


Ministries **TODAY**

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MISSIONARIES
TO THE
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CHAPLAINCY FULL
GOSPEL CHURCHES

Missionaries to the Military

Chaplaincy Full Gospel Churches



CFGC Marine chaplain Lt. Mark Johnston prepares the sacraments for a "tailgate" communion service on the last night of his battalion's maneuvers in North Carolina.

Dirt, bugs and sweat. Dust hangs in the motionless air long after the five-ton trucks rumble through. It's late October deep in the North Carolina woods and the Indian summer con-

tinues to linger on. The 510th Artillery Battalion of the 2nd Marine Division is wrapping up three weeks of maneuvers. For nearly 21 days there have been no hot meals, no hot water, no electricity and no contact with family members waiting at home at Camp LeJeune.

This is the life of the toughest of soldiers—the "grunts" as they are often called. They are alert, disciplined and dedicated—the cream of the crop. Each

one is prepared to respond to orders that allow only 24-hour notice before deployment to any hot spot in the world. They live on the edge of a war that may or may not ever come. They are the "few good men" of the U.S. Marine Corps.



Settled in with the 757 Marines of "artery battalion 510" is a man dressed in the same camouflage fatigues as the others. He, too, is tough and well-disciplined. His cap is worn low over his eyes. His hair is clipped short in the style that characterizes the fighting man. He walks through the tall pine trees well after sunset with total confidence, his combat boots kicking through mounds of dirt churned up by the tracks of the powerful howitzer cannons. As he approaches his jeep, he pauses and looks around. "This will do fine." He asks his driver to lower the tailgate and make preparations. He scours the

by Bruce Buckingham



Full-gospel chaplains are the “new kids on the block” within the military chaplaincy.

dark woods and spots a small group of men gathered near their tent. They salute as he approaches.

“Men, I will be conducting a short service at 18:45 over there next to my vehicle. You are all invited to attend. I’ll be giving testimony of a healing we had here a couple of nights ago. Spread it around. That’s at 18:45.”

Lieutenant Mark Johnston is a Marine division chaplain. But something about him is different. He’s filled with the Holy Spirit.

Johnston is part of a new order of chaplains representing independent full gospel and charismatic churches in the United States. For years the military chaplaincy has

been dominated by Catholics, Jews and the traditional Protestant denominations. But recently—with the assistance of the U.S. Congress—the Pentagon was forced to accept representatives of fellowships not formally covered by existing denominations. Included are the independent full gospel and charismatic churches that have sprung up across America.

Chaplaincy Full Gospel Churches (CFGC) was conceived by Army chaplain Jim Ammerman five years ago. Ammerman retired from the U.S. Army as a full colonel in 1977, having been a chaplain for 23 years. At that time he was the ranking Southern Baptist chaplain in the Army. He had served as a chaplain

with the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and spent five years with the much-heralded Green Berets.

“We now have 107 full gospel men and women officially endorsed as active military and reservist chaplains,” says Ammerman, president and director of CFGC. “Just six years ago, CFGC was only a vision that the Pentagon said would never happen because of the ‘disorganized nature of the charismatic movement.’ But since its inception, CFGC is the fastest-growing endorsing agency in the United States. In fact, we are ranked as the eighth-largest endorsing group out of 96.”

Ammerman takes great personal interest in each CFGC applicant. Much of his time is spent traveling



CFGC chaplain Lt. Mark Johnson (left) prays with a Marine serving time in the brig at Camp LeJeune.

with his wife, Charlene, as they tour the world, gathering support for CFGC. But Ammerman makes time to conduct personal interviews with potential applicants who have the desire to serve the Lord in the military.

From his base in Dallas, Texas, Ammerman researches applicants' backgrounds. Four years of college plus an additional three years of seminary is the minimum requirement. Besides that, each man or woman must be willing to work with the establishment and have the guts to place God first. Their com-

mitment is to the Lord and to the military for minimum three- or four-year stints.

Ammerman also works with students currently enrolled in seminaries. Many are recruited immediately following graduation. In addition, he oversees chaplains assigned to veterans' hospitals and other "civilian" institutions.

Lieutenant Lyrice Marsh was attending Garrett Seminary when she was recruited into the Navy chaplaincy by Ammerman.

"I was interested in joining the Navy as a chaplain," Marsh says,

"but I resisted going on active duty with the Lutherans or the United Church of Christ. CFGC provided the way for me to become a chaplain and not compromise my beliefs nor conform to a previously established set of rules."

