

MISSION
TO NORTH
AMERICA

Presbyterian Church in America

Multiply

Profiling God's Great Work in North America

Dear Friends:

If you make a habit of watching the news or reading the paper, there are certain words that you often hear these days: international relations, terrorism, political unrest (both domestic and international), civil wars, and homeland security. All these things are realities of the world we live in. This truth hastens the need for another truth...the truth of Christ.

Today, there are about 150 Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) Chaplains serving under the endorsement of Mission to North America (MNA). Of these, 117 work in the military, while approximately 33 minister in hospitals, prisons, and other community organizations. These men interact with individuals in life-changing, dire situations, whether it is a war zone, a prison, an impoverished community, a hospital waiting room, or a hospice care facility. But no matter what the circumstance, the message the chaplains communicate is the same – that, in the uncertainties of their surroundings, Christ is sure, and lives are changed only through the Gospel.

This issue of *Multiply* features four chaplains answering calls in various settings. As you read, I ask that you prayerfully consider how the Lord might use you as a part of MNA Chaplain Ministries. MNA also serves the churches and presbyteries of the PCA with: Church Planting, English as a Second Language (ESL) Ministries, Mercy Ministries, Leadership and Ministry Preparation (LAMP), Revitalization and Evangelism, Capitol Service, and MNA ShortTerm and Disaster Response. Please continue your generous support of MNA, both prayer and financial, and let us work together to advance the Lord's Kingdom in North America.

In Christ,



Jim Bland, MNA Coordinator

Chaplains Convey the Security Found in Christ

When Chaplain Mike Curtis recalls his recent deployment with the Air Force in Southwest Asia, it's the faces of the young troops he remembers most: "I was stationed in a central location, and almost every day, I watched as the young men and women went in and out. All I had to do was look at their faces and I could tell whether they were coming or going. Being in a combat zone has that effect."

Growing up around the military, Mike knows first-hand the difficulties service personnel deal with during active duty, especially when they are away from their families. "It's important for people in the military to have the services of good chaplains and spiritual leaders with them. Whether it's counseling, encouragement, or simply having someone to pray with, that connection means a lot."

Mike remembers one stressful day during his deployment when he was serving on a medevac flight. "We were loading some injured onto the plane. Some were on stretchers and a few were walking on. One person asked if he could talk with a chaplain. He said that he had been reading his Bible and had some questions. All this was happening over the noise of the aircraft engine, so we were basically screaming at each other. But we were able to talk for about an hour and work through some of his questions."

Those impromptu meetings are at the core of Mike's ministry – whether the troops are deployed to an overseas location or they are stationed away from family in the United States. ***"Much of what these individuals deal with on a daily basis brings up the question: 'What is life about?' That's why it is crucial for the chaplains to be right there alongside them."***

Many of the men and women Chaplain Mike Curtis interacts with through the Air Force are between the ages of 20 and 25. "It's very different to work with people so young. On the one hand, you are amazed at the responsibility they are given... flying million dollar planes, and on the other side of it, many of them are dealing with issues of being away from home for the first time." The troops are not the only ones who feel the homesickness. Mike says that his trust in the Lord to take care of his wife and kids at home is a big part of coping with his longings for his family.



Mike is one of a growing number of Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) Chaplains endorsed by Mission to North America (MNA) to reach out to men and women in the armed forces, as well as to offer spiritual guidance and support in hospitals, care facilities, prisons, and other organizations throughout North America. MNA Chaplain Ministries Coordinator Dave Peterson explains that in the midst of difficult, and in some cases, life and death situations, the chaplains are there to help remind some and introduce others to our daily need for Christ. ***“It’s often the hard circumstances that cause us to realize our dependence on God,”*** he says.

Chaplain Steve Fisher is at Navy Recruit Training Command Great Lakes, a boot camp, in Illinois. “I see people just as they are entering the service. A lot of them are dealing with family issues, homesickness, uncertainty about the choices they are making, stress, and the intensity of the training. But whether they are believers or not, I’m there to support them, to build relationships with them.”

Steve works with seven other chaplains of different denominations. Every nine weeks, about 10,000 recruits come through the camp. The chaplains split up the group and serve as counselor to about 2,000 each. “It’s hard to count how many times during the day that I get to share and remind people of the Gospel. Because of the nature of the training, the recruits can’t leave the base. That makes them more willing to talk or come to the worship service. ***For many, it’s the first time they’ve heard the Gospel.***”

One recruit in particular left a lasting impression on Steve: “This young woman came from a mixed background. Her grandmother was a Christian, but her mother had no religion at all in her life. This woman had gotten involved with a form of witchcraft. After having the opportunity to talk with her, I realized that she was rebelling against a Christianity where there is no suffering. If she believed in Jesus, she always had to be happy or something was wrong. I was able to tell her more about Christ and how he knows – literally – what true suffering is. We talked about how good the Gospel really is, and after that, I could see the hunger in her eyes to know more.”

This recruit highlights the joy and challenge for Steve in his ministry. “The training lasts nine weeks, so that’s all we have them for. The best I can do is plant seeds. I can’t really do discipleship or long-term transformation. With this young woman, I gave her a Bible but didn’t really have the chance to go much further. That’s the downside, but the plus is that even though I’m not really being ‘fruitful,’ I’m planting more seeds than I could anywhere else.”

Serving with the Army, Chaplain Lenny Siems is in one of the most tumultuous areas in Southwest Asia. Though he frequently encounters the results of combat, his words are filled with abundant joy when discussing his assignment: “I am so blessed to be here as a chaplain. To be able to help in these situations, to comfort our young men and women, and to be able to pray for and with the wounded and the medical providers is such an honor.”

Lenny says that the experience is a well-taught lesson in the human condition and the power of God, “For one of the first times in my life, I am seeing the direct and terrible results of sin, especially on the human body. It is hard to see such suffering and not be affected in some way. God is teaching me that I can really do nothing on my own but share the love of Christ to a hurting world. This is a liberating experience.”



Chaplain Steve Fisher, pictured above and below right, laughs when he recalls how the Lord first began to place the chaplaincy on his heart: “I knew God was calling me to parachurch ministry, something involving evangelism, but I wasn’t sure what. But when I was in college, some friends of mine started to joke with me that I needed to be a chaplain on a submarine, so that the people I was ministering to could not get away from me.” With all jokes aside, that’s exactly what Steve did. After finishing seminary, Steve went on active duty with the Navy in 2000. He spent six years in Japan before filling his current post at the Navy Recruit Training Command in 2006. “One of the things I like most about my job is that, because I’m a chaplain, the recruits know up front that I’m a Christian.” While deployed in the Persian Gulf, Steve worked with the US troops on the USS Juneau, but he also had the opportunity to visit and provide worship services and counseling aboard warships from Great Britain and Australia.





After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, Chaplain John Stodgill (pictured on left) worked with many people displaced by the storm at Wayne General Hospital in Waynesboro, Mississippi, which is about 100 miles north of the coast. "A lot of the people were dealing with post traumatic stress disorder, but there weren't enough people to help. We saw first-hand the emotional pain of the hurricane." John recalls one patient who was in critical condition asking him "Do you think God can have mercy on a person like me?" John opened scripture right away and told the man about the forgiveness and love of Christ.

While Mike, Steve, and Lenny are a part of the military side of Chaplain Ministries, John Stodgill represents the civilian chaplaincy. "I work with the local hospital and hospice care. I minister to all people of all faiths, and I am available for the patients, their families, and the staff."

After being in the pastorate for 45 years, John answered a call to serve as chaplain of Wayne General Hospital in Waynesboro, Mississippi. He says that even though it's a small hospital, the needs are great. ***"I'm on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many times I'm offering support, prayer, encouragement, and condolences."***

John faces life, death, and overwhelming stressors on a daily basis. "I remember one instance when one of our doctors felt like he had been pushed as far as he could go. I was able to meet with him and offer him the same support I offer the patients and their families. We forget, but the doctors are human too."

