

**THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED
JOINT COMMISSION ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL
Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
and military chaplaincy endorsing for the
Korean American Presbyterian Church [KAPC] and the
Korean Presbyterian Church in America [KPCA]**

02 March 2004

Dear Chaplain, Military Member, Pastor, Elder, Concerned Believer,

In recent years the major churches making up the membership of the Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRJC) have in their senior deliberative bodies (General Assemblies and Synod) passed resolutions concerning the use of women as military combatants in the Armed Forces of the United States. Since this was the first formal response of our churches to the evolving policy and practice of female integration into all areas of the U. S. military, the result has been discussion and dialogue in many circles with a commensurate number of questions and concerns as to the practical meaning of these resolutions for members of these respective church bodies.

To assist in applying the resolutions, the PRJC is sending you this letter and the accompanying statement as a concise response, while at the same time encouraging study of the commissioned study papers from the committees of each church. The approved statements, grounds and committee study reports are in published synod and assembly minutes. The PCA study can also be found at www.pcanet.org, as can the OPC study at www.opc.org. It is our request that this response of the PRJC be made available to all church members and interested individuals and that it be used as an aid by pastors, elders, chaplains, church leaders and military members in counseling others on this subject.

The PRJC has revised the letter and statement published in 2003 to change the term “women as direct military combatants” to “women in combat.” The changed language more accurately reflects the denominational statements and avoids ambiguities that became apparent in the language of the 2003 statement.

It is our prayer that each church member and fellow follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word will consider the resolutions of General Assembly and Synod with due seriousness, applying these principles to living out their calling as disciples of the Lord.

Yours in His Service,

PRJC Members present at the 01-02 March 2004 Annual Meeting:

Presbyterian Church in America

Rev. James C. Pakala, PRJC Chairman
CH (COL) D. Charles Frost, USAR (Ret.)
CH (COL) Douglas E. Lee, USA
CH (COL) Stephen W. Leonard, USA (Ret.)
Rev. Dr. Kennedy Smartt
CAPT Ronald L. Swafford, CAPT, CHC, USN

Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Gordon E. Kauffman, CAPT, USN (Ret.)
Robert B. Needham, CDR, CHC, USN (Ret.)
CH (LTC) Christopher H. Wisdom, USA

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

CH (MAJ) Stanley R. Copeland, USA (Ret.)
Rev. Dr. Jerry O’Neill
Don E. Prichard, COL, USMCR (Ret.)

Declarations of the Synod/Assemblies

A. RPCNA 168th Synod, 1998

Therefore, be it now resolved

1. **That**, while recognizing the right and duty that women have to self defense, which may involve physical violence (Judges 9:53), it is our conviction that Biblical teaching does not give warrant to employ women for military combat.

2. **That**, we direct all presbyteries and sessions, to instruct their congregations in this regard,

3. **That** we urge any of our female members who are considering or presently engaged in military service to take counsel of their Sessions as to the teaching of God's Word in the matter, and

4. **That** the Clerk of the Synod send a copy of this resolution to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and to our military chaplains, and

5. **That** the Moderator of the Synod be directed to assign a representative to present a copy of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Senate, and the House of Representatives.

B. OPC 68th General Assembly, 2001

“That the 68th GA declares that the use of women in military combat is both contrary to nature and inconsistent with the Word of God.

Grounds [also adopted by the GA]:

(1) This is a ministerial declaration of what is revealed in Scripture, cf. 1 Corinthians 11:14; Report I, Sections III-IV. [See pp. 265-269 of the 68th GA minutes].

(2) This provides the biblical counsel requested by the PRJC without making any further pronouncement that would, presumably, cause the church to ‘intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth’ in a matter that some would say is not yet an extraordinary case, cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 31.4.”

C. PCA 29th General Assembly, 2001

That the Philadelphia Presbytery Overture, the PRJC letter, and the Report of the Bills and Overtures Committee be answered by this report.

That the PCA continue to recognize that the individual conscience, guided by the Word of God and responsive to the counsel of the Church, must decide concerning the propriety of voluntary service in the military.

That the PCA believes that military service is a just and godly calling; however, that it presents special and difficult moral challenges in light of the integration of women into the armed services.

That the women of the PCA be warned of the many difficulties and moral and physical dangers involved in serving in the military in secular America, due to their inherent greater vulnerability.

That individual believers as citizens be urged to exercise their godly influence to bring about authentic spiritual and moral reformation in the military services.

That the PCA chaplains be encouraged in their continued ministry to all male and female personnel in their spheres of ministry.

That pastors and sessions be informed of this report and be encouraged to instruct their people in the matters it presents.

That the NAPARC and NAE churches be informed of the PCA’s position on this matter.

D. PCA 30th General Assembly, 2002

1. Acknowledging that the child in the womb is “a person covered by Divine protection” (*Statement on Abortion*, Sixth General Assembly); and that women of childbearing age often carry unborn children while remaining unaware of their child’s existence; and that principles of just war require the minimization of the loss of life—particularly innocent civilians; the PCA declares that any policy which intentionally places in harms way as military combatants women who are, or might be, carrying a child in their womb, is a violation of God’s Moral Law.

2. This Assembly declares it to be the biblical duty of man to defend woman and

therefore condemns the use of women as military combatants, as well as any conscription of women into the Armed Services of the United States.

3. Therefore be it resolved that the Thirtieth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America adopts the above as pastoral counsel for the good of the members, the officers, and especially the military chaplains of the Presbyterian Church in America.

4. Be it further resolved that the Presbyterian Church in America supports the decision of any of its members to object to, as a matter of conscience, the conscription of women or the use of women as military combatants.

E. **PCA 31st General Assembly, 2003**

Nothing done by the previous Assembly compels any court of original jurisdiction to exercise discipline on issues pertaining to the report on the Ad-Interim Study Committee on Women in the Military.

PRJC Understanding of the Force of Synod/Assembly Declarations

We believe that the actions of the General Assemblies/Synod, rightly understood, have significant weight for chaplains, ministers, ruling elders, military personnel and members of our churches.

The weight of these ecclesiastical statements includes the duty to take them seriously, not to dismiss them casually as advice that can be ignored. Our purpose here is not to foster judicial actions, but to help understand and apply what the assemblies have approved.

As we do this, it is important to realize that none of the declarations has been formally adopted as part of the law and order of the church. Therefore, they are, in a sense, works in progress and the full force of the statements is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, actions are to be taken and counsel is to be given in accordance with the stated position of the church, insofar as one's individual conscience enables.¹

Regarding the matter of individual conscience, these words from A. A. Hodge's commentary on *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Banner of Truth reprint, 1992) are instructive. The following paragraphs are from that commentary on Chapter 31, sections II-IV: "... synods and councils, consisting of uninspired men, have no power to bind the conscience, and their authority cannot exclude the right, nor excuse the obligation, of private judgment. If their judgments are unwise, but not directly opposed to the will of God, the private member should submit for peace' sake. If their decisions are opposed plainly to the Word of God, the private member should disregard them and take the penalty."

Nothing herein summarized by the PRJC compels any court of original jurisdiction to exercise discipline on issues pertaining to Synod and General Assembly declarations cited above.

¹ Dr. Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Theological Seminary, in answer to an inquiry about these questions from the PRJC Chairman, made helpful observations regarding PCA polity as understood by that Assembly: "The first error perceives an action of the General Assembly to be similar to a law of congress or a decision of the Supreme Court. Both are improper analogies. Until the General Assembly acts so as to make a matter a part of our Standards, then that matter is not binding -- unless the matter is determined by a judicial decision or unless the determination is already within the powers of the GA as assigned in the constitution (such as determining the trustees of agencies).

"The second error perceives a non-constitutional statement of the GA as being superfluous and of no import. In actuality, the GA makes such statements to advise its members and churches of the mind of the larger church at that moment. While such action does not have the authority of law to bind conscience or future Assemblies, brothers in Christ are obligated to weigh with great deference this "pious advice" since they have vowed to seek the peace and purity of the church, and this cannot be done through simply ignoring the properly approved advice of brothers and fathers. Such advice (i.e., an "in thesi" statement) must be seriously considered as the consensus of the church (but not the mandate of the church) by conscientious brothers until the church changes its advice."

PRJC Responses to Issues Raised about Women in Combat

1. We acknowledge that many troops have as their primary mission the support of the war fighters. They may kill or capture the enemy in instances of self-defense within the support train. They are positioned in harm's way as are any military or civilian personnel close to the battlefield.

However, the synod/assemblies' declarations clearly assert that God never intended a woman to be a military combatant. Further, we regard these assembly/synod actions to frame the biblical sense of military combatant to be anyone who is involved, accountably and plainly, in seeking the death of enemy personnel.

There are concerns for women in support roles, as in "remote" naval and aviation roles in the military, that must be considered individually and judiciously. Those concerns affect the spiritual life of the female military member or potential member as well as the male member who as commander or subordinate might be expected and required to abstain from acting on his sense of moral obligation to protect women. While these denominational declarations do not forbid women from participating in those remote or support roles, each should evaluate his own circumstances. Military positional requirements should be examined and evaluated in light of the Scriptures elevated by denominational study committees, as well as by the chaplain's independent study. PRJC chaplains should assist men and women, as requested, in their making that evaluation.

