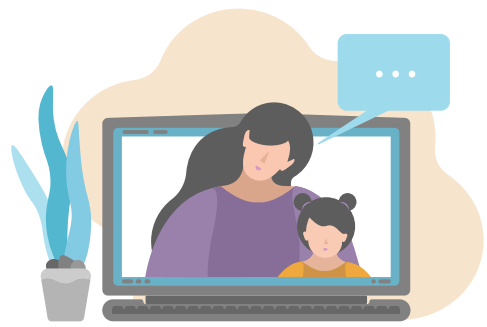
One of the priorities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith. This is accomplished under the familiar name of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which the Synod uses to describe the mercy work directed by the policies of the Boards for National and International Mission and implemented through the programs of the Offices of National and International Mission.

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Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison Ext. 1402
President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Rev. Daniel F. McMiller Ext. 1341
Executive Director
LCMS Office of International Mission

Rev. Robert M. Zagore Ext. 1730
Executive Director
LCMS Office of National Mission



Finding New Ways to Connect with the Community

2020 has been a less-than-ideal year for international mission. With the earthquakes and then the pandemic lockdown, four short-term mission teams were forced to cancel their trips to Puerto Rico.

LCMS missionaries from the Synod's world regions brainstormed ways for people to serve without ever leaving home. The result of their discussion was an online project to pair native English-speaking volunteers with students desiring to practice their English.

Members of the canceled trips, members from past short-term teams and Concordia University System students were invited to participate. They received an overwhelming response, and 42 volunteers were matched with students from Ponce and Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. Other volunteers were connected with students in Russia and the Czech Republic.

Orientation sessions for the five-week program were held in early May to introduce volunteers to the LCMS' church-planting work and help them understand how teaching English functions as a bridge into the community.

"Through various introduced topics and carefully chosen Bible material, we have been able to help our partner learn English skills while also learning more about the Savior," said the Rev. Philip Hillenbrand, pastor of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Mequon, Wis., who participated in the program with his wife, Amy. "We also feel like we are helping the local missionaries by opening doors with some new contacts."

The first round of the program was a success. Volunteer Hilary Tew of Wake Forest, N.C., said it "has been one of the wonderful, creative ideas to come out of COVID-19 isolation. I hope the LCMS will continue these virtual missions opportunities even after people are able to resume meeting in person, because it is a great way to connect with and help people in the community who might not attend in-person [English-as-a-Second-Language] classes."



"I hope the LCMS will continue these virtual missions opportunities even after people are able to resume meeting in person."

—Volunteer Hilary Tew, Wake Forest, N.C.

To learn more about volunteering for this project in the future, visit [servenow.lcms.org/opp/online-english-conversation-partner/](https://www.servenow.lcms.org/opp/online-english-conversation-partner/).

Unity in Christ and His Gospel

THERE'S ONE RACE, THE HUMAN RACE.

Every member of the human family is a wonderful and valuable creation of our almighty heavenly Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit. And every person is sorely affected by the problem of sin. No human philosophy or sociology has a more sobering and realistic view of the human condition of sin than does biblical Christianity.

We are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). We are horrified by sins against others but hardly surprised. As sinners, we are all capable of horrible thoughts, words and deeds against God through our neighbor. We are all guilty. "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15).

That's why God the Father sent one Savior for us all. He took on "our flesh." The Lord God was pleased to bring about salvation through a Palestinian Jew. He didn't look much like me, but He bore my sinful flesh to the cross, nonetheless. He died my death. He suffered for my sin and the sins of the world. It makes not one ounce of

difference that my skin is pink (unlike His!) like that of my northern European ancestors, who were worshiping trees and their ancestors at the time of Jesus. What we call "race" has to do with physical traits that developed naturally. Those genetic adaptations are incidental to being human, being God's creation and being saved by Christ.

Our Augsburg Confession says there is unity in the church where the Gospel is preached purely and the Sacraments are administered according to it (AC VII). There can be no discrimination in the church based upon genetic traits. In the Gospel, we are freed to see our unique traits, ancestry and country of origin as divine First Article gifts. As the Small Catechism says, "God has made me and all creatures." Thus, we are called to love one another in the church and world. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The more the world makes "race" a divisive issue, the more we in the church shall proclaim unity in Christ and His Gospel and show love to all. And this is precisely why LCMS World Relief and Human Care exists.

In Christ,

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

