

The War and Pastoral Care of Soldiers, Military Families, and Chaplains

Written by Rev. John Gundlach



Introduction

At the time of this writing, 1.6 million Americans have served in Iraq or Afghanistan since the beginning of the Global War on Terror. Nearly 790,000 veterans have been released from the military services and have returned to our communities. Some have been able to return to a settled, normal way of life, but many others face continuing struggles as a result of their service. They and their families need and deserve all the support services the government can provide. They also need and deserve the compassionate care that our pastors and churches can provide.

This section is intended to raise awareness of some of the major issues with which service members, veterans, and their families are confronted. Suggestions will be offered for ways that pastors and churches can help, and some resources will be provided for those who would like additional information.

Pastoral Care for Military Personnel and Their Families Prior to Deployment

The time leading up to a deployment is often very stressful for service members and their families. This is true for all military families, whether the service member is career active duty or a Reserve or National Guard member who is being activated for a deployment.

A military family has much to accomplish prior to a deployment. Wills need to be processed, military paperwork completed, financial support arrangements made, and those in Reserve or National Guard units have to leave their civilian jobs and transition to active duty.

Taking care of all these details places a great deal of stress on military families. But the most important pre-deployment stressor is dealing with feelings about the coming separation. Many families experience anticipatory grief, and the stress can become so great that it leads to marital and family conflict. Because of this, the service member's ultimate departure can be a source of both sorrow and relief.

Pastors can help during this time by understanding this process and helping military families realize that what they are going through is normal. In most cases, in-depth therapy will not be necessary; but sensitive pastoral care is appropriate.

A congregation can extend care to a service member prior to deployment by offering a liturgy of departure and blessing during a service of worship. An example of this liturgy is available on the [UCC website](#). It is also important to assure the family that the congregation will be there to support them while the service member is deployed.

Pastoral Care for Military Personnel While on Active Duty

Pastors and churches should maintain contact with members who are on active duty. Communicating via emails and sending church newsletters, cards, letters and devotional materials will let service members know they are not forgotten. Sending an occasional care package will also be much appreciated.

Many churches remember their deployed service members in prayer during their weekly worship services. Letting service members know that they are regularly prayed for can be a source of comfort to them and their families.

These are tangible ways to show support. They are especially helpful for maintaining contact with mobilized Reserve or National Guard members who will return to local congregations when their deployments are over.

Pastoral Care for Families of Personnel on Active Duty

Deployment Adjustment

Families go through a time of adjustment after the service member deploys. The length of the adjustment period varies, but it usually lasts a month or more. The family's ability to cope with the service member's absence and settle into a new "normal" routine is dependent upon the family's internal (mental, emotional, spiritual) and external (financial, extended family, church, etc.) resources. This early stage of adjustment is a good time for the pastor and members of the congregation to be in touch with the family to see what assistance might be needed.

Parenting and Child Care Issues

In traditional two parent families where one parent is a deploying service member, the remaining parent takes on the responsibilities of both parents. In single parent families where the sole parent is a deploying service member, child care responsibilities are often passed to a non-custodial parent or other family members. At times these responsibilities can be overwhelming. Pastors and congregations can help in these situations by offering occasional child care relief, by making sure that the child/children are included in church programs and social activities, and by referring the parent/guardian to organizations in the community that offer programs for children.

When a child's same sex parent deploys, the child may be left without an adult of their gender to relate to as a mentor or friend. If that is the case, perhaps a trusted member of the congregation, recommended by the pastor and acceptable to the child and the child's parent or guardian, could take on that role.

Nearly two million children in our country have a parent serving in the military. Children of deployed service members often have difficulty adjusting to their parent's absence. They may express their distress through nightmares, fear, anger, acting out in school, or rebelling against authority. These children's teachers in both school and church need to be made aware of what the family is going through. The pastor and the children's church school teachers can provide compassionate support. If necessary, the pastor can also refer the family to a counseling agency in the community.

Financial Concerns

Many lower ranking enlisted service members and their families have difficulty making ends meet financially. Some even qualify for food stamps. And when Reserve or National Guard members are activated for a deployment and have to leave their civilian jobs, they often experience a significant loss of income.

