



21 May 2018

To: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Endorsed Chaplains

**RE: Guidelines for Same-Gender Services**

Greetings:

This statement of guidelines is the result of a request for an expression of the stance of our denomination for chaplain ministry with LGBTQ persons. Although primarily this statement is for our military chaplains it may also be of use to those who are engaged in chaplain ministries across a wide variety of settings. Many of our chaplains have expressed that they are finding themselves to be either the only chaplain on an installation, or one of a very small minority, who are “unrestricted” in their ability and willingness to provide services to and for LGBTQ persons.

This statement provides written affirmation of the denomination’s support for this ministry. The repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell and the decision of the Supreme Court to declare the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional prompted the Department of Defense to draft new policies which extend benefits and services to LGBTQ personnel and same-gender married couples. The Offices of the Chiefs of Chaplains of the Army, Air Force, and Navy recognize that there are many pastoral considerations as a result of this decision and have requested that the ecclesiastical endorsers for each denomination issue guidance to their military and Veteran Administration chaplains in accordance with denominational expectations and requirements.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has established itself as a denomination that is open and affirming of all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Throughout our recent history, the DOC has boldly and with conviction ordained members of the LGBTQ community in the spirit of diversity and inclusivity. Our commitment to an extravagant welcome of all people into the full life and ministry of the Church was demonstrated by the General Assembly in a Sense of the Assembly Resolution passed in 2013. Pluralism, inclusivity and respect for all of God’s children are paramount in discerning an appropriate pastoral care plan for any who seek chaplain support. Understanding that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serves a diverse family of believers, we affirm that our chaplains too represent a broad spectrum of theological understanding and belief.

It is the expectation of the Office of Chaplaincy and Specialized Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that all of our chaplains have and will continue to treat all Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and members of the Coast Guard who seek their guidance and counsel with respect and dignity. Knowing that Commanders are given authorization for chaplains as special staff officers to plan and implement a comprehensive religious program that addresses the religious and spiritual needs of all service members in the command, we expect that our chaplains will fully cooperate to either directly “perform” or indirectly “provide for” all who seek their services, all who are legally entitled to military chaplain ministry support. It must be noted that different commands, installations and posts will be directed by specific policy and, in some instances, state regulations. It is the responsibility of each chaplain to be fully aware and advised as to how those regulations will inform a response to requests for some services. It is, in any case, the chaplains duty to ensure our service member’s free exercise of religion, as a continuing testament to God’s acceptance and love for all people.

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As the ecclesiastical endorser for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) it is my intention to walk alongside, serve with, and support you as you minister to the members of our Armed Forces, their families and our veterans. It is my further intention that our Endorsed Chaplains will receive this message as guidance and not as a denominational directive. Our history and polity celebrates and affirms individual conscience and the leading of the Holy Spirit in the conduct of ministry.

This guidance has been formulated with consultation by Rev. Sotello Long, President of Disciples Home Missions, and is based on similar guidance from the United Church of Christ. It represents my vision and intention for our denominationally endorsed chaplains across Active Duty, Reserve, and Guard components of all service branches and the Veterans Administration Health System. It may also serve as guidance for chaplains serving in other diverse settings for ministry.

As your Chaplain Endorsing Officer, I invite your thoughts and or questions on this or other issues related to your ministry.

Respectfully and with prayers for your continued ministry,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Thomas A. Yates'.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas A. Yates, Chaplain Endorsing Officer  
Office of Chaplaincy and Specialized Ministries, Disciples Home Missions  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

