



## Information for Leaders of Churches of Christ Services on Military Installations

### **I. BACKGROUND:**

Thank you for your interest in providing members of the Church of Christ an opportunity to assemble and worship according to our unique beliefs and practices. Your leadership can be a very rewarding and spirit-building experience for you and great blessing to the military and civilian personnel at your base.

The Command Religious Program by which military members are provided opportunities for *free exercise of faith* is the responsibility of the Commander and is managed by the Command Chaplain through a wide range of chapel programs for persons of all faiths. When the beliefs and practices of a faith group are sufficiently unique, a separate *distinctive faith group* (DFG) service may be established and led by a person of that faith group, i.e. a *Distinctive Faith Group Leader* (DFGL).

At military bases where there are no congregations of the Church of Christ in the local community or at posts where military personnel are not permitted to leave base, members of the Church of Christ sometimes choose to worship together as a DFG instead of participating in one of the general Christian chapel services. Usually, DFG services are graciously supported by the chapel staff members who make a great effort to accommodate all faith groups. Some Command Chaplains make the process easier than others; nevertheless, there are steps to follow and policies to understand in order to establish and sustain a Church of Christ service on a military base. More details are in attachments (1) and (2). This material is provided to help the DFG Leader understand the process and work cooperatively and successfully within the DoD requirements.

### **II. UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION**

The Church of Christ DFG “congregation” is a group or a service—NOT A CHURCH. It is crucial to understand what may seem like a fine point; but, it is an important distinction for understanding and applying policies which affect the DFG service. In our church polity, we presume that wherever a group of members congregate it is a congregation—a church—with all the functions associated with a church. However, the *establishment* clause of the Constitution is interpreted to mean that the government cannot establish a “church” on a military base. Military Commanders can authorize military personnel to have the time and space to worship according to their faith. Therefore, a DFG meeting simply is a group of like-minded persons who assemble to worship according to their distinctive beliefs and practices. It emphatically is NOT A CHURCH in the view of the command or the chapel staff. Generally, this is not an issue; however, there are implications that must be understood:

- A. On rare occasions the Command Chaplain will interpret this in the most limited and negative sense and only allow time for a worship assembly. Other common practices such as Bible classes, social/fellowship activities, and youth meetings may not be

allowed. Although this is an extreme and very rare application of policy, it does occasionally happen.

- B. There are common policies that may seem restrictive, but in fact eliminates many potential conflicts in DFGs.
  - 1. A DFG may not meet on post until services are requested and approved by the command.
  - 2. Financial offerings must be managed through a sub-account in the chapel fund or offerings must not be accepted at all.
  - 3. Offerings can be used only for approved purposes, and funds not used internally to support the DFG must be planned and announced in advance as designated offerings. There is a more detailed discussion of financial offerings in attachment (3).
  - 4. The DFGL cannot receive pay for services. This is strictly a voluntary position.

### **III. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR HAVING A DFG SERVICE**

The requirements of Army Regulation 165-1 are typical of what may justify starting a Church of Christ faith group service for any military branch. Although in the past, an individual's personal request to the Chaplain frequently was all that was needed, currently the prospective DFGL can expect to go through this process and will have to provide Service-specific required documentation. It used to be that if the Church of Christ service has been established for long period on a post, this information was not required. Service policy now requires documented justification annually.

The specific requirements, with suggested responses, are outlined in Attachment (1)

### **IV. DISTINCTIVE FAITH GROUP LEADER ENDORSEMENT**

Persons who desire to start or continue to lead an existing or ongoing Church of Christ service must obtain approval from the Command Chaplain who will require an Endorsement from the Church of Christ. The Fairfax Church of Christ is recognized by the Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB) and can provide the acceptable documents and liaison with the command. It will expedite the process if all the information in Attachment (2) is provided with the request. This usually can be managed by phone or email. Contact information for the Endorser is shown below.

Dr. Gary G. Payne  
Chairman, Chaplaincy Endorsing Committee  
Fairfax Church of Christ  
3901 Rugby Road  
Fairfax, VA 22033  
703-631-2100 (Church Office)  
703-631-0744 (Church office fax)  
[chaplains@fxcc.org](mailto:chaplains@fxcc.org) (Endorser email)  
[www.fxcc.org/chaplain](http://www.fxcc.org/chaplain) (Website)

### **V. LEADING A CHURCH OF CHRIST DFG**

You will find in attachment (3) a discussion of matters which some Church of Christ group leaders and/or members have found difficult to comprehend or deal with. It will be helpful to review this information, especially the section regarding collection and management of offerings.