Additional financial distress may be caused by the loss of a second income as the solo parent has to stay home to take care of the children. Or they may have to pay for child care so they can take a second job to make up for the service member's lost income.

And then there are the unforeseen emergencies that arise while the service member is away. The car breaks down, the mower or the washing machine dies, or the plumbing fails. Military families are all too

familiar with these types of emergencies which always seem to happen during deployments. Often, they are costly and wreak havoc on a tight budget.

Some spouses or guardians are just not prepared to manage their finances wisely. This may be due more to their lack of experience than irresponsibility. Sometimes service members fail to adequately prepare their families to handle these responsibilities in their absence. Or they don't provide a sufficient monthly pay allotment to cover their family's expenses.

Churches can assist military families in several ways. When there is an emergency a church may be able to provide funds to remedy the problem, or someone in the congregation might know how to fix what needs to be repaired. Providing emergency child care could keep a parent from having to miss work and lose a day's income. If there is a need to provide assistance with budgeting or managing family finances, someone in the church could do that.

Pastoral care in this instance may involve helping a family obtain assistance from the congregation or through local community service agencies. If a family's financial difficulties are due to the service member not providing adequate funds out of his or her monthly pay, the pastor can contact the American Red Cross or the service member's command to help resolve the problem.

Pros and Cons of "Instant Communication"

Today, service members in combat zones and their families are able to communicate with one another in ways that were not dreamed of in previous wars. They can communicate frequently and nearly instantaneously via satellite telephones, cellular telephones with cameras, and computers. They email back and forth, send digital pictures, and write blogs.

The obvious advantage of these ways of communicating is that service members and their families can share what is happening to them almost as it is happening. Husbands and wives can communicate about routine family matters and relationship issues. Children can talk about what's happening in their lives and get the deployed parent's guidance and support.

The disadvantage of this kind of communication is that it brings the war closer to home and home closer to the war. Family members are more aware of the daily ups and downs of their loved ones in the war zone and of the dangers they face. And, conversely, service members are more aware of the family's struggles at home. They are separated by thousands of miles and each can do little to remedy the hardships of the other. Fear and frustration can result.

What can pastors and churches do to help? Here again, communication is so important. Communicate with the service member. Send an email periodically to ask how they are doing and to assure them that you are supporting their family while they are gone. And stay in touch with their family—in person if they live locally, and by phone and email if they reside elsewhere.

The Impact of Deployment on Families

Deployments are always stressful for military families. But the stress is greatly intensified in a time of war, when the possibility exists that a loved one may come home with life-altering wounds of body or spirit, or they may not come home alive.

During the Global War on Terror, the impact on military families has been multiplied by the fact that many military members, even those in the Reserves or National Guard, have had to deploy several times and for extended periods of time—sometimes for 12 to 15 months. Understandably, this has resulted in a high rate of divorce and family dysfunction. Pastors and churches need to care for these individuals and families that are hurting.

Pastoral Care for Military Personnel and Their Families Post-Deployment

Just as military families go through pre-deployment stress and a period of adjustment once deployment

separation has begun, they will go through a time of readjustment once the military member returns to the family. Once the joy of reunion fades, the real work of getting back together begins.

In many families, this is a time of tension because of the changes that have taken place during the service member's absence. Each person in the family has changed because of their experiences during the deployment. The power equation in the family may have shifted. The way the children have been parented may be different. The spouse left with responsibilities at home may be more independent and confident and may not want things to go back to the way they were before. Or the opposite may be true, the spouse may want to hand over all the responsibilities to the service member and finds that he or she is not willing or ready to assume them. In most cases, some renegotiating of the relationship will be necessary.

When a service member returns home from a combat tour and is suffering from post-traumatic stress, they are often prone to anger quickly and fly into rages with little provocation. It is not surprising that domestic violence has sometimes resulted.

Pastoral care and counseling may be needed if families have difficulty getting back together following a deployment. In some cases, pastors will need to refer the family for marriage and family counseling in the community.