Marsh, a young, peppy black woman, recently completed her three-year commitment with the Navy. She now serves as a reservist chaplain assigned to the Coast Guard. While on active duty in the Navy, she served aboard the submarine tender *Emory S. Land*, assigned to the Squadron 8 submarines

based in Norfolk, Virginia. Marsh spent six months aboard the *Land* in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. While there, she took the lead in organizing Bible studies and choirs. She was so successful that sailors on other ships in the Persian Gulf requested permission to transfer to her ship to attend her prayer groups.

"Some of the non-combatant

sends me, but the Lord, working through my commanding officers, places me where I am needed."

Though most of her ministry is to the wives and families of the servicemen, she is often requested to travel to areas where the men are deployed in field actions to conduct field services. Every place she has been sent, her testimony and witness have been well received.



Lt. Johnston (second from right) prays for the family of a fallen soldier.

ships will be increasing the number of women on board to 50 percent," Marsh says. "The need for women chaplains is growing daily."

Lieutenant Beverly Hardgrove, stationed with chaplain Johnston at Camp LeJeune, was almost 40 years old when she decided to enter the Navy as a CFGC chaplain. It was CFGC that allowed her to bypass the mainline denominational bureaucracy.

"Being a CFGC chaplain allowed me to enter the military chaplaincy without tempering my faith," Hardgrove says. "I feel free in the spirit to minister however the Lord leads. I can't choose where the military

CFGC chaplains know the Marines at Camp LeJeune—and servicemen at every post—have brought with them problems they've had for much of their lives. Many are young, experiencing their first time away from home. Others have brought wives and children, and must deal with the problems of securing adequate housing and care for them.

"They are frightened young men," says Johnston, who was recently nominated for the Navy Commendation Medal. "But I love them. They are tough and strong, and they really do have good hearts.

"The military says the mission is

"Each man or woman must be willing to work with the establishment and have the guts to place God first."

above the man. But our job is to tell these soldiers they are important. We try to take their minds off the fact that at any time they could be sent to the jungles of Panama or the deserts of the Middle East. Our goal is to keep their thoughts on Jesus.”

Johnston has had to struggle with establishing himself as “the

“splinter group”—often lumped with the Muslims and Mormons.

Much of the problem stems from the fact that the charismatic movement has no common organizational tie—no headquarters. Thus the government has difficulty labeling charismatic and full gospel churches under a single heading.

“The military is the greatest mission field in the nation, and the government is willing to pay the salaries of the missionaries,” he told charismatic conferences. People responded. Because of his single-minded effort, the military chaplaincy is now open to all independent full gospel churches.



The pressure and rigors of military life open up many opportunities for the CFCG chaplains to minister.

new kid on the block.” Though CFCG has been around for several years, Johnston and other CFCG chaplains are still having to buck the traditional chaplaincy establishment, which at times tends to disregard and repudiate their enthusiasm to minister the gospel.

In fact, CFCG chaplains are sometimes referred to by mainline denominational chaplains as a

Because of this, CFCG, in its infantile stage, had to struggle to survive. Ammerman, with nothing more than his retirement pay and a burning vision from God, traveled the nation. He visited U.S. senators and representatives. He hounded Pentagon leaders. He went to every charismatic meeting he could schedule and raised support—both prayer and financial.

CFCG currently represents 3.5 million Spirit-filled believers expressing support through 25,000 active churches from 41 denominations and independent fellowships. Within the next five years, the coalition of supporting churches is expected to double. Meanwhile, the number of full gospel chaplains is expected to reach 300 by the year 1995. It is only a matter of time be-

fore the bureaucracy of the military chaplaincy recognizes what the recruits on the line have known for years—men follow men who believe in miracles.

Precisely at 18:45, chaplain Johnston carefully prepares the sacraments resting on his jeep's

days ago a man in our battalion was run over by a truck while asleep on the ground in his sleeping bag. What you may not know is that as we prayed for him in the hospital, he was miraculously healed. A series of X-rays over a couple of hours details the healing of a broken pelvis and crushed tailbone. The



tailgate.

"These men have to be prepared to die every day of the year," he says solemnly. "The only difference between me and them is I don't carry a gun. But I do carry a sword." He grins as he opens his Bible.

As the men begin to appear out of the dark woods, Johnston, with his black stole draped over his neck, turns to the group.

"As you know," he begins, "two

miracle is now part of his permanent record. It was witnessed by our own commanding officer, who has since rededicated his life to the Lord."

From the group of hardened Marines seated on the ground, a series of amens drifts heavenward. ■

Bruce Buckingham is the public information officer for NASA at Kennedy Space Center, Florida.

"It is only a matter of time before the bureaucracy recognizes... men follow men who believe in miracles."