Attachments:

- (1) General Requirements for having a DFG Service
- (2) DFGL Endorsement
- (3) Background Information and Leadership Issues

**--Attachments Follow--**

## GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR HAVING A DFG SERVICE

The following information is based on Army Regulation 165-1 which is comprehensive and is generally descriptive of policies for all Branches. Where information is required from the DFGL, suggested responses are shown below.

Distinctive faith group leaders seeking to provide religious services in chapel or unit facilities must submit an application to the local installation chaplain for processing and approval. An application must be resubmitted for approval upon change of a sponsoring chaplain. The prospective leader must -

- (1) Be approved by a religious organization recognized by the AFCB or recognized as a tax-exempt religious organization by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In the latter case, the prospective distinctive faith group leader shall submit a current original letter of certification and endorsement by an authorized leader of the distinctive faith group with a full description of the group. This will include its origin, the length of time it has existed, and the number of members of the parent faith group. Letter of certification and endorsement must be renewed annually.
- (2) Establish the need for the requested distinctive faith group worship service. This is based upon our unique worship requirements.
- (3) Provide a by-name list of those persons requesting the service.
- (4) Provide a complete explanation of why the worship service cannot be conducted by a military chaplain.
- (5) Provide reasons why the local chaplain-led worship services cannot meet the specific theological/denominational requirements of the group.
- (6) Establish with the installation chaplain that the proposed distinctive faith group leader is qualified for the position. This will require a letter from the prospective DFGL's current or home congregation.

## RESPONSE TO REQUIREMENTS FOR HAVING A DFG SERVICE

The items below respond item-by-item to the requirements listed above for justifying a DFG service and approval of an FGL

- (1) The Fairfax Church of Christ Ministry to Chaplains will provide the Command Chaplain and the FGL with an endorsement that responds to the requirement noted above. See attachment (2).
- (2) The following statement will suffice for response to item 2.  
*"Based on matters of conscience in religious practices, military members of the Church of Christ typically do not participate in general Protestant chapel services. Instead, they seek a local assembly of like-minded Christians or worship as families/small groups in residences. These options generally are not available to trainees who are not allowed to leave Post."*

*A general Protestant service does not meet requirements of worship for members of the Church of Christ in these specific areas as well as in other distinctive styles and practices of worship.*

- *The Church of Christ worships, as a matter of conscience, with only a cappella congregational singing.*
- *Communion (the Lord's Supper) is observed every Sunday.*
- *Historic creeds, such as the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds, and any extra-biblical statements of faith are specifically avoided.*
- *Members expect male-only public leadership of worship assemblies and to be led by one who shares their distinctive beliefs and practices.*
- *Typically at each service an invitation is offered to those who wish to publicly confess their faith and be baptized by immersion.”*

(3) The FGL should be prepared to provide a list of names representing who will attend. If the DFG service has been established, the chaplain may accept a record of recent attendance in lieu of a list of names.

(4) The following statement responds to item 4. *“Members of the Church of Christ expect to be led in worship by a person who shares their theological and doctrinal views. If a chaplain from the Church of Christ is available, the service can be led by a chaplain. Because members of the Church of Christ expect to have Communion each Sunday and baptisms performed immediately upon confession of faith, it is essential that all worship activities be led by a member of that faith group. Just as chaplains from certain denominations can serve Communion only to members of their faith group, members of the Church of Christ expect to be led in these religious observances by one who shares their beliefs.”*

(5) Item (2) applies.

(6) The Endorsement Form verifies this qualification. A sample copy is in attachment (2).

There have been several recent changes to the above documentation. Normally, Chaplains require the DFGL letter from the Fairfax Endorsement Committee containing the above information. The applicant should contact Fairfax and be prepared to provide (1): A letter on church stationary from the eldership or leadership of the congregation stating that the prospective member is a member of the church in good standing and the basis for their recommendation. (2). A summary of the applicant's history with the church and how long he has been a member of the Church; (3) a list of members who attend or desire to attend services; (4) your and the sponsoring chaplain's contact information.

## **DISTINCTIVE FAITH GROUP LEADER ENDORSEMENT**

Persons who desire to serve as a DFGL should request an Endorsement from the Fairfax Church of Christ. The process will be expedited if all the information listed below is provided with the initial request.