Pastoral Care for Those Returning to Our Congregations from Active Duty

Wounding of the Soul

No one who experiences the trauma of living in a combat environment returns home the same person as the one who left. Even those who are not directly involved in combat operations but live in an environment where danger is always immanent are changed by it.

Some veterans return home physically wounded. Others return physically unharmed but bearing unseen mental, emotional, or spiritual wounds. Some have both. This inner woundedness has been described as a "wounding of the soul," or "post traumatic soul disorder."

Those whose souls have been wounded as a result of their experiences often feel guilt for what they have done or witnessed, or they may feel guilty about being a survivor when some of their friends didn't make it. Their sense of grief and loss are profound: loss of their innocence, loss of who they previously thought themselves to be, and a loss of their moral and spiritual compass.

Pastors and churches need to be sensitive to the fact that the wounds many service members bear are spiritual wounds. These wounds may not be obvious to a casual observer, but they are painful, life-altering, and can be life-threatening.

Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress

In April 2008, the RAND Corporation released the results of its study which found that nearly 20 percent, or one in five, returning veterans reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression. But only about half of these veterans sought treatment for their condition. Even so, the Department of Veterans Affairs has treated more than 68,000 veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Service members preparing to come home from Iraq or Afghanistan are screened for this disorder prior to their coming home. Many will not accurately report their symptoms because they know it will delay their homecoming. And once they get home, those who remain on active duty often won't seek available treatment because they don't want to be labeled a "non-fighter" or a psych case. Reservists or National Guard personnel returning home may have the same hesitancy to seek treatment, may not have a Department of Veterans Affairs facility offering treatment close to where they live, or they may have difficulty getting treatment. And some veterans with post-traumatic stress have been misdiagnosed.

Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after a person experiences a terrifying or life-threatening event, or a series of events that cause extreme stress. Participating in combat or living in a combat environment where danger is always immanent can trigger this disorder.

This disorder can be recognized in a variety of symptoms. A person may be hyper-vigilant, constantly look around to see where danger or a threat to their safety may be lurking, and have panic attacks. They often have recurring nightmares and vivid memories of traumatic events. They may be prone to anger easily, fly into instant rages, and become aggressive and violent. They may be depressed and withdrawn from people, even those they love. They often turn to alcohol or drugs to try to dull their psychic pain. They may get the feeling that their life is out of control and that there is little hope for a better future. If left untreated, post traumatic stress disorder can lead to death by suicide.

While not all veterans who have been in combat or have lived in a combat environment end up with full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder, nearly all will have some symptoms of post-traumatic stress when they return home. The extent of their symptoms will vary depending upon the inner resources they had prior to the experience, and the extent to which they participated in or witnessed life-threatening situations. They are more likely to experience the disorder if they have had lengthy and multiple deployments in combat areas.

Pastors need to be aware of the symptoms of post traumatic stress as they work with veterans and their families. In addition to providing compassionate pastoral care, pastors need to know that post-traumatic stress disorder is a serious problem and be prepared to refer veterans and their families for the care they need.

Traumatic Brain Injury

A significant number of veterans of the Global War on Terror are returning home with traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The most common causes of TBIs are explosions of ordnance and roadside bombs.

TBIs are caused by a blow or jolt to the head or occur as a result of a penetrating head wound. Not all blows to the head result in a TBI, and the symptoms of TBI vary with the severity of the cause. But any injury diagnosed as a TBI results in disruption of the functioning of the wounded individual's brain. This could include everything from a mild concussion to extended periods of unconsciousness and amnesia. Service members who survive multiple concussions may have more serious symptoms of TBI.

Common symptoms of TBI include difficulty organizing daily tasks, vision problems, headaches, ringing in the ears, tiredness and lethargy, lightheadedness or dizziness, memory problems, inability to concentrate, impaired decision making or problem solving ability; slowed thinking, moving, speaking or reading; feeling easily confused or overwhelmed; feeling sad, anxious, listless; sensitivity to sounds, light, or distractions; and feeling easily angered or irritated. Some of these symptoms may present themselves almost immediately, and others may appear long after the events that caused them.

