



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
2000 NAVY PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-2000

IN REPLY REFER TO

AUG 16 1994

**Building Our Future Together**  
**Occasional Thoughts: Teamwork**

Dear Chaplain:

Very recently, our Nation was once again in the grip of another tragedy that befell "America's family," with the untimely death of John F. Kennedy, Jr., and his wife and sister-in-law. One of the first calls the Kennedy family made in response to the horrible loss of yet another loved one, was to my office with a request for pastoral and sacramental intervention. Soon thereafter, we learned of the desire of the Kennedy and Bessette families for the Navy to provide burial at sea services for those killed in the plane crash off Martha's Vineyard.

The national media covered the event, from a respectful distance, as USS BRISCOE (DD 977) served as the platform for this centuries old, solemn ceremony. This is where the story eloquently illustrates the subject of my letter to you. No fewer than a dozen chaplains and scores of Religious Program Specialists and civilian staff members within various Command Religious Programs---spread from Newport, Rhode Island to USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67) underway in southern waters, to Coast Guard installations and cutters---were deeply and directly involved as this saga unfolded. From the search and recovery phase, to the burial at sea ceremonies, the chaplain-RP team serving with Navy and Coast Guard units combined to provide behind the scenes pastoral intervention and sacramental ministry to the Kennedy and Bessette families, to Coast Guard crews and to others affected by this tragedy.

Navy chaplains worked around the clock, prayed and comforted the bereaved---this time before a national audience. Navy chaplains and RPs responded instantly and well, performing with dignity, skill and astounding professionalism. They did so with a great deal of discipline and team spirit. This commitment to teamwork was not lost on our Navy's leadership, nor was it lost on those who directly benefited from chaplains' ministrations and RP support.

However, you and I know that Navy chaplains and RPs, around the globe, respond well to similar crises all the time. They (you) also perform well in the moment of crisis, and do so with little fanfare and no clamor for attention or credit. Your extraordinary ministries reflect and are consistent with your undeniable commitment to servant leadership and teamwork.

Therefore, permit me a few reflections on our sense of teamwork. Ours is a Corps of chaplains with many distinctives: faith group peculiarities; gender and ethnic differences; racial, generational and cultural givens. In the midst of all these notable and respected distinctives, we are further defined by type duty (e.g., shipboard, FMF, overseas, hospital duty and other specialized assignments). Let's add to this the mix of chaplains serving at different grade levels and at various command echelons. However, our common ground is found in a unifying purpose, a shared vision for ministry and a single focus on those we are commissioned to serve.

I believe there are three essential elements that ensure and enable our ability to work together as a team--both in moments of crisis and throughout our daily activities. They are collaboration, communication and cooperation. There may be more, but I have learned that these three are core elements of teamwork. Each concept implies strengths, but also limitations. It is therefore incumbent upon us to view them together, and the resultant synergy, vitality and cohesiveness that ensues when we do so.

### **Collaboration**

Not long ago, the local newspaper here in Washington, DC reported the results of a survey of the "most stressful jobs in the United States." The article displayed numerous photographs depicting fire fighters, medical trauma centers, school teachers, search and rescue teams in action. The pictures led you to the erroneous conclusion that these daring exploits--demanding either risk of life itself, or requiring precision such as in medical surgery, or that are emotionally taxing--would headline "the most stressful jobs." This was not the case. In almost every circumstance, respondents reported that, for the most part, they loved what they were trained to do. It was not the length of the work day that caused them the most stress, nor was it the technical precision required by their professions.

Undue or extreme stress was most induced by working with and for others who were simply difficult people. Daily life became complicated and tiring when people were not pulling in the same direction. The work place was not an enjoyable, fulfilling place when competing agendas and private ambitions overshadowed common goals.

Collaboration implies a coordination of activity. We have without doubt noticed the "uncoordinated" person when speaking of athletics. But, how wonderfully graceful is the person who is coordinated: there is balance, symmetry, efficiency, unity. The body works in harmony, and doesn't work against itself.

Collaboration becomes the framework for effective ministry: knowing what to do and when to do it; and to assist chaplains and RPs to understand the relationship between what they do and what the coordinated whole achieves.

### **Communication**

Collaboration (coordination) alone assures efficiency of motion but tells us nothing about the consequence of that effort. To be sure, communication can be a cliché unless we define its meaning and value. Communication is more than facts, policies, and directives. Virtually every organizational assessment survey reports "lack of communication" as the top problem in most organizations. However, these same surveys record a plethora of communication instruments--bordering on an overload experience of e-mails, memos, newsletters, newsgrams, trade journals, annual reports, and so forth. Remarkably, the recipients still carp that communication hasn't adequately taken place.

The type of communication I am thinking about is that kind that speaks to how we understand each other and how information inspires, enables and fosters teamwork. Listening, reading and observing are as much a part of communication as speaking. Pushing information out is to be balanced with taking information in. The communication I encourage is that flow of information which can be distinguished as helping us to do our jobs better in a team environment. Communication means not only receiving relevant information but what we will do with it once it is received and understood.

Further, communication needed to perform our ministries at the highest levels does not necessarily forge agreement. Collaboration cannot stand alone as the single pillar of teamwork. It therefore follows, communication alone will not foster or achieve the ideal we have in mind when we speak of working together as one Corps.

### **Cooperation**

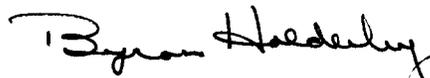
Just as collaboration and communication imply proper methods and strategies for effective team ministry, cooperation speaks to our intention to work as part of a team. Collaboration and communication refer to aptitude for peak performance. Cooperation addresses our *attitude* for peak performance. Examples abound of the otherwise talented, skilled athlete who is not a team player. Until professional or personal maturity takes hold, this incredibly gifted athlete drifts from team to team, setting or breaking personal records, but not adding value to the prospects of a winning season for the team.

Building our Corps' future together through Career Development, Innovative Use of Technology, and Spiritual Growth are immense undertakings. They are strategic objectives that directly support our vision to bring a word of Hope within reach of every Sea Services member. This vision is larger than any single one of us--and requires us to think of a team that involves the endeavors of the entire Sea Services family, as well as our respective faith groups.

Responding instantly and well to the Kennedy/Besette plight was a pastoral endeavor much larger than a single Service or person. Spiritual support, pastoral solace and sacramental ministry were provided only because of exceptional team effort involving collaboration, communication and cooperation. This is only the most recent instance in which teamwork has been an abiding and real value of Chaplain Corps ministry.

I strongly encourage you to discuss with your team members--chaplain/RP colleagues, chapel participants, chain of command and staff personnel--those elements that forge a strong, responsive, self-less cadre of people engaged in the noble work of religious ministry. Also, I ask that you dissect the good examples of coordinated actions done well in order to identify what made them good examples--to learn from them, recognize the team members, and to incorporate these stories into the "muscle memory" and the larger story of our Corps. It is so easy to rehearse and re-tell the negative "sea story." Let us not ignore the many worthwhile examples of servant leadership that characterize our Corps as a team with many distinctives, yet pursuing a common vision.

Sincerely,



A. BYRON HOLDERBY, JR.  
Rear Admiral, CHC, U.S. Navy  
Chief of Chaplains