U.S. AIR FORCE

REVISED INTERIM GUIDELINES
CONCERNING FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION IN THE AIR FORCE

WE ARE SWORN TO SUPPORT AND DEFEND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES. IN TAKING OUR OATH WE PLEDGE OUR PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION'S PROTECTIONS FOR FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION AND ITS PROHIBITION AGAINST GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION.

WE WILL REMAIN OFFICIALLY NEUTRAL REGARDING RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, NEITHER OFFICIALLY ENDORSING NOR DISAPPROVING ANY FAITH BELIEF OR ABSENCE OF BELIEF. WE WILL ACCOMMODATE FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION AND OTHER PERSONAL BELIEFS, AS WELL AS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, EXCEPT AS MUST BE LIMITED BY COMPELLING MILITARY NECESSITY (WITH SUCH LIMITATIONS BEING IMPOSED IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE MANNER FEASIBLE). COMMANDERS SHOULD ENSURE THAT REQUESTS FOR RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION ARE WELCOMED AND DEALT WITH AS FAIRLY AND CONSISTENTLY AS PRACTICABLE THROUGHOUT THEIR COMMANDS. THEY SHOULD BE APPROVED UNLESS APPROVAL WOULD HAVE A REAL, NOT HYPOTHETICAL, ADVERSE IMPACT ON MILITARY READINESS, UNIT COHESION, STANDARDS, OR DISCIPLINE. AVOIDANCE OF SCHEDULE CONFLICTS BETWEEN OFFICIAL ACTIVITIES AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES CAN ENHANCE UNIT EFFECTIVENESS AND DEMONSTRATE MUTUAL RESPECT.

CHAPLAIN SERVICE PROGRAMS ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMANDERS. CHAPLAINS IMPARTIALLY ADVISE COMMANDERS IN REGARD TO FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION, AND IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS OF RELIGIOUS SUPPORT AND PASTORAL CARE TO HELP COMMANDERS CARE FOR ALL THEIR PEOPLE, INCLUDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FREE EXERCISE OF INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS. WE WILL RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF CHAPLAINS TO ADHERE TO THE TENETS OF THEIR RELIGIOUS FAITHS AND THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO PARTICIPATE IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING PUBLIC PRAYER, INCONSISTENT WITH THEIR FAITHS.

LEADERS AT EVERY LEVEL BEAR A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THEIR WORDS AND ACTIONS CANNOT REASONABLY BE CONSTRUED TO BE OFFICIALLY ENDORSING NOR DISAPPROVING ANY FAITH BELIEF OR ABSENCE OF BELIEF. IN OFFICIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR WHEN SUPERIOR/SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIPS ARE INVOLVED, SUPERIORS NEED TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE POTENTIAL THAT PERSONAL EXPRESSIONS MAY APPEAR TO BE OFFICIAL, OR HAVE UNDUE INFLUENCE ON THEIR SUBORDINATES. SUBJECT TO THESE SENSITIVITIES, SUPERIORS ENJOY THE SAME FREE EXERCISE RIGHTS AS ALL OTHER AIRMEN.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN WORSHIP, PRAYER, STUDY, AND DISCUSSION IS INTEGRAL TO THE FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION. NOTHING IN THIS GUIDANCE SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD TO LIMIT THE SUBSTANCE OF VOLUNTARY DISCUSSIONS OF RELIGION, OR THE EXERCISE OF FREE SPEECH, WHERE IT IS REASONABLY CLEAR THAT THE DISCUSSIONS ARE PERSONAL, NOT OFFICIAL, AND THEY CAN BE REASONABLY FREE OF THE POTENTIAL FOR, OR APPEARANCE OF, COERCION.

PUBLIC PRAYER SHOULD NOT IMPLY GOVERNMENT ENDORSEMENT OF RELIGION AND SHOULD NOT USUALLY BE A PART OF ROUTINE OFFICIAL BUSINESS. MUTUAL RESPECT AND COMMON SENSE SHOULD ALWAYS BE APPLIED, INCLUDING CONSIDERATION OF UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE NEEDS OF THE COMMAND. FURTHER, NON-DENOMINATIONAL, INCLUSIVE PRAYER OR A MOMENT OF SILENCE MAY BE APPROPRIATE FOR MILITARY CEREMONIES OR EVENTS OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE WHEN ITS PRIMARY PURPOSE IS NOT THE ADVANCEMENT OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. MILITARY CHAPLAINS ARE TRAINED IN THESE MATTERS.

GENERAL RULES REGARDING USE OF GOVERNMENT COMPUTERS APPLY TO PERSONAL RELIGIOUS MATTERS AS THEY DO FOR OTHER PERSONAL MATTERS. CHAPLAIN PROGRAMS WILL RECEIVE COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT AS WOULD COMPARABLE STAFF ACTIVITIES.

THESE GUIDELINES ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMANDERS TO MAINTAIN GOOD ORDER AND DISCIPLINE, AND ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE *CORE VALUES OF THE AIR FORCE: INTEGRITY FIRST; SERVICE BEFORE SELF; AND EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO.*

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