Pastors who are made aware of a service member who is suffering from these symptoms should encourage the service member to seek evaluation and treatment.

Suicide

It has been estimated that 25 percent of the suicide victims in our country are veterans. That percentage is twice as high as the number of suicide victims in our general population. In 2005, over 6,000 veterans committed suicide. Of those, over 2,000 were veterans between the ages of 20-25—veterans of the Global War on Terror. In 2007, 2100 veterans attempted suicide, or more than five per day.

Veterans commit suicide for a variety of reasons: guilt and shame because of the things they saw or did, loss of relationships, feeling that they no longer have a right to live when friends and comrades have died; they believe their lives are out of control and they feel helpless to change them, or they feel hopeless that

their lives will ever be "normal" again. For those with untreated post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide may be seen as their only option for relief.

It is difficult to know exactly how many veterans commit suicide. Records are kept for those who are related to the military or in treatment with the Department of Veterans Affairs. But veterans who are discharged and return to civilian life and commit suicide may never be counted in the statistics.

The number of suicides and suicide attempts by veterans has increased significantly over the past several years. If previous wars are an accurate predictor of what may happen to Global War on Terror veterans in the future, the numbers will continue to go up. For example, there are now more veterans of the Vietnam War who have committed suicide than the number who died in the war.

Pastors need to be well-versed in suicide prevention modalities. It is especially important to remember when dealing with combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or severe depression that they may see suicide as an option. Pastors should be able to recognize the signs that a veteran is considering suicide, take their suicidal ideation seriously, and get them help immediately.

Sexual Assault

Although the military services have strict regulations against sexual harassment and those who are convicted of sexual assault are punished for their actions, this has not deterred many service members from committing these crimes against citizens of the country they occupy or against fellow service members.

The victims are not always women. However, one in four women service members—25 percent—who are being treated by the VA have reported being raped or having experienced an attempted rape while in the service. Some reported being raped repeatedly or by multiple assailants. For a variety of reasons, it is often difficult for victims to bring their military assailants to justice; thus, they are victimized again.

Pastors may have service members come to them for counseling because of having been victims of sexual harassment or assault. In most cases it would be good to encourage the person to seek therapy from someone who is specially trained to deal with this issue. The Department of Veterans Affairs offers this service, as do organizations in many communities.

Homelessness

Twenty-five percent of homeless persons living in our country today are veterans. An estimated 194,000 veterans (from all wars) live on our nation's streets. Many of these veterans are people who returned from combat tours with post-traumatic stress and were unable to cope with the stress and responsibilities of everyday life. They often developed drug and alcohol problems and lost jobs, relationships and self-respect.

Many of our churches support homeless shelters and soup kitchens, places where homeless veterans can go for care and services. Some churches also participate in community programs where the churches themselves provide shelter and feeding programs, or offer other programs to help veterans return to the mainstream.

Legal Problems

Veterans sometimes get into trouble with the law due, in part, to the effects of having post-traumatic stress. Their volatility sometimes gets them in trouble for fighting or spouse abuse. They may get pulled over for driving recklessly or driving while under the influence of alcohol. They may get caught using drugs. These and a variety of other problems will bring them into a local court system.

In some locations, the courts have taken a more therapeutic, redemptive approach to help veterans who have gotten themselves in trouble. Rather than giving them stiff jail sentences, they have remanded veterans to various treatment programs. In many cases, this has been just what these veterans have

needed to help them redirect their lives. Pastors, local ministers' groups, and churches can advocate for this approach in the justice systems of their communities.

Conscientious Objection

As in every war, there are service members who find that their deeply held religious beliefs, personal philosophy or conscience will not allow them to continue serving in the military. For some, this happens as a result of coming to terms with the reality of what they have been trained to do. For others, this conviction develops as a result of their experiences in combat. And in recent years, the issue of "selective conscientious objection" has been raised by those who do not object to military service per se, but object to serving in a war that they regard as immoral and illegal.

Chaplains participate in the military process whereby those who are applying for a discharge on the grounds of conscientious objection are interviewed and evaluated. The chaplain's recommendation helps determine the outcome.