1. Your full name, rank/rate, organization and org title, address, email address, phone number.
2. Your sponsoring chaplain's full name, rank, org title, address, phone number and email address.
3. Name and contact information of an alternate (two if possible) to lead services when you are TDY or otherwise absent from the service (very important).
4. Confirmation that you have coordinated your request with the sponsoring chaplain and have his (her) support.
5. Confirmation that you are the choice of local members of the Church of Christ to serve in this capacity.
6. Number of people who desire to attend Church of Christ services.
7. A letter from your current CONUS or home congregation on church stationary stating that you are a member in good standing and their reasons for the recommendation.
8. A brief paragraph giving your background in the Church of Christ, including when/where you were converted. (Not necessary for re-endorsement or if referred by the AMEN Ministry or other familiar ministries of the Church of Christ to the military.). Length of time that you have been a member of the Church.
9. Ensure you have a Child Care National Agency Check and Inquiries (CNACI) clearance. Required by all DoD Regulations, all chapel staff and volunteers must be CNACI cleared; those who work with child services on base must have this as well. Be aware, this is different from a security clearance for the government, such as a Secret or Top Secret Clearance. So, if the Command Chaplain is not referring you to this, he/she will need to.

## **CHURCH OF CHRIST DFGL**

### **Background Information and Leadership Issues**

**CONDITIONS FOR APPROVAL BY THE COMMAND:** DFG services on post are limited to exceptional circumstances such as when (1). There is not a Church of Christ Chaplain assigned to the post; (2) there are no local congregations available; or, (3) military personnel cannot leave post to attend a local congregation. The sole purpose of the DFG is to provide an opportunity for members of the Church of Christ to worship according to their beliefs and practices when there are no other local alternatives available. Therefore, a request by military personnel or a local church to establish such a service or other activity on post will not be approved by the military Commander when the chief purpose appears chiefly to be to “evangelize” the military base instead of merely providing for *free exercise* by members of the Church of Christ. The installation or base Chaplain is required by regulation or policy to conduct an annual needs assessment to determine if a service is required for DFGs, regardless of length of time it has been in existence.

**ACCOMMODATION OF MILITARY REQUIREMENTS:** The DFGL must work within policies of the command religious program. These requirements should not affect the ability of the group to worship according to the general beliefs and practices of the Church of Christ; however, questions may arise that have not been considered previously by a DFGL who has not had significant leadership experience in a civilian congregation. Since the potential list of issues is endless, they will not be specifically addressed here. We simply ask the DFGL to consider that civilian congregations everywhere make non-faith related accommodations to the State in order to establish a congregation, own property, and receive tax-free contributions. You can relate these typical accommodations made by civilian congregations to your military situation:

- Tax-free status and employer ID numbers must be requested and approved by the IRS.
- Trustees (or similar non-biblical positions) are appointed and named to the State in order to purchase, own, or sell property.
- There are restrictions on how tax exempt offerings/donations can be accepted and used.
- The State defines what can be done by a “tax free” church in areas of political involvement and candidate/party endorsement.
- Permits and zoning approval must be obtained before constructing or using a facility as a church building.

All this is said because of the frequency with which new DFG leaders or members take offense at typical requirements of working within chapel program guidelines. It is extremely rare for a chapel requirement truly to infringe on a group’s ability to teach the gospel and worship as they desire. On the rare occasion when there appears to be an infringement, the Endorser is in a good position to work directly with the Command Chaplain to help the DFGL sort out matters. Please contact the Endorser before a situation deteriorates and ill will develops between the DFG and the chapel staff.

**COLLECTING CHAPEL TITHES AND OFFERINGS/DONATIONS:** In the past, many congregations were permitted to take collections, deposit funds into a congregation bank account, and disburse the funds with no accountability to the Command Chaplains. Now that situation is virtually non-existent, and the requirement to manage funds through a chapel fund sub-account raises objections among some in the Church of Christ. Generally speaking the military process works well; however, it requires planning and attention where DFGLs previously could operate on an impromptu, reactionary basis. The Command Master Religious Program demands planning. Where serious problems have occurred, the reasons usually have been lack of planning and attention by DFGLs. However, there also have been occasions in which the chapel fund managers did not disburse funds according to directions of the DFGL. Either problem can be avoided with a modicum of planning and monitoring. General requirements for collecting and disbursing offerings are outlined below:

- All contributions by the DFG must be collected publicly in the assemblies and placed in a chapel fund sub-account. DO NOT try apparent loop holes to circumvent this requirement by having members contribute outside the assembly. That is a violation of the Fund Regulations. It can cost you the privilege of meeting on post. Also, it is a protection for the leader in that it precludes a disgruntled member from accusing him of misuse of funds. No DFGL needs the exhilaration of a military IG inspection of his spiritual leadership.
- Offerings must be received publicly and remain in public view until removed for counting by at least two people, including a chaplains' assistant.
- The DFG must have a budget by which the fund manager can make regular disbursements.
- Offerings designated for a specific recipient such as a missionary or benevolent organization must be listed in the CMRP, announced in advanced (see Service policy) and members given a choice to contribute to the designated offering or to the general collection.
- Avoid accumulating large balances in the sub-account. This statement paraphrased from DA Pamphlet 165-18 is excellent guidance for managing sub-account funds, "dollar in - dollar out, zero daily balance, and every dollar received designated to religious charitable organizations or other recipients designated by the DFG."
- Once in the general collection, funds may be used only for the local congregation and can be impossible to disburse to worthy but unbudgeted missions or benevolence. Also, at the end of the fiscal year, some military Branches will go through all accounts and consolidate (i.e., confiscate) everything over about 30% of the annual net value of the account. Keep your funds budgeted and expended.

