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**Building Our Future Together**  
**Occasional Thoughts: Ministry on the Front Lines**

Dear Chaplain:

Dream with me for a moment. Imagine a Chaplain Corps in which no Sea Services man or woman is outside the reach of religious ministry. Contemplate a future where a word of Hope extends to every member of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Envision with me a circumstance that both permits and enables 900 Navy chaplains to influence almost 400,000 Sailors, Marines and Coastguardsmen.

I believe this is possible. I believe that Hope can be made available to all on the Front Lines of Defense. I believe that those front lines are everywhere and all the time. This vision stretches, expands and enhances our traditional understanding of an intentional ministry of presence; and, it also demands a redefinition of our traditional roles and activities.

I am encouraged in this vision because I am not alone in the dream. Some of you are deeply involved in the seemingly tedious calculations in order to make this dream come true. You also realize what I have learned. There are several ways to interpret what the "front lines" mean. And, there are several critical steps necessary to position ourselves for ministry's sake on those front lines. We need not simply resign ourselves to whatever the future may bring. We can participate in its development as co-laborers with our God and with one another.

**The Front Lines of New Platforms**

Currently, there is a diligent strategy being crafted of changing the requirements paradigm for chaplain presence in the advent of "smart ships." "Network-centric ministries" is a new phrase to be added to our strategic planning vocabulary. Due to the foresight, imagination and unflappable determination of Chaplain Vic Smith and others, the Chaplain Corps will be on the front lines - however those front lines may be drawn in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Because of the developing Information Technology (IT) Environment, battle groups will be configured differently and deployed in ways unfamiliar to us now. Another equally important operational concept with religious ministry consequences is sea based or "focused logistics." These terms and concepts reflect a

profound "sea change" in how we will extend religious ministry in the next Century. We will all learn more about these rapidly evolving concepts as we seek to enact our vision of remaining with our people in all climes and circumstances.

### The Front Lines of Technology

Later this year, I will specifically address the role, value and challenges of technology in our vision to extend our ministry of Hope within the Sea Services. However, every one of us has been affected by the more obvious advances visible (and not so visible – but no less pervasive!) all around us. Technology is forever altering the type and number of platforms that will take us to sea, and how they will be deployed and employed. It is transforming everything from how, when and where we shop, communicate, and receive information—to name a few examples. All these and more illustrate that the front lines of technology are daunting perhaps, and at the same time represent where our people are and where we need to be with them.

Permit me a brief remembrance. When I entered the Navy, payday aboard ship involved the forming of a pay line at a pre-appointed hour in the wardroom. Under the watchful eye of the Supply Officer, the Disbursing Officer opened the books and distributed the pay. At that time, you not only received your wages (usually cash), but you queued up to pay your monthly mess bill, designate your allotments, and the formation led you to receive shots from the Corpsman – if shots were due. And, you might take care of any number of other mandatory things that the command could think of while it had the undivided attention of all concerned. This ritual was repeated in all the messes throughout the ship at various hours on payday.

The state of technology of that era dictated more than a methodology for payday. It also created a distinct social setting. There was a certain openness about things such as income and a variety of other issues that one faced aboard ship. For these things to be accomplished, people had to assemble in close proximity. Community was created and reinforced through officers call, 8 o'clock reports, captains call, and on payday. Community was sustained in ways that are now only memories of how things were done.

Contrast that former method of pay with today's electronic checking and the more impersonal, yet highly effective, ways we transfer income and pay bills. Community has yielded to convenience; anonymity and privacy have prevailed over openness. Nevertheless, there is still a need for intimacy, assurance and the felt presence of God among those we serve. The proliferation

of chat lines and e-mails provide dramatic testimony to the need for human contact, one with another and each person with God.

### The Front Lines of Military Operations

Closely related to the front lines of technology and smart ship development is the changing nature of military operations. We must not forget the purpose and mission of our institution, and the operational context for our ministry of Hope. Here too, immense and rapid change is taking place. We will continue to deploy with our people. We will continue to sail into harm's way when our Nation calls upon us. We will continue to seek clergy to become chaplains who understand and honor this special calling--a calling not grounded in comfort or convenience.

Also, I believe the front lines of military operations are everywhere. They are everywhere because of what we have learned about asymmetrical warfare. They are at home and abroad because of terrorism's threat. They are ubiquitous because our deployments are more frequent and diverse. This seems to be the prevailing reality due to the range in deployments that vary from the more traditional to Operations Other Than War. The front lines are at home as well as underway because the definition of "family" now includes single parents, dual income families, extended and blended families - and we have learned that underway readiness depends on family readiness.

### The Front Lines of Spirituality

Giving attention to electronic and hardware issues should never be interpreted as losing sight of our "software" concerns. Religious rights and spiritual needs deserve special attention, which I plan to address in a similar fashion later this year. In fact, this year's Professional Development Training Course in Worship & Generation X is a call to all of us to the front lines of a new generation now dominating our numbers in the Sea Services. Through this PDTC, we are learning how spirituality itself is undergoing change, and we are discovering that people think differently about denominational loyalties and what constitutes the core values of their faith and faithfulness.

We must ably serve on these front lines as well. We must seek to understand so that we are reliable voices of Hope in behalf of the fundamental and timeless spiritual concerns expressed and lived out in increasingly diverse and eclectic ways.

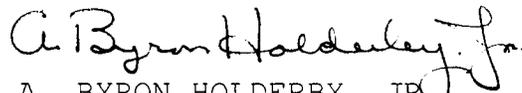
At the outset, I asked you to dream with me. I now ask to be included in your dreams.

- What do you see?
- What do you hear and feel?
- How is ministry changing and shifting for you?

I did not exhaust all the possibilities for the front lines of ministry because I can not. I can not without the aid of your eye and ear for the future. Each of you, serving faithfully and intelligently where you are, provides the mosaic that depicts part of the whole.

I therefore invite you to engage this big dream in conversation and prayer with your religious ministry colleagues, mentors, chapel communities, and your respective ecclesiastical officials. Let us work together and pray for one another in order to find ways to be on whatever front lines we find before us. Let us covenant with one another to bring those front line warriors and peacekeepers a word of Hope. A word of Hope.

Sincerely,



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