Pastors and churches need to support not only those who see it as their patriotic duty to serve in the military, but also those service members who feel they can no longer serve in good conscience.

Veterans Caring for Veterans

Veterans may not want to share their stories with pastors and church folks. In many cases, they likely will not want to share much of what they experienced even with their own families. Often, veterans distance themselves from others so they won't have to deal with questions about what they did in the war. Sometimes this is due to feelings of guilt and shame, and sometimes it is just too painful to relive things in order to tell others about them.

It is a well known fact that combat veterans are more likely to be comfortable sharing their situation with others who have had similar experiences. Veterans who need other veterans to talk to should be encouraged to contact the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) or the American Legion. All have veterans available to offer peer support.

Pastoral Care of Chaplains/Pastors and Their Families by Denominational Leaders

When they deploy chaplains leave their homes, families and, in the case of some Reserve and National Guard chaplains, their churches for periods of 6 to 15 months. Some have had to do this more than once.

For the most part, our chaplains have coped well with their deployments and they have provided outstanding ministry. But deployments are stressful for everyone concerned — for chaplains, their families, and for the churches that endure the temporary loss of their pastors.

Church leaders need to be sensitive to the special needs of these clergy and their families. There are a number of ways that church leaders can provide meaningful pastoral care:

1. Maintain contact with your chaplain/pastor during the deployment. Emailing is an effective way to do this. It doesn't take a lot of time, but it will let the chaplain/pastor know they are not forgotten. Inquire about their welfare and invite them to talk about their ministry. Send denominational and local church mailings to their deployed address so they can keep up with what's going on back home.
2. Periodically call or visit the chaplain's spouse or other primary family member. Ask how things are going for them and inquire whether they need assistance in any way. Active duty military families usually live on or near military bases where they are supported by others who are going through similar experiences. Families of Reserve and National Guard chaplains often do not have access to this same level of support in their communities. Going through a deployment alone can be very isolating. Knowing that you care will mean a great deal.

3. Encourage the chaplain's church to be supportive of their deployed pastor and family. The church should maintain communication with both. Their offers to help the family in practical ways, such as offering occasional child care, fixing the car, mowing the grass, et cetera, will be a help to both the chaplain and the family.
4. Encourage the chaplain to maintain contact with the church. Chaplains have done this by using email, establishing blogs for their parishioners to read, or writing articles for the church newsletter. One innovative chaplain even used a satellite telephone while overseas to bring greetings and offer the pastoral prayer over a speakerphone to his congregation during his church's Christmas Eve service. There are a variety of ways to stay connected, and each is helpful.
5. Remember to be in touch with your chaplains after they return home. Like everyone else who returns from a deployment, chaplains have to deal with relational issues as part of the reunion process. This is true for both family and church relationships.

An additional concern is that chaplains who return after ministering in a combat environment may suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress. This may require a more lengthy readjustment, as several of our chaplains have discovered. Talk with the chaplain and his/her spouse or primary family member about their experiences during the deployment. Ask how the reunion is going with both the family and the church. See if there is a need for assistance.

Regardless of how one may feel about the war, we need to reach out to and support those who represent our denominations as chaplains in this challenging and often dangerous ministry environment. Chaplains and their families appreciate the tangible care that is provided by church leaders—and it hurts when pastoral care is not offered.

Conclusion

The Global War on Terror has now lasted longer than any war in our nation's history. When it will end, no one knows. But our country's Armed Forces are being told to prepare for a state of persistent warfare for the foreseeable future. Should this be the case, the tragedy this war has been for so many people in our own country and around the world will continue, with devastating consequences.

The number of those who need our care is growing daily—the number of veterans returning from the war wounded in body and spirit, and the number of families who have lost loved ones either through death or because of their woundedness. And those of us who know their stories grieve for them.

We who are followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, know of a better way of being in this world. And we must proclaim that. We must open our hearts, we must open our eyes, we must speak our truth and offer our gospel of hope. We must also reach out our hands to help and open our arms wide to embrace those in our communities who have been so deeply affected by war.

