



## Serving Those Who Serve

The United States has been at war since September 11, 2001. We still refer to that traumatic time in our history as 9-11. In many ways, that day was a wake-up call for people of faith. It is one of those days of which you remember where you were and what you were doing.

I was serving as President of Massachusetts Family Institute (MFI), a ministry in association with Focus on the Family, and as the senior chaplain for the 26th Infantry Brigade for the MA Army National Guard. That morning, I hosted a meeting of leaders in the “pro-family” movement for all New England states. I remember vividly arriving at a beautiful home near the New England coast to be with our MFI Board Chairman, who was serving as our host for the day.

The Chairman met me at the door and asked if I had heard the news. I had been listening to praise music and enjoying a time of worship during my drive, so I had no idea what he was talking about. He led me to his study in time to see a replay of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center. In amazement, we watched the second plane hit. I literally had to sit down, and we began to pray for those trapped in those buildings. We saw the first building collapse, and then the second. Then, we saw the Pentagon

in flames and reports of other aircraft missing or not responding to Air Traffic Controllers.

I left the others, who continued to pray, and called my Brigade Commander. He told me to get to headquarters as soon as possible. I went home, packed some clothes and uniforms, and said good-bye to my wife, not knowing what the coming days would bring.

As it turned out, I made it home late that night as we waited to see what the President would do. Eventually, we did mobilize soldiers. I found myself doing “Pre-Deployment” briefings and “Coping With Separation” briefings. I made regular trips to visit National Guard soldiers mobilized along the Eastern coast, serving on security missions at sensitive areas.

Three years ago, I was recalled to active duty and sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to assist with ministry for the 101st Airborne Division as they made multiple deployments. My job has been to coordinate the ministry on post to make sure all chapels and chapel ministries remain open and functional as division chaplains and chaplain assistants are deployed.

It has been a challenging and most rewarding ministry. I have made more notifications of the loss of a soldier than I

want to remember. I have helped spouses deal with severe family problems while their husbands were away at war. I have seen courageous families face separation and remain true to God and to each other. Our Protestant women of the chapel ministry have thrived as ladies stand strong for Jesus during difficult times.

The deployments continue. The 101st Airborne Division is now on their third rotation since 2003, this one lasting 15 months. During this latest deployment, we are discovering that more spouses are returning home rather than remaining at Fort Campbell for the 15 months their soldier will be at war. This means many military families have returned to local communities and, in some cases, to local churches. These returns provide prime ministry opportunities for many congregations.

What can you do to reach out to military families in your area? First and foremost, pray! I know this is what we usually say about everything, but this is critical. Some congregations are joining an international effort to build a Wall of Prayer for deployed service men and women. You can find more information about this effort and become part of the Wall of Prayer at <http://www.accts.org/>.

We recently held a Concert of Prayer for our deployed soldiers here at Fort Campbell. I asked our deployed chaplains to send prayer requests. The following are a few of the responses:

- Please pray for our peacemakers' protection.
- Pray that the enemy might be confounded and confused and the enemy's leadership will be destroyed.
- Pray that the lies of the enemy will be exposed, particularly the lie of heavenly reward for suicide-bombing missions.
- Pray that our relationship with Pakistan might result in the enemy's sanctuary being eliminated.
- Pray for our general officers' leadership in decision-making so that they will see clearly the way ahead—defeat of the enemy and development of the Afghan and Iraqi governments.
- Pray that violence against Afghan women will stop and that women and girls will be valued as human beings.
- Pray that the cycle of corruption will be broken and that the people will choose not to grow drugs, but, rather, invest in the future well-being of their land through education and legitimate forms of commerce.
- Pray for unity among the Coalition forces and the local military forces.
- Pray for political and popular support around the world for the cause of peace, freedom, and democracy.
- Pray for comfort of those who grieve the loss of loved ones.
- Pray for our deployed soldiers, who are experiencing marriage problems.
- Pray for a safe return home for all of those who are deployed.

Next, reach out to deployed spouses and servicemen in your area. You can find out about soldiers in your area that may be deployed by contacting your local military recruiters and by visiting your closest National Guard Armory or Reserve Training Center. All deployed units have organizations for spouses. In the Army, we call these Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). These organizations meet regularly while their soldiers are deployed to hear the latest news from downrange and to support each other.

The following are some suggestions as to how you can minister to military personnel and their families:

- Your church could volunteer to provide a meal for a FRG meeting or provide funds for a picnic or outing to an amusement park.
- Find out if any spouses of deployed soldiers are pregnant, and offer services to them like a baby shower, or help with meals when the baby comes.
- If you read of the death of a soldier in your community, pray for that family. Ask God to open doors to minister in appropriate ways when the family is ready to receive ministry.
- Join with other churches in your community, and plan a welcome-home ceremony for soldiers in your area when they return from duty.
- Offer to do a marriage retreat for deployed soldiers and their spouses, helping them to reconnect after an extended separation.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Our soldiers serve so that we can live in peace. May God grant us grace and wisdom to serve those who serve us so honorably and courageously!



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*Bio: Chaplain (COL) Ronald A. Crews was mobilized to active-duty June 2005 and serves as Deputy Installation Chaplain for Mobilization at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He and his wife Jonda live in Clarksville, Tennessee, and have four children and three grandchildren. Chaplain Crews will retire this summer, completing 29 years of service as a U.S. Army Chaplain. Chaplain Crews received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Stetson University, a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Seminary, and a Doctorate of Ministry degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He serves on the Board of King College, and InterFACE Ministries.*