2. These declarations provide authority for PRJC chaplains who counsel or advise other military members regarding the use of women in combat.

3. These declarations do not require a PRJC chaplain, who is biblically counseling a military member who has a problem of conscience with women in combat, to advise resignation. Neither do they require a chaplain who has a problem of conscience with women as military combatants to resign.

4. PRJC chaplains should counsel women who are or might be carrying a child in their womb and who intentionally place that child in harm's way to repent and consider the implications of genuine repentance and forgiveness. Counseling should include the father of the baby and the person who knowingly orders that woman into harm's way.

5. The military chaplain is not expected or obliged to preach or impose these biblically derived declarations presumptively upon individual service members. He should be prepared to teach principles from which this finding is derived and to explain and elaborate when particular pastoral guidance is sought by a uniformed service member. As well, the chaplain shall explain the particulars of such pastoral guidance to a uniformed service member's senior in command when asked to do so by a member who is appealing for relief from duties that could compromise behavior by a man toward a woman.

6. With respect to questions of conscience and morals, as in any other difficult and complex ethical problem, it is the duty of any PRJC endorsed chaplain, humbly relying on God's enabling grace, to seek to deal with all the aspects of such a situation in a manner consistent with his ordination vows, regardless of the inherent difficulty.

7. How are chaplains supposed to deal with (including providing counsel) commanders' policies and institutional/state policies as compared to dealing with individual women vis-à-vis the Synod/Assembly actions?

Chaplains have a moral responsibility to be well and carefully informed of the policies and actions of their endorsing church as well as the policies of their parent command and service, and also the appropriate civilian authorities. From the perspective of the PRJC, we believe this

includes diligent, thoughtful reading of the actions of the three church bodies on this issue, including the exegetical work. Furthermore, we believe that the obligation of each chaplain is to deal biblically with each counselee as God will grant him the grace to do so.

For instance, we do not believe any PRJC endorsed chaplain is obligated to inform every female service member he meets of the position of his church on the subject of women as military combatants, any more than he is obligated to inform every service member he meets of his church's stand on baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc. On the other hand, if any one asks for a biblical perspective on any of these subjects, we believe it is the duty of the chaplain to represent his endorsing denomination without fear or dissimulation.

To put it another way, it is the duty of a chaplain to do his own "heavy lifting" beforehand on issues such as women as military combatants, issues which may come up in many different settings. He must think it through with humility, honesty and care, just as he would in explaining why our PRJC denominations do not ordain women. Thus, when asked about the issue of women as military combatants, he can kindly and with sensitivity give the questioner the basic biblical facts and citations to encourage his or her own "heavy lifting."

8. The Commission was also asked: How should chaplains advise their command concerning these Synod/Assembly actions?

When asked, answer honestly. When reporting to the command, during the indoctrination period, inform the senior chaplain and/or C.O. if it appears that there may be an issue. If the issue is discussed in an up-front manner at the beginning of the relationship with the command, the probability of friction diminishes. Informing a command of our commitment to use the name of Jesus Christ in prayer is an analogous issue best addressed before having to force the issue in an actual occasion of public prayer.

9. In light of the Synod/Assembly adopted recommendations, some chaplains have asked what advice they are being "commanded" to give? The answer is "none."

10. A group of chaplains addressed the following related questions to the PRJC: "We felt that the churches will be looking to the PRJC for guidance on this issue. How should they be counseling their members on this issue? Some form of statement would be very beneficial so that ministers can provide the Godly advice as stated in the resolutions. And, if it is the obligation of men to protect women, can the denominational statements be construed to imply that all our young men should enter the military to fulfill their obligation and our young women be counseled on the biblical roles that they can play in the military?"

We do not believe it is the place of the PRJC to instruct churches as to what respective synod/assemblies have said. However, we can provide to those who are interested the narrower application for which the PRJC is responsible. It is not the place of the PRJC to construe denominational statements with respect to these questions outside the responsibilities of the PRJC as set forth in the first sentence of Article II of its Constitution: "The Commission is an agent of its member denominations (not an ecclesiastical commission in the technical sense), created by them to assist in carrying out their ministries to members of the Armed Forces and other institutions."

Note on exegesis:

The exegetical grounds of the PCA and OPC statements address diverse issues of military combat, such as those raised in Judges 4:4-5:31. Deborah was not a woman in combat. Chaplains and other interested Christians are urged to make use of the careful exegetical work already done by the General Assembly committees that studied the issue. The RPCNA included Scripture references in its declaration. The PCA and OPC published in General Assembly minutes the full majority and minority reports of their study committees, including detailed exegesis.