On a wall in the Pentagon Conference Center there is a row of pictures of living recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. One of these, an African-American by the name of Vernon J. Baker, shared these words of wisdom:

"War is the most regrettable proving ground. Those who launch it, and those who seek to create heroes from it, should remember its legacy. You have to be there to appreciate its horrors—and die to forget them."

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Resources

The following list of resources is just a sampling of what is available. It includes books, organizations and web sites that will be of help to those who would like to learn more about the issues raised in the preceding pages or who need to know where to obtain information on services available to assist service members, veterans and their families. Some of the web sites provide information that will be helpful to pastors and churches that would like to offer supportive ministries to veterans in their communities.

Books

- Armstrong, Keith LCSW/Suzanne Best, Ph.D./Paula Domenici, Ph.D., *Courage Under Fire Coping Strategies for Troops Returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and Their families. Reconnecting with Loved Ones; Combating War Reactions; Returning to Work and Community; and Resources to Help with Readjustment.*
- Bannerman, Stacy, *When the War Came Home* The inside story of Reservists and the families they leave behind.
- Burden, Mathew Currier, *The Blog of War: Front-Line Dispatches from Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Paperback)
- Cantrell, Bridget C., Ph.D. and Chuck Dean, *Down Range to Iraq and Back*
- Elizabeth, Quynn, *Accepting the Ashes: A Daughter's Look at Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (order via www.acceptingtheashes.net)
- Henderson, Kristin, *While They're at War* The true story of American Families on the Home front
- Kraft, Heidi S., *Rule Number Two: Lessons I Learned in a Combat Hospital*
- Matsakis, Aphrodite, *Back From the Front: Combat Trauma, Love, and the Family* Helpful to families, clinicians and clergy who seek to understand the dynamics of combat stress and its impact on marriage and family relationships. Book also includes an extensive list of resources for assistance.
- Raddatz, Martha, *The Long Road Home: A Story of War and Family*
- Tick, Edward, *War and the Soul: Healing war trauma in our nation's veterans, their families, our communities*
Wood, Trish and Bobby Muller, *What Was Asked of Us: An Oral History of the Iraq War by the Soldiers Who Fought It* (Hardcover)

Web Sites

- Buffalo City Court Veterans Program - www.buffalonews.com/102/story/445169.html
A story about this innovative program to offer treatment rather than incarceration can be found at The Buffalo News web address above. To learn more, contact Mr. Hank Pirowski at (716) 845-2788 or hpirowsk@courts.state.ny.us.
- Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Centers – www.vetcenter.va.gov
Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all veterans who served in any combat zone. Services are also available for their family members for military related issues. This site can help veterans locate their nearest community based Vet Center, of which there are 232 throughout the U.S.
- Elizabeth Quynn – www.acceptingtheashes.net – This web site by the author listed in the book section above offers very helpful information about post-traumatic stress disorder and provides links to other organizations and web sites dealing with this subject.
- Iraq Veterans Against the War – www.ivaw.net – (215) 241-7123
Organization of veterans who are against the war in Iraq. Site offers information, membership, and speakers.

