



THE CLERGY CONNECTION

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Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does. ~ William James

New Research: Combat Experience and Strength of Faith

The authors, VA researchers, wanted to explore the relationship of combat deaths to changes in strength of religious faith. Findings showed that Veterans' experiences of killing others or failing to prevent a death weakened their religious faith. Faith was weakened both directly and through guilt. Weakened religious faith was related to greater use of mental health services. That was true regardless of severity of PTSD symptoms or limits in social support. This finding suggests that a primary motivation for Veterans' continuing in treatment may be their search for a meaning and purpose in their traumatic experiences. The authors concluded, "This possibility raises the broader issue of whether spirituality should be more central to the treatment of PTSD, either in the form of a greater role for pastoral counseling or a wider inclusion of spiritual issues in traditional psychotherapy for PTSD."

Want more information? See the source: The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 2004, Volume 192, Issue number 9, pages 579-584. Authors: A. Fontana & R. Rosenheck. Title: *Trauma, Change in Strength of Religious Faith, and Mental Health Service Use Among Veterans Treated for PTSD.* ☺

How to Make a Referral to the VA

If you want to make a referral for a Veteran, Reserve or Guard member, please remember to ask the permission of the warrior before contacting us as a matter of respect. To make a referral or to gain additional information, telephone the Chaplain Service at the VA Medical Center nearest to your location: http://www.va.gov/CHAPLAIN/docs/NatChapDir_1_10_13location.pdf.

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1
 Confidential help for Veterans and their Families.

Did You Know?

- An important characteristic of PTSD involves avoidance, a Veteran's tendency to stay away from experiences, places, people, images, smells, feelings, etc. that remind him/her of a trauma. Avoidance lessens the possibility that a Veteran will experience traumatic events through memory. Avoidance can make warriors seem strange to civilians. However, avoidance is quite normal for warriors who have been through trauma. Avoidance of feelings can affect our relationships.
- Avoiding strong feelings like those experienced during a traumatic event. For example, not being able to cry at a funeral, feeling numb.
- Avoiding emotional closeness or intimacy with others so as not to re-experience bereavement.

Food for Thought: Protection from feelings (except anger) is common for warriors with PTSD. This numbness can be seen by others, often resulting in labeling of the Veteran as crazy or cold. What can you and your community do to help with this stigma, a stereotype of Veterans with PTSD? ☺

The Clergy Connection is a publication of the Office of Rural Health (ORH) and National VA Chaplain Center "Rural Clergy Training Program." For more information, contact: Jim Goalder, jim.goalder@gmail.com.



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Practical Pastoral Tips: What You Can Do

Mariners need a safe port during dangerous storms. They leave the turmoil of the sea and enter into safety for a time. It can be a time of renewal until they return to the dangers of the sea again.

Your pastoral office can be a safe haven for those in turmoil. In interpersonal relationships, there are certain qualities that define a safe haven.

- LISTEN. Then offer a calm, safe and non-judgmental, non-anxious presence.
- Provide clear, reliable boundaries of communication and respect.
- Be present with Veterans and families during the storms of reintegration.

- Provide a compassionate space wide enough to encompass the awfulness of war trauma.

Any port in the storm? Not really. We want only the best ports for our Veterans and warriors. Follow the guidelines above to allow a safe haven for those deserving our best. ☺

New Things You Should Know About...

Six new fact sheets have been added to the Rural Clergy Training website. This series of **“10 Things You Should Know About...”** documents addresses [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\)](#); [Spiritual Injury](#); [Mental Health Stigma](#); [Suicide, Treatment and Prevention](#); [Healthy Family Functioning](#); and information your combat Veteran would like you to know. To read and/or download printer-friendly versions, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining/10things. ☺

A Soldier's Story for Reflection

“It happened at 9PM. I was supposed to go to Da Nang the next day to leave the country. The sirens started about 9:30. Guys were screaming and running. I ran out and ran toward the perimeter where the shells were falling. They taught us, in case of a VC (Viet Cong) attack, to not go to a bunker since the VC will use satchel charges (to blow up the bunker). I didn't have a weapon since I had cleared post. I was supposed to leave the next day. I was helpless. I ran to a foxhole and jumped in near where the shells were falling. I just wanted to be safe. I was afraid--I thought I was going to die. “God, you kept me here for a year. Please don't let me die now.” I thought we might be overrun. I stayed there for 30 minutes. The shells were so close that the shrapnel was falling into the foxhole. I was in a foxhole of no more than 4 feet wide. I was all balled up inside it. I could hear the shrapnel hitting the back of

the foxhole. Later, they told us that it was our own artillery shells that fell wrong.”

- This soldier's life was almost taken by friendly fire. How might that event affect his attitude toward military authority and toward authority in general? What problems in his future life might he face because of these attitudes?
- From this soldier's perspective, God answered his desperate prayer. How might his attitude have been different if he had been seriously injured in this attack? How might his spiritual life have been changed?
- What could you, as a member of the local clergy, do to help this person? ☺



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A Community Success Story

The General Federation of Women's Clubs of Connecticut and other groups have helped create "Veterans Oasis Centers" on Connecticut college campuses. Specific sites are set up on campuses that provide a private and safe environment for Vets: to meet, socialize, network, and obtain services necessary for integration into civilian life. At the University of Connecticut, for example, the university has donated space and other groups have provided funds for furniture, computers and flat screen TV's. This arrangement allows Veterans there to relax, discuss life plans, military experiences, and the challenges of civilian life with fellow warriors who understand them best.

Such support can mean the difference between success and failure in the tasks of living for our Veterans. A similar arrangement could be set up in your community. Sites could be a community college, a church or a civic center through support from several houses of worship and/or Veteran Service Organizations. A safe place to gather is essential to healthy support for our Veterans!

A safe place to gather is essential to healthy support for our Veterans. What would be the first step in setting up such a support for Veterans in your community? ☺

Resources for Your Veteran

ABOUT FACE <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/>

Learn about posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from Veterans who live with it every day. Hear their stories. Find out how treatment turned their lives around. This website contains videos that can be used to encourage Veterans and military personnel to open themselves to help. It can be used for your learning or the learning of a warrior with whom you spend time. ☺



Your Voice Matters: Learning About Referrals from Rural Clergy Training Workshop Participants

On our surveys in 2012, we asked about two aspects of community involvement for those who attended: 1) community ministries and 2) speaking from the pulpit. 15.2 percent of our clergy sample reported participating in Veteran-related community ministries while 83.3 percent of our small sample of Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) personnel reported doing so. There is a clear advantage for community-based, cooperative services in rural settings. Based on these findings, the Rural Clergy Training Project will strengthen its emphasis on setting up community networks among clergy and between clergy and VSO's.

Most clergy (54.5%) and VSO personnel (66.7%) reported that they had spoken of Veteran and military needs from the pulpit. This finding is promising in suggesting that those who attended our workshops, as community leaders, can be influential in increasing understanding and decreasing stigma in local communities.

Based on these findings, our future training will continue emphasizing this role as an important option and provide supportive materials to facilitate a pulpit ministry related to the care of Veterans and military personnel. ☺



The Rural Clergy Training Program is supported by the VHA Office of Rural Health. For more information, please visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining.