



The North American Baptist Conference Military Chaplain Guidelines

Endorsed by the North American Baptist Conference to serve our Lord Jesus Christ
as a chaplain in the Armed Forces of the United States of America
or Department of Veteran's Affairs Chaplaincy (DVA)
(Updated January 2025)

Recognizing the unique ministry skills necessary to serve the Lord and the United States of America as a chaplain to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines of the United States Armed Forces or Department of Veteran's Affairs Chaplaincy (DVA), as well as their families, the following guidelines leading to NAB endorsement are hereby established. The credibility of the NAB is clearly represented in ministers endorsed from our conference to serve as chaplains to the military, whether active duty, guard, reserve, chaplain candidates, or DVA. Therefore, only pastors of the highest caliber will be endorsed.

Background

The NAB is a member of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF). As a member organization, pastors endorsed to become chaplains in the armed forces and DVA must adhere to the strict guidelines of the NCMAF. NAB pastors will find very helpful information about becoming a military chaplain or DVA chaplain on the NCMAF website (www.ncmaf.com). We encourage you to become familiar with everything on their website; the Resources link under the Member's Home tab is especially helpful. It will lead you to the specific websites if interested in serving as a chaplain in the Army, Air Force, or Navy; the service's chaplain candidate program; or the DVA.

The NCMAF website lists the requirements to become a chaplain in any branch of the armed forces:

- Ecclesiastical endorsement (certifies experience and degree requirements meet the standards of the respective ecclesiastical group)
- Two years religious leadership consistent with clergy in applicant's tradition (strongly recommended)
- United States citizenship (No dual citizenship)
- Bachelor's degree (120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours)
- A graduate degree to include a minimum of 72 semester hours (or equivalent) from a qualifying (accredited) institution.

- No less than 36 hours must be in theological/ministry and related studies, consistent with the respective religious tradition of the applicant.
- Endorsers are free to exceed the Department of Defense (DOD) standard per ecclesiastical requirements, but cannot go below the minimal DOD requirements, e.g. many endorsers specifically require the Master of Divinity degree. (The NAB prefers the MDiv degree for pastors serving as chaplains.)

Qualifications for Active Duty Chaplains

- Army: Commissioned prior to age 40 (Age waiver availability may vary from year to year)
- Air Force and Navy: Commissioned and on active duty by age 42 (Some consideration may be made for prior service)
- Pass a military commissioning physical
- Pass a security background investigation
- Ability to work in the DOD-directed religious accommodation environment

All chaplains are expected to adhere to the [NCMAF's Covenant and the Code of Ethics for Chaplains of the Armed Forces](#).

NAB Military Chaplain Guidelines

In addition to the NCMAF requirements, the NAB military chaplain or DVA chaplaincy guidelines further:

- Require approval by the NAB Military Chaplain Credentials Committee (MCCC), which has the prerogative to consider each applicant on their individual merit.
- Require the members of the MCCC, including the NAB executive director, the NAB endorsing official, the applicant pastor's regional minister, a former or retired NAB endorsed military chaplain, and a minimum of two other NAB pastors, to be able to affirm the applicant's suitability to serve as a military chaplain.
- Prefer, per the NAB, that when possible the NAB endorsing official shall have served as an active duty, guard, or reserve chaplain in the armed forces.

Pastor/Applicants Desiring to Become Active Duty Chaplains Must:

- Possess a Master of Divinity degree (MDiv).
- Hold current membership in good standing in a NAB church.
- Have received ordination that qualifies the pastor for service to the Lord and an NAB church as the senior pastor.
- Have demonstrated outstanding leadership as senior pastor, associate pastor, or director of specific ministries within the local church for a minimum of two years.
- Be sensitive to the religious pluralism of the military environment and be willing to support the free exercise of religion for all military members.
- Exhibit exceptional personal maturity, emotional stability, and outstanding professional competence.

Concerning Pastor/Applicants Desiring to Become a Chaplain in the Reserve or Guard Components:

- They must meet all the requirements of the NAB Military Chaplain Guidelines.
- They must continue in their active pastoral ministry role in an NAB church as they serve as a chaplain in the reserve or guard of the armed forces.
- They must be specifically approved by the MCCC if they are a reserve or guard chaplain serving in other significant Christian leadership positions in a non-pastoral role (i.e., college/seminary professor, NAB International Office or regional staff member, or chaplains serving in hospital, senior living community, prison, or similar ministries).
- If the guard or reserve chaplain leaves his current ministerial position without a call to serve in another NAB church (or non-pastoral role as approved by the MCCC), the chaplain will be granted continued endorsement for a period of two years.
 - If the guard or reserve chaplain does not find future service in an NAB church within two years, the ecclesiastical endorsement will be rescinded.
 - Chaplains must keep the NAB endorsing official informed of their current pastoral status. Written communication will verify the timing of continued endorsement.