- Kristin Henderson – www.kristinhenderson.com/takeaction.htm
An excellent, comprehensive source of information for military families and for church and community groups who want to support them. Numerous links to other web sites and organizations that are there to help. Definitely check out this site.
- Military Homefront – www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil
This is the official Department of Defense web site for reliable Quality of Life information designed to help troops and their families, leaders and service providers.
- Military One Source – www.militaryonesource.com – (800) 342-9647
A comprehensive source of information for veterans on a wide variety of subjects and referrals to confidential services. Assistance is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- National Veterans Foundation – <http://nvf.org> – (888) 777-4443
Organization offers a variety of assistance to veterans and has counselors available on line and by telephone.
- National Center for PTSD (a VA site) – www.ncptsd.org – info line (802) 296-6300 Email: ncptsd@va.gov
Site offers information about post-traumatic stress and referral sources.
- The American Legion – www.legion.org/veterans - (202) 631-9924/861-2700
"Heroes to Hometowns" section of this site offers information on a wide variety of assistance that is available to wounded veterans and their families.
- The National Guard Bureau – www.ngb.army.mil – the Army National Guard official web site; information available on how to contact various state National Guard offices and listing of resources to help soldiers and their families.
- The War List: OEF/OIF Statistics – <http://ptsdcombat.blogspot.com>
This site offers statistical data on a wide variety of subjects related to the Global War on Terror (e.g. killed, wounded, PTSD, etc.). Worth visiting.
- Veterans for Common Sense – www.VeteransforCommonSense.org
VCS was formed in August 2002 as a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization by war veterans who believe that the people of America are most secure when our country is free, strong, and responsibly engaged with the world. The VCS mission is to raise the unique and powerful voices of veterans so that our military, veterans, freedom, and national security are protected and enhanced, for ourselves and for future generations. VCS is a strong advocate for quality healthcare for veterans.
- Veterans' Suicide Hotline – www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org/Veterans
Dial (800) 873-8255, then press 1; counselors are available 24/7.
Information is available for referrals to local resource agencies.
- Virginia Is For Heroes – <http://www.virginiaisforheroes.org/links.htm>
An outstanding web site for finding links to organizations that help service members, veterans, and their families. This is not just for Virginia residents, but does include information that will be helpful to person living in that area.

Video

- Lioness; DVD, order from <http://www.lionessthefilm.com>, \$19.95
Looks at war through the eyes of the first women in U.S. history to be sent directly into ground combat. It recounts their experiences in Iraq and what they went through when they came home. Run time: 1 hour, 22 minutes; rating: NR
- Operation Homecoming; DVD available from <http://shopping.discovery.com>, \$14.95
A heart-wrenching look at emotional homecomings as brave soldiers return home from combat. Celebrates the individual sacrifices and triumphs these soldiers have endured, and features interviews, photos and home videos. Told through the viewpoint of the soldiers' loved ones. Highly rated. Run time 3 hours, 31 minutes.
- The Ground Truth, Focus Features; DVD available from Amazon.com, \$6.99
The stories of a half-dozen American heroes, ordinary men & women who heeded the call for military service in Iraq. This charts recruitment & training combat homecoming & the struggle to

reintegrate with families & communities. A powerful and honest video. Studio: Uni Dist Corp. (mca) Release Date: 09/26/2006 Run time: 78 minutes, rating: R (language and violence)

- Healing the Soul: A Self-Guide to Our Own Healing; Virtual Life Solutions, \$199.99
Contact: www.virtuallifesolutions.com. PC-based interactive tool performs a self-guided assessment in each of seven areas: relationships, finances, work and jobs, personal, recreation and hobbies, spirituality, and intellectual. These sessions can be done individually or with someone else; includes a Guide Book-Journal.

Programs

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers a training event called the VA Chaplain Service Veterans' Community Outreach Initiative (VCOI). The purpose of this program is to help local clergy learn more about the needs of returning veterans and their families, including spiritual needs they may have as a result of their active duty experiences. As part of this training, clergy learn about the healthcare provided by the VA and how they and VA chaplains can make referrals to one another. To find out more about this program and where it may be offered, contact the National VA Chaplain Center at (757) 728-3180 or the VA Medical Center closest to you.

The following information is included as handout materials for this program and can be ordered separately from sources listed:

- Ministering to Families Affected by Military Deployment, Deployment Resources for America's Clergy (US Army)
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST): Counseling & Treatment, Dept of VA
- Accepting the Ashes: A Daughter's Look at Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Quynn Elizabeth
- The Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve, VA Pamphlet 22-90-3
- A Summary of Benefits, VA Pamphlet
- Resources in Support of the Seamless Transition of Our Returning Veterans: OEF & OIF, VA Pamphlet
- Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers: Rebuilding Wounded Lives, VA Pamphlet
- A Summary of VA Benefits for National Guard and Reserve Personnel, VA Pamphlet IB-10-164
- What to Expect from your VA Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service, VA Pamphlet
- Women Veterans Health Program, VA Pamphlet
- Strength for Service to God and Country: A Daily Devotional for Military and Public Service Professionals, www.StrengthForService.org

For More Information

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