The Consolidated Chaplains Fund (you are a sub-account) has a policy of taxing all subaccounts to support command-wide programs to benefit local service persons.

Don't neglect to be gracious in giving to the general chapel fund. The congregation enjoys protection of its right to free-exercise, rent-free facilities, administrative support, book-keeping and check writing services, publicity, communion supplies, bibles, and other materials. Being a generous member of the chapel community is important to the reputation and effectiveness of the congregation.

Most Church of Christ DFGs already have a list of people or organizations to which they contribute. Some of the typical recipients are listed below.

- Congregations in foreign countries frequently support local missionaries or benevolent works.
- The AMEN program of the White's Ferry Road Church of Christ probably is the most significant effort in the Church of Christ to support fellowship and community among military members.
- White's Ferry Road also has a visionary, well managed Disaster Relief Fund.
- Helping Hands International, Partners in Progress, Let's Start Talking, World English Institute and others are deserving missions and benevolent organizations affiliated with the Churches of Christ.
- Fairfax Church of Christ sponsors the ministry that makes it possible for DFGs to be endorsed easily and acts as an advocate when needed. Fairfax does not solicit financial support, but a periodic designated offering is helpful to the Ministry.

Talk with your sponsoring chaplains often and be sure you understand and abide by chapel policies that protect you and assure good relations with the chapel staff.

**DIVERSITY OF MEMBERS:** Only one service for a particular faith group is permitted on post. It is sad to acknowledge that we are a significantly fractured fellowship, and at times, members with particularly restrictive beliefs attempt to separate themselves from the main Church of Christ group to start their own service. This will not be approved by a Commander. There are several points to make from this.

1. If you are the DFGL, expect to have diverse beliefs and practices characteristic of various wings of the Church of Christ.
2. Members with diverse beliefs must worship together as one body. Otherwise, they must assemble privately in their own quarters or off base. There will be no provision for acknowledgement or public assembly by more than one group from the Church of Christ.
3. The practical result is that people with extreme positions cannot be allowed to dominate the group. A typical pattern has been for the most legalistic member to label the less restrictive members as divisive because they have practices which violate the more narrow persons' conscience. This is used to limit and control activities of the whole group to conform to the narrowest views. The most narrow frequently are the most vocal members since "their ox is being gored." This tyranny of a minority has completely disrupted good fellowship and even resulted in the demise of some DFGs. When necessary, the DFGL must exercise strong leadership to keep the group on an even keel calling on every member to be "*completely humble and gentle, [be] patient, bearing with one another in love. [Make] every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.*"

**FEED THE SHEEP:** As you might expect, there is a wide range of religious perspectives and experience among DFGLs and members. Unfortunately, it has been common for some groups' and leaders' vision of how to assemble to worship our God and how to preach the good news of Christ to be limited to riding familiar hobbies, bashing other churches, and demeaning the chaplains and chapel program, i.e. the ultimate absence of vision –criticizing others.

Other groups have a clearer vision of how to build up one another and lead others to Christ. The key difference seems to be whether the leaders are issue oriented or whether they understand how to feed the sheep. The most fruitful ministries know their audience and teach a message that

shows the grace of God and His Son to people who desperately need Him. In some groups, there are multiple baptisms every Sunday. In others which may not be as large, there still is a spirit of love and fellowship that sustains isolated brothers and sisters and often provides a defining experience of faith and commitment to God for the person's lifetime. The key seems to be (1) know the sheep, (2) be sensitive to what Word from the scriptures they need to strengthen their faith, moral character, and relationship with Christ, and (3) consider and provide what the flock needs instead of whatever is key persons' favorite theme.

**We trust that most DFG leaders will not face many of these issues. Most problems can be avoided if the leader understands and anticipates requirements of the military base. Internal congregation problems can be greatly reduced if the leader recognizes and deals with early signs of problematic attitudes and prevents tensions from spilling into the assemblies. Your leadership of a congregation of the Church of Christ will provide life-changing spiritual experiences for many and will be a blessing in your own life. We are here to help.**