Seminary Students Interested in the Chaplain Candidate Program of the Various Branches of the Armed Services:

- Must be completely familiar with the chaplain candidate requirements for the Army, Navy, or Air Force Chaplain Corps as found on the NCMAF website (www.ncmaf.com).
- May apply for a chaplain position in the reserve, guard, or active duty following graduation from seminary, the awarding of the Master of Divinity degree, and ordination in an NAB church.
 - The chaplain candidate program is funded by the reserve component of the member services.
 - Service as an active duty chaplain may not be possible until completion of reserve requirements.

Expectations

The NAB expects that the military chaplain will:

- Continue to affirm the NAB Statement of Faith as posted on the NAB website at nabconference.org/us.
 - The NAB will withdraw the ecclesiastical endorsement of any chaplain found to be in noncompliance with the NAB Statement of Faith.
- Maintain close ties with the NAB throughout his career, whether active duty, guard, reserve, or DVA.

- Notify the NAB endorsing official and NAB executive director of changes in duty assignment, job title, promotion, home address, or phone number.
- Make regular financial contributions to his home church and the NAB's annual budget.
- Worship and/or fellowship with the nearest NAB church as often as practical.
 - Active duty chaplains receive permissive temporary duty to spend with their endorsing denomination.
 - The chaplain is encouraged to travel to the nearest NAB regional annual meeting, and every effort should be made to attend the NAB Triennial Conference.
- Maintain the highest moral, spiritual, ethical, and financial standards at all times.
 - Failure to do so will result in the NAB endorsing official conducting a review of the impropriety.
 - If evidence warrants the revocation of ecclesiastical endorsement, the chaplain will be separated from military service immediately.

The chaplain may expect that the NAB International Office, the region or association, the local NAB church, or all of the above will:

- Provide written theological statements regarding the doctrines of the NAB, as located on the website at nabconference.org/us.
- Sustain the chaplain in regular prayer support.
- Recognize the chaplain when present at NAB meetings and affirm the unique pastoral skills necessary to serve the Lord in the armed forces.
- Provide regular conference mailings, electronic communication, and updated information regarding the ministry of the NAB.
- Provide administrative support as required.
- Visit the chaplain and his family at his duty assignment when practical.
- Honor the chaplain and his family upon his retirement.

Department of Veteran's Affairs Chaplaincy (DVA)

NAB pastors interested in serving as DVA chaplains are encouraged to become familiar with the NCMAF website (www.ncmaf.com).

Application

If you desire to pursue serving the Lord and our nation as a chaplain in the armed forces or DVA chaplaincy and receiving endorsement from the NAB, the procedures are as follows:

- Review the requirements listed on the NCMAF website and the requirements of the armed service or DVA for which you are most interested in receiving ecclesiastical endorsement.

- Contact the NAB ecclesiastical endorsing official:
 - Pastor Ed Willis
Office Phone: (503) 362-7621
Email: ed@westhillscc.com
Mailing Address: 1650 Brush College Rd. NW
Salem, Oregon 97304
 - The NAB endorsing official will answer any further questions applicants may have and will initiate the paperwork leading to ecclesiastical endorsement.
- Provide the following documentation:
 - The NAB Military Chaplain Information Form (as found on the following page), including references from a minimum of two pastors and your regional minister, who will affirm your suitability and call to serve as a military chaplain.
 - A written testimony that should include your call to follow Christ, your call to serve the body of Christ as a pastor, your call to serve in the armed forces or DVA as a chaplain, and the support of your family to serve in the military, as well as a brief outline of less than five pages concerning the basic convictions and values that determine the way in which you do the work of ministry, including typical ministry goals and methods to achieve them.

Processing Applications

The website for the branch of the armed services in which you serve will list the timeline regarding the next accession boards that will be meeting. The MCCC and endorsing official will do their very best to ensure the NAB administrative paperwork is completed on your behalf in the most expeditious and timely manner possible.