Whether serving with the military or ministering to civilians, these four men represent the heart of the chaplaincy – to influence and change lives for Christ. "By working directly with these men and women, we can show the love of Christ through our actions," Mike says. Steve adds, "When they are facing life-altering decisions and searching for answers to life's 'big' questions, the Lord has placed me in a position where I can ask to share my views on the issues they are dealing with in light of the Gospel. No matter what religious beliefs they hold, everyone can relate to what it means to be human and to the need for forgiveness."

John emphasizes, ***"When the people are facing death head-on, they are yearning for hope. And we are there ready to tell them all about the hope found in Christ."***

For more information on MNA Chaplain Ministries, visit www.pca-mna.org. ■

During his time in a combat zone, Chaplain Lenny Siems, pictured bottom left, corresponded with family and friends through letters and emails. In one letter, he wrote: "I was about to go to bed after another long day when I received a call from another chaplain that we had a possible mass casualty. When I got there, they were beginning to unload men, women, and children from the ambulances. Before it was all over, they had treated 37 wounded from a bicycle suicide bomb. I sat there with one young boy, maybe 11, who was hurt and scared. I stayed with him while they put an IV in him and tried to reassure him through an interpreter. To see small children wounded by a homicide bomber deeply saddens me." Lenny depends on his relationship with Christ to help him through these experiences, "No matter how small or large the problem is I must run to Christ because only He is sufficient to help us in our time of need."



Enriching the Kingdom: 2007 Mercy Ministries Conference



Christian Education & Publications and MNA are excited to announce the 2007 Mercy Ministries Conference, Enriching the Kingdom – People hurt, God calls, Church responds. The conference will be in Atlanta on April 20-22 at the Crowne Plaza Ravinia. Speakers include Phil Ryken, Diane Langberg, March and Mariam Bell, Amy Sherman, Steve Corbett, and others, addressing themes such as ministering to those facing crisis in marriage, prison ministry, justice and mercy in the inner city, and economic development in communities of need. **For more information, contact Loren**

Easterling at 678-825-1132 or training@pcanet.org, or visit www.pca-mna.org.

MNA DISASTER RESPONSE:

Continued Disaster Response Support Vital

Last year we saw the considerable impact a natural disaster can have on communities when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf region. But even with the magnitude of the destruction, very quickly we also witnessed that the strength of the Body of Christ is great. Today, those neighborhoods affected by Katrina are still rebuilding and we know that we must be prepared for more storms. MNA Disaster Response is committed to helping PCA churches and presbyteries coordinate practical assistance to people in need due to a disaster. Workers are still very much needed

in the Gulf region. **To find out how you can be involved, visit www.pca-mna.org.**



UPCOMING CONFERENCES

From Embers to a Flame Conference will meet at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on January 18-21.

Sarang Community Church in Anaheim, California, is hosting the **English Ministry Korean Pastors Conference** on January 29-31.

The **North America Church Planting Conference**, sponsored by MNA and Global Church Advancement, is scheduled for January 29-February 2 in Orlando, Florida.

Harbor Presbyterian and MNA are sponsoring the **2007 Multi-site Church Conference**, March 13-14 in San Diego, California.

The **MNA African American Convocation** will meet June 8-10 in Memphis, Tennessee.

Look for MNA events at the **35th PCA General Assembly**, June 11-15 in Memphis, Tennessee.

For more information, visit www.pca-mna.org.

Mission to North America (MNA) serves the churches and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), providing leadership in church planting initiatives, as well as placement and training services for church planters in the US and Canada. In addition, MNA coordinates English as a Second Language (ESL) Ministries, Mercy Ministries, Leadership and Ministry Preparation (LAMP), Revitalization and Evangelism, Capitol Service, Chaplain Ministries, and MNA ShortTerm and Disaster Response for the PCA in North America.

For a list of MNA staff, visit our Web site: www.pca